2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

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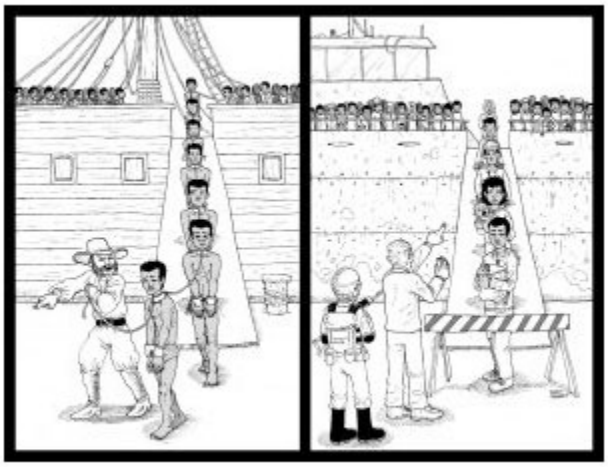
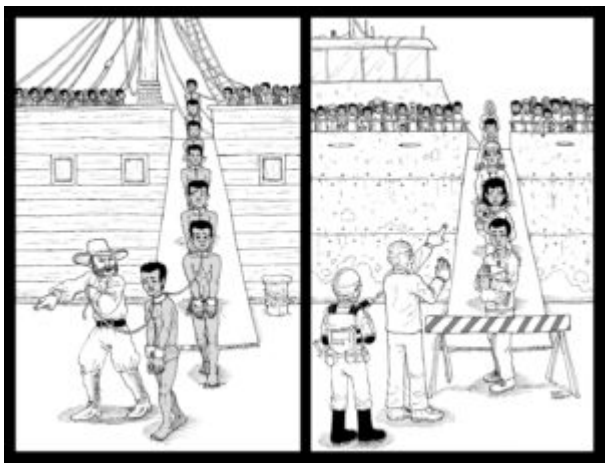
Environmental Degradation and Forced Displacement in Africa

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3



The *polycrisis* is a convenient global buzzword today that perfectly describes the complex, cumulative and unprecedented effects of multiple, disparate, and overlapping global crises which threaten human ability to cope, adapt, and survive.[1] The Covid-19 pandemic, climate crises creating wildfires, floods, and extreme weather events, burgeoning inflation and economic recession, multiple migration crises and fatalities, the war in Ukraine and threats of a third world war—have mutually constituted a shared sense of humanity undergoing tremendous collective stress. This essay considers Africa's experience of the polycrisis in relation to the mutually constitutive effects of ecological crises and human displacement, within the global context described above where multiple disasters overlay multiple impacts and local, national, regional, and international levels of responsibility.



Today, not less than 184 million individuals who make up 2.3 percent of the global population are resident in other parts of the world outside their countries of origin and nationality.[2] This conservative figure starkly signifies the "complexity and increasing necessity" of cross-border movements, as the *2023 World Development Report* puts it.[3]However, African migration is propelled by the cumulative effects of historical and contemporary ecological, economic and sociopolitical issues that have become acute in the current global polycrisis. Nowhere else best captures the interconnectedness of human rights, democracy, and peace on the one hand, and the environment, resources, conflict, and displacement, on the other hand.

Over the years, humans have had reasons to migrate from their abodes due to fear, threats to their lives, and many other reasons, without much premeditation nor plans for such movements. Hence, they seek refuge in the places provided by host countries and communities that would guarantee either safety, or the absence of the threats that had made them migrate, or the presence of protections their home communities have lacked. Thus, forced migration, resulting in the acquisition of refugee, internally displaced person (IDP), and asylum-seeker status, has skyrocketed in recent times. The UNHCR informs that one in every 74 people on Earth have been forced to flee, and 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced in 2022.[4] Of this number, 35.3 million are refugees scattered across the world.[5] The number evidences an unprecedented increase of 8.2 million in the one year from 2021, where there was an average of about 27.1 million refugees globally. Ukraine, South Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Myanmar, and Afghanistan are currently the highest refugee-producing countries globally, with refugees from those countries making up half of the entire global refugee population.[6]

In the midst of all these, the place of Africa in the global discussion on refugees and the predominance of their saturation in certain parts of the continent has become very concerning in recent times. In 2021, Africa alone had up to 32 million forcibly displaced persons, that is, refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers on the continent.[7]An estimated 75 percent of Africa's forcibly displaced are internally displaced persons (IDPs),[8] with the UNDP referring to internal displacement in Africa as "a silent epidemic."[9] For a long time, Africa has remained a continent marked by the constant presence of refugees and displaced persons, fleeing from the harsh realities of conflicts, political repression and instability, and environmental challenges that invoke the forced migration of countless people and families.[10] Displacement constitutes a significant economic and social burden for the citizens,

communities, and nations where the displaced settle.

From the wilderness of North Africa to the Southern horizons of the continent, African nations have shouldered bravely the sole responsibility of providing shelter and protection to those in need. Countries like Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, and Chad have become homes for refugees, with large sprawling camps and settlements dotting the landscape for decades.[11] The plight of African refugees and displaced persons is worrisome. The unending flight occasioned largely by the quest for security and livelihoods of those fleeing from conflicts contributes to one of the greatest challenges of the continent. Refugees most times arrive in their host communities with no resources amidst current uncertainties of survival.

The constant production of refugees is not typical of every African country, but there are several that have become nearly permanent producers and hosts of refugee populations. Citizens of just 10 countries in Africa make up about 88 percent of its refugees and displaced persons because of conflict and several other reasons. South Sudan has sat comfortably at the apex as one of the top refugee-producing countries in the world with about 2.2 million refugees from the country and another 2 million people that have been internally displaced. Countries like Uganda, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Sudan have provided refuge for hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese refugees.[12]

Causes, Concepts, Contestations

Several displacement-producing factors have been given more attention than others and the purpose of this essay is to relate the presence and conditions of African refugees and displaced persons to the state of environmental degradation on the continent, evidencing the other less-discussed displacement-producing trajectories. The reasons accounting for the ascription of the status of refugees to many Africans are numerous. Armed conflicts,[13] political instability which includes various forms of political repression and coups,[14] ethnic and religious tensions and conflicts,[15] 'natural' disasters including droughts, floods, and other conditions,[16] environmental degradation aggravated by land degradation, deforestation and desertification,[17] economic hardship,[18] human rights abuses,[19] and others have formed a long list of factors that facilitate displacement and turn people to IDPs and refugees.

While the whole world and most scholars have rather attached the causes and events that have

led to the displacement of people and the seeking of refuge to conflicts, violence, and terrorism in African countries, other important factors are often left out of the discourses. Truly, Africa has put itself in the rank of one of the most disturbed continents, with political, economic, ethnic, and terrorism-related conflicts pushing millions out of their homes and comfort zones. The conflict narratives have therefore become so easy to fixate upon and become measures of understanding refugees and a measure of addressing their issues without attention to specificities and peculiarities.

An important and perhaps more fundamental explanation is the intense scholarly, activist, and political contestation surrounding the concept of climate and environmental degradation as causes of displacement. Technically, there is no legal support for the recognition of migrants who cite environmental or climate related causes as their reasons for seeking asylum or refugee status. The international refugee regime and its law, the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, recognizes mostly political causes of refugee crises, and for a long time did not acknowledge potential economic and ecological causes, nor even internal displacement as a global issue. In spite of this, there has long been acknowledgement of the phenomenon of displacement caused by environmental changes and disasters. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as far back as 1992, noted that "the gravest effects of climate change may be those on human migration as millions are displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding, and severe drought."[20] More recently, the latest and most comprehensive international agreement on migration, the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, explicitly recognizes climate-related events, environmental degradation and (natural and man-made) disasters as propellants of human migration.[21]

This contestation of causes and concepts further shows up in a fundamental way as a lack of agreement concerning the appropriate terminology for the phenomenon, with labels used including environmental migration/migrants, environmental refugees, environmentally induced displacement, climate migration/migrants, climate refugees, and so on. The International Organization for Migration provides a usefully broad definition of the concept of "environmental displacement" which embraces different kinds of environmental disasters with different causes and different kinds of related human mobilities thus: "Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who

move either within their country or abroad."[22]

The above conceptualization, which refers to "sudden or progressive change in the environment," points to the value of distinguishing between two broad kinds of environmental crises as either one provokes distinct patterns of human mobility and displacement. "Sudden-onset climate events" occur within hours or days, and encompass events such as hurricanes, wildfires, mudslides, and floods, while "slow-onset climate events" emerge over several years, such as desertification, changes in rainfall patterns, extreme temperatures, and sea-level rises.[23] Each of the these two types provoke different patterns of displacement, as sudden-onset events can be more clearly linked to specific population displacements, while slow-onset events produce human mobilities that are less easily trackable and less directly traceable to climate events given that there are several other factors and forces co-existing in the time period of these events as to becloud the justification for displacement.[24]

For the above reasons, limited attention has been given to the important subject of environmental degradation on the continent which has effectively sent many Africans forcibly packing and moving. The ecosystem in Africa is plural and particular to different zones and parts of the continent but the people have been able to adapt to their own ecological peculiarities over millennia. However, the depletion of the resources attached to the ecosystem like soil, water, pasture, and clean air has severely tested the capabilities and adaptability of the people and set in motion the events that have led to their migration to saner climes to settle.

Key patterns of environmental degradation and displacement in Africa

There are many causes of the current environmental crises affecting African peoples, some internal or domestic to African nations, others external to the continent and locatable in the international system. Environmental degradation is partly caused by the actions and inactions of Africans themselves, including persons that are forcibly displaced, and the end results have both been devastating and many times fatal to the existence of human lives on African soils. In recent times, the continent has not been paying much attention to the issues around the environment and the ecosystem as most African countries tend to focus more on immediate problems such as political instability and economic crises, until the environmental degradation has graduated to the level of imminent danger. This means that the orientation in the continent is far more reactive to the consequences of environmental degradation, rather than proactive to tackle the activities that progressively degrade the African ecosystem. This is even more evident in the way it takes quite a lot of effort to persuade African leaders to take any steps towards protecting the climate and environment.

Although several factors are responsible for environmental degradation, particularly in Africa, the consequences and resultant effect of it have been quite heavy on the generality of the African population, displacing many and making others into refugees as they crisscross borders. The World Bank has predicted that the continent will be the hardest hit by climate change, with up to 86 million internally displaced by it by 2050, and West Africa and the Lake

Victoria basin as “hot spots” as early as 2030 with up to 32 million and 36 million respectively displaced by it by 2050.[25] Climate-related occurrences in Africa account for about 7.4 million people that are displaced in sub-Saharan Africa.[26] There is an anticipation of about 85.7 million climate and environmentally induced migration by 2050.[27]

The East and Horn of African countries are some of the African countries that have had millions of people displaced as a result of environmental and climate factors over time. The countries in the Horn account for about 0.1% of carbon emissions globally and have been facing extreme drought with lack of rainfall or failed rainy seasons for four seasons consecutively. As a result, not less than 36.1 million people are seriously affected. This has caused considerable challenges for pastoralists and farmers, with an incidence of about 8.9 million deaths of livestock in the Horn of Africa alone.

As a result of this, about 20.5 million people face the risk of extreme food insecurity as well as malnutrition in countries like Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia, while about 16 million of them could not get clean or potable water.[28] In Somalia alone, there are no less than 1 million people that have become environmental refugees and displaced persons as of 2022.[29] The effect of drought on the African population cannot be underestimated being that a large proportion of the people are farmers, of crops and of livestock, and several of the areas depend on agricultural activities for livelihood and survival. Hence, drought brought about the loss of livelihood and pushed them to look for more favorable areas for survival, causing millions to forcibly migrate.

Where drought is the problem for some, flood is the challenge for others. The erratic climate system and inordinate rainfall have strongly affected many African countries, destroying the people and their properties. Countries in the Horn of Africa, Burundi, South Sudan, and Uganda have their citizens becoming victims of extreme flooding with no hope in sight in most cases. Statistics from recent ecological disasters are grim and rising literally by the day. Sudan has one of the most serious flood situations in Africa currently. In 2022, about 299,500 Sudanese were displaced by excessive flooding.[30] There was a destruction of about 17,600 homes across the country and about 45,100 dwellings were completely damaged. Aside from this, over 129 people died in 2022 in addition to the thousands of others displaced from their homes.[31] The situation is made worse by the fact that much of the economic and infrastructural resources in the country have been extensively damaged. In the same 2022, about 238 medical facilities, 1500 water resources, emergency facilities and 1500 latrines were also destroyed.[32]

Nigeria, Mali, Chad, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and others have also continually experienced problems relating to floods resulting from long-term environmental factors and degradation. In Nigeria, not less than 1.3 million people have been displaced internally and externally, contributing to the already large numbers of refugees and displaced persons in the region. With about 2.8 million people in Nigeria directly impacted by flooding and the loss of hundreds of lives to it, Nigeria might be emerging as one of the main focus areas for apprehending the issue of environmental refugees in Africa.[33]

In Chad, floods are recorded to have affected about 1 million people, as declared by the government, putting they, their families, and property at risk. About 90,000 people left their rural homes for N'Djamena, the capital city, and other places for safety and refuge.[34] Cameroonians living in Logone Birni, Kousseri, Blangoua, Makari, and Zina have been victims of excessive flooding with about 63,000 people affected in the country. Today, not less than 379, 500 citizens of Burkina Faso have been displaced.[35] In Niger, especially the Diffa areas, not less than 13,000 people has also been displaced as a result of flooding.[36]

This problem is quite notorious across all parts of Africa and it has been an age-long problem that has not received adequate attention. The UNHCR has decried the fact that about 3.4 million Africans that are displaced by flooding across the continent in mid-2023 need urgent attention.[37] Aside from the fact that the homes of citizens are destroyed, leaving them to wander around other towns, cities, and possibly other countries, other effects of flooding are the destruction of vital economic resources and farming systems, including the death of livestock. This economically incapacitates the people, with the only option of looking out for other opportunities and places.

Environmental degradation is one of the chief factors causing climate change globally—but it is *both* a cause and an effect. With the carefree attitude that African nations have shown towards the subject matter in recent times, it is obvious that the continent has not been getting the warning messages from nature, nor hearing the cry of green lives. The release of Greenhouse gases (GHGs) like methane (CH4), carbon dioxide (CO2), and nitrous oxide (N2O) affects the environment by raising global temperatures. In 2021, Africa was responsible for about 3.9 percent of the emission of carbon globally, mostly from land use and forest degradation,[38] industries, and the burning of fossil fuels.[39] This percentage is very low, relative to other major carbon emitters such as China (23%), the United States (19%), and European Union (13%), with these industrialized countries along with others like Russia and India accounting for up to 90% of global carbon emissions. Conversely, the devastating impacts of these emissions disproportionately affect developing countries of Africa and the global South.

Greenhouse gas emissions contribute to climate change which can cause extreme weather events such as hurricanes, droughts, wildfires, and floods, as the continent has been witnessing in the past few decades. More so, it is responsible for rising sea-levels that have been displacing people living along the coasts. Sea or ocean level rise poses imminent threats to African societies, especially coastal metropolises such as Alexandria, Cape Town, Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Lagos, Luanda, and Mogadishu. Sea levels are expected to rise by around 0.3 meters by 2030 with a global warming of 2C, and is projected to affect about 117 million Africans who could lose their lives, properties, or be displaced.[40] Importantly, the density of the coastal cities of Africa, environmental abuses leading to degradation, and emission of greenhouse gases from 2020 to 2030, have all been on the increase. Abidjan, Casablanca, Lagos, Dar es Salaam, Cape Town, Alexandria, and Luanda are expected to have a population increase of between 48 million and 69 million, and with current laissez faire attitudes towards preventing climate change, it is expected that emissions would increase either proportionally or more than

the rate of population increase.[41]

The situation could get more compounded due to the possibility of greater water scarcity and food insecurity in addition to the already existing levels of these issues across the continent. As climate change affects the patterns of precipitation and have a direct effect on water availability and, consequently, on economic productivity, there will be many more incidences of reduced crop yields and food shortages. More so, major disruptions to livelihoods could be one of the issues the continent would have to battle if measures are not taken to forestall this potential disaster.

The above has shown reasons for the continuous forced displacement of Africans and the tensions that follow. However, the continent is likely to face more problems from these emissions as African and global increments in energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, feedback loops, and altered weather patterns continue to produce regrettable results in environmental degradation on the continent.

Forests are key to combating emissions and environmental degradation. Twenty-six percent of African land are forests scattered across different parts of the continent.[42] There is also an estimation of about 43 billion trees with high concentrations in large countries like the DRC, Ethiopia, African, and South African.[43] Unfortunately, the practice of continuous deforestation from the construction of buildings, infrastructures, industrialization, and other development activities has brought about massive deforestation every year. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, FAO, has noted that the rate of deforestation in African is twice the global rate. Every year, about 4 million hectares of forest are lost to deforestation putting the rate higher than the rest of the world. Both forests and grasslands of the continent take up about 50 percent of the land designation in the continent.[44] Even the Congo which is seen as the 'lung of the planet,' being the second largest rainforest on the globe with forests measuring about 152 million hectares of land, is witnessing this rapid deforestation and could be facing some of the consequences.[45] This exposes people to the environmental consequences that are capable of displacing them or bringing the need to seek refuge elsewhere.

Deforestation has become a major threat to biodiversity in African spaces and ecosystems, causing fragmentation and destruction of habitats of both animals and plants. Forests are also responsible for the prevention of soil erosion, which is quite important to the survival of African, especially those that are farmers or depend on plants and forests for survival. With deforestation, the absence of the tree roots that help hold the soil together and brace against the impacts of wind and rainfall has been having dangerous impacts, especially in more industrialized environments in African countries. In addition, trees are supposed to be absorbers and natural 'sinks' of carbon dioxide, the latter seen as a primary causative factor in climate change processes and environmental degradation.[46] The danger of burning of wood and deforestation is the release of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.[47] The effects of deforestation on the ecosystem are numerous but this is just one of the many factors that degrade the environment, causing loss of lives and livelihoods and displacement.

One other problem in Africa that could increase the number of environmental refugees is the inadequate waste management systems in each African country. The municipal solid waste in Africa increased to about 125 million tons as far back as 2012 and the projection was around 250 million tons by 2025.[48] One of the contributing factors to this dire projection is the inadequacy of the systems of waste collection in Africa, which is only about 55 percent.[49] To buttress this, there are more uncontrolled landfills and dumpsites in Africa than controlled ones, with over 90% of waste disposed at the former. Hence, it gives lesser room for recycling, which is just about 4% of all waste in general. Although the aim of the African Union has been to achieve a 50% rate of recycling on the continent, the realities indicate otherwise.[50]

The effect of this on the environment cannot be underestimated. The result of this has been forcing a lot of people out of their communities, making them environmental refugees across the continent. Bad waste management in Africa is responsible for some of the flooding problems in the continent. Non-biodegradable materials, plastics and other materials that form solid waste are the greatest causes of land pollution and cause both harmful environments, contamination of the soil, erosion and blockage of water passages that could lead to flooding. The effects also include becoming water and air pollutants, destruction of habitats, climate change, livestock and wildlife hazards, ecological imbalances, and soil contamination.

Indifference and Awareness Deficits

Truly, as the number of refugees and displaced persons as a result of environmental degradation is increasing, one would expect considerable efforts towards making right the situations. The ecological awareness of the citizens is influenced by different factors. There is general environmental illiteracy and ignorance as well as lack of efforts for proper orientation of the people. The indifference is partly increased by the continuous and desperate focus on concerns on survival rather than longer term environmental protection that has potential to displace people. Africa houses a high percentage of the global poor and as such, the immediate concern of the people is towards fulfilling their most basic needs such as food and water from day to day. Hence, environmental issues have become tertiary to most African communities and people. In addition, ineffectual educational systems, and lack of access to education in some African countries have denied people the opportunity to understand the repercussions of certain environmental actions and inactions over time. The people sometimes have no access to up-to-date scientifically backed information that would bring about seriousness and understanding of the urgency around cautious actions and attitudes towards environmental degradation. It is also unfortunate that those who feel they are not affected or not living in some of the areas that are vulnerable do not feel the need to protect the one home everyone

shares: Planet Earth.

In addition, Africans have a heavy reliance on the burning of fossil fuels, especially in remote and rural areas where alternatives are scarce, expensive, or non-existent. About 6 out of 10 Africans live in rural areas, and as such, there is ahigh rate of reliance on fossil fuels the continent as people burn kerosine, or fell trees for firewood. Hence, the readiness of Africans to transition to renewable energy and resources is very minimal even as the concerns around sustainability has risen on the continent.

While much has been said around how environmental degradation makes people acquire refugee status, refugees themselves have not learned lessons from the unfortunate incident that affected them in the first place. The deforestation process and wood-fuel consumption at refugee camps have also been a concerning worry generally. The consumption patterns of the camps and its inhabitants generally do not also show the readiness to combat waste generation and consciousness of environmental degradation.

Responses and Recommendations

As the causes, manifestations, and impacts of environmental degradation and its forced displacement outcomes are many and varied, so have been the responses by government, civil society actors, international organizations, and individuals.

Africans for millennia cared deeply for their environment and had a spiritual connection to it. While acknowledging variations across African societies, there was undoubtedly a common strand of indigenous worldviews that centered a holistic view of their environment, respecting the existence of all tangible and intangible matter, human and non-human, living and non-living, ancestral and spirit beings, and saw all inhabitants and habitations of the planet as existing in inextricable interconnectedness to one another and to other terrestrial realms. For them, nature was sacred, and nature was divine. Care was taken to exist in harmonious interrelation to all elements of the environment, and the planet itself, Earth, was revered as the mother of all, providing care, nurture, sustenance, and life itself. African humans took from the natural environment only as much resources as they needed to survive and thrive and saw it as their responsibility to return or grow back the nourishment in the living, non-human, and invisible environment, that is, they practiced indigenous climate mitigation and environmental protection strategies. They shunned exploitative relations to their environment, preserving communally owned resources for inter-generational enjoyment, and it was well-recognized that

achieving balance between the various natural forces was a prerequisite to peace and stability.[51]

It seems then that the current patterns of environmental behavior discussed before cannot be seen as typical, but as recent and compelled by several intersecting factors, some noted already, and including forces such as colonial economic dislocations, global capitalism, exploitative relations between states and corporations, commercialization of land, land-grabbing and the dispossession and relocation of communities from ancestral land, rural-urban migration, poor governance, exclusion of local people from decision making about their environmental resources, and so on.[52] For Africans, the polycrisis has been on for quite a while, and recent events are merely a culmination. If the crisis would be considerably mitigated for the many people, communities, states, and societies affected by it, there would be need to roll back the mentioned nefarious practices, and to begin to practice respect for age-old environmental philosophies that center justice, harmony, respect, and sustainability.

So, multi-level responses are required to begin to see any improvements to the adequacy, effectiveness and durability of the measures applied to addressing environmental displacement. At the global level, action needs to be taken to get the major contributors to carbon emissions to reduce their carbon footprint and diversify their sources of energy to begin to lessen and reverse the adverse climate impacts of their industrial activities. It is now axiomatic to point out that while global North and industrialized countries account for the near totality of climate change-causing greenhouse gas emissions, the disproportionate effect is felt in Africa, projected to have the highest number of environmentally displaced by as early as 2030, and by other developing areas such as South Asia. The most important action to begin would be for these richer countries to begin to honor the multilateral commitments for climate change mitigation that they have already made, and to expand those commitments, specifically, to provide the commensurate resources to the poorer countries to cope with and survive the current crises, a reparation imperative.

In conclusion, African governments and the African Union (AU) cannot sit on the fence to make recommendations and plans that have proven to lack the force of enforceability over the years. For example, in addition to global agreements such as emanating from the various COP climate conferences, the 1969 OAU Convention provides for African governments to recognize and protect as refugees persons who due to “events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.” This has potential to expand the rights and protections available to environmentally displaced persons on their territory. Furthermore, the landmark AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, the Kampala Convention, arguably has not contributed much to the quantum of assistance available to people displaced by climate events; financial commitments to IDPs remain limited, and prevention is virtually non-existent. And in 2022, the AU concluded its first ever joint climate change action plan and strategy, called the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032).[53] It remains to be seen how far this would go in terms of implementation.

As Wangari Maathai often noted, we cannot really blame the poor for the environmental degradation evident across the continent; it is governments, the powerful people and groups in society, that are responsible for, and should be held accountable for its environmental crises and its consequences. African leaders generally exhibit nonchalance towards efforts to reduce the causes and cushion the impacts of environmental displacement. From governmental de-prioritization of the issues of environmental degradation to lack of adequate responses to the problems arising from them, the future does not promise greater strides towards sustainability in Africa. More so, it is quite embarrassing that many governments do not consider environmental degradation as a time bomb. This is because environmental degradation, the refugees and IDPs it has produced, and the many consequences are not just affecting individual countries but have become continental disasters. This then calls for extra measures to be taken by governments, the AU, and other international organizations.

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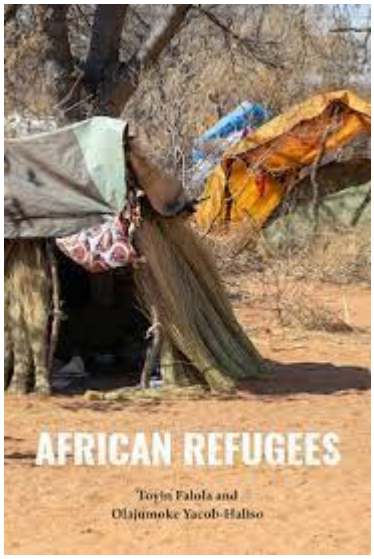
Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso is associate professor of African and African American Studies at Brandeis University, and co-author of African Refugees *(Indiana University Press, 2023).*



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Sudan’s Wars of Identity: The Creeping Quest For A New Sudan

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

Overview of the Conflict

The war that erupted in Sudan on April 15, 2023, in the capital Khartoum, has spread to various parts of the country, particularly the Western region of Darfur. It is causing great suffering, destruction, and death. Thousands of people have been killed. Millions have been uprooted from their homes as internally displaced persons or have crossed international borders as refugees. The mediation efforts by regional and international actors have tended to focus on the humanitarian dimension of the crisis without due attention to the root causes of the conflict and longer-term goal of peace, security, stability and nation building. The challenge in this crisis is to see it as the most serious wake up call for the Sudanese to explore the root causes of the cumulative conflicts that have bedeviled the country since independence and to address them to achieve a genuinely inclusive and lasting peace for all the people and regions of the Sudan.

Alleviating human suffering should of course be a high priority. But the war has deeper causes that need to be addressed. It reflects an acute crisis of national identity that has deep historical roots, but whose modern manifestation started at the independence of the country in January 1st 1956, dominated by the Arab Islamic North. This generated two devastating wars of liberation by the non-Arab Christian African South against the domination of the North. This ended in the independence of South Sudan on July 9th 2011. The crisis is also having a creeping impact on other regions of the country, particularly in the marginalized areas of the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile, and Darfur. The current war is an extension of the liberation movement that led to the independence of South Sudan, but left the marginalized

non-Arab regions of the North under the domination of the Arab center.

This paper presents the conflict as a manifestation of the legacy of slavery which stratified the races, religions and cultures in a manner that was grossly discriminating. The process of liberation from this dehumanizing system culminated in the secession of the South and is now threatening the survival of the remaining Sudan as a unified country. The paper argues for stopping the violence, addressing the immediate humanitarian needs, and committing to negotiate a framework for constructively managing diversity. The paper proposes a broad formula of 'One Country, Multiple Systems' for managing diversity within national unity. The precise number of the systems and the details of self rule envisaged for each region can be worked out to meet the requirements of the context. Participation in the national arena would be structured in such a way as to ensure inclusivity and full equality. Success in achieving the equitable accommodation of diversity in the Sudan might motivate and facilitate closer ties between Sudan and South Sudan that could conceivably lead to the restoration of some form of constitutional association.

Historical Roots of the Problem

The tendency in the dominant circles of Northern Sudan has been to shy away from discussing the history of slavery for which they bear inherited responsibility. But, to paraphrase the popular saying, those who do not know their history run the risk of repeating it. What is involved in Sudan's history of slavery is not the risk of repeating it, but the failure to address the harmful effects of its legacy.

Slavery in the Sudan is documented as going back to time immemorial, but it's modern manifestation began with the Turko-Egyptian rule of 1821-1885. That first colonial domination was overthrown by the religiously inspired revolution of Mohamed Ahmed, who assumed the title of The Mahdi, the Islamic Messiah. The Mahdi is credited as the first leader to have unified the country, though he did not establish effective control of the entire country,

especially the Southern region. The Mahdi died shortly after his miraculous victory and was succeeded by Khalifa Abdullahi from the Ta'asha tribe in Darfur. Khalifa's rule was resisted by the Riverain Arab tribes of the Nile Valley, who considered themselves to be representative of the dominant Arab Islamic identity of the nation and should have been the legitimate inheritors of the Mahdist state. That tension between Darfur and Center persists to this day and is an element in the current conflict. Khalifa Abdullahi's rule *was* overthrown by the Anglo-Egyptian reconquest of 1898 which established the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Administration that was effectively controlled by the British.

The Mahdiya, as the Mahdist Revolution is known, was initially welcomed in the South as a liberation movement, but when it turned out to be a perpetrator of the slave raids against the South, it was violently resisted. The Anglo-Egyptian rule ended the hostilities and governed the Sudan as two regions in one country, the Arab-Islamic North and the indigenously African South. The Christian Missionaries were encouraged and supported to proselytize and convert the population of the South to Christianity. Although the Missionaries offered basic education and rudimentary medical services in the South, the South was neglected, while the North, particularly the Central Region, progressed economically, socially, culturally and eventually politically. What is more, while slavery was abolished in its crude form, slavery-like practices were tolerated in forms that were subsumed under domestic services. These practices were popularly perceived as elements of societal stratification that sharply divided the country into North and South.

The North-South dualism prevailed until 1947 when the British Civil Secretary, James Robertson, reversed the separatist policy in favor of full national unity. When I met him in England in the early 1960s, he said that he regretted his decision and that he should have known that the North and the South were too different to be in one country. Ironically, I found myself defending his decision by saying that unity was the desired objective and that the civil war that broke out after independence was due to the failure of the Sudanese to create conditions for sustaining peace and unity.

As the country moved toward independence, the positions held by the colonial rulers were assumed by the North, except for three relatively junior administrative posts. This triggered in the South a wide spread fear that independence would simply be a replacement of foreign rule by internal colonialism, with the prospective return to the dark days of the slave raids. In August 1955, a unit of the Sudan Defense Force in Southern Sudan staged a mutiny that was halted by the intervention of the outgoing British Governor General who promised justice and the redress of Southern grievances.

Southern representatives in the National Legislative Assembly voted for the declaration of independence on January 1st, 1956, on the Northern promise that the Southern call for a federal system would be given 'serious consideration'. The North dishonoured this promise immediately after independence. The 1955 mutiny regained momentum and progressively escalated into a full-fledged civil war whose objective was the secession of Southern Sudan. The failure of the democratically elected government to quash the rebellion led to the military

coup of General Ibrahim Abboud in October, 1958, which vigorously pursued the war. But Abboud also failed to win the war. That, combined with opposition to military rule, led to his overthrow by a popular uprising in October 1964. The elected government of the traditional Islamic sectarian parties also failed to end the war. This prompted Jaafar Mohamed Nimeiri to seize power in May 1969. Nimeiri negotiated with the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement and concluded the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, which granted Southern Sudan regional autonomy.[i]

Intimidated by the opposition of the sectarian Islamic parties and the Muslim Brotherhood, Nimeiri unilaterally abrogated the Addis Ababa Agreement ten years later by dividing Southern Sudan into three weaker regions and imposing Islamic rule over the whole country. Nimeiri mistakenly assumed that the South had been irreversibly pacified. In June 1983, the South staged a rebellion championed by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA) whose declared objective was the liberation of the whole country and the creation of a New Sudan of inclusivity and equality, without discrimination on the ground of race, ethnicity, religion or culture. This vision entailed correcting the distortion of Sudan's national identity as Arab and Islamic, when the vast majority of the populations of the country are non-Arab and even the so-called Arabs represent a racially and culturally hybrid composition.

The vision of New Sudan stipulated by the SPLM began to inspire the non-Arab regions of the North and liberally-minded Sudanese at the center. They began to join the South in the liberation struggle. The first to join were the Nuba of Southern Kordofan and the Angassana (Funj) of Southern Blue Nile. Darfur also joined the rebellion shortly after, but was crushed, only to resume in the early 2000s. The war lasted over twenty years until it was ended by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that gave the South the right of self determination, which they exercised in favor of independence in 2011. The allied rebel movements in the North however remained in the Sudan and were given the right to decide through 'popular consultation' how to autonomously govern themselves within national unity.

The recent eruption of the war between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Force (RSF) should therefore be viewed as a symptom of a nation still in tragic search for its soul, a process that was started by the South.

Evolution of the Conflicting Identities

The identities that are now tearing the country apart evolved in a dynamic process of interracial and cross-cultural diffusion. Being a Muslim, Arabic speaking, and culturally Arabized, with a traceable or claimed Arab descent, elevated one to a respectable level of respect and dignity. This contrasted sharply with being a Black African and a 'heathen', which relegated one to the denigrated status of a legitimate target for enslavement. Slavery in Africa and the Middle East was practiced in a cultural framework in which children are valued as the continuation of Identity and influence, a form of genetic immortalization. A master's child born of his slave woman was considered a free legitimate child of the father, equal to the children of

free mothers. The system was therefore both discriminatory and liberally assimilating.[ii] This contrasted with the practice in the West, by which a master who begot a child with his slave woman considered that child his slave whom he could exploit and even sell.

Secessionist War in the South (1955-1972)

The discriminatory and assimilating practice of slavery in the Sudan meant that there was much mixing in the blood and racial features of the master and slave racial groups, with culture and religion as the integrating factors. The identity of resistance in the South kept the two parts of the country apart until they were brought together by colonialism into one state in a governance system of unity in diversity. The attempt by the North to impose its assimilationist culture ignited two wars of resistance that characterized relations with the North. The first war of liberation aimed at the separation of the South from the North.

Although it lasted for seventeen years, neither party was able to win militarily. Successive governments failed to defeat the rebel movement and the Southern rebels could not impose their separatist objective on the government. Nimeiri wanted to break this cycle, but the parties needed a third party to offer a face-saving mediation that would make compromise mutually acceptable. Sudan Council of Churches in collaboration with the All Africa Council of Churches, and the facilitation of Emperor Haile Sellasie of Ethiopia, emerged as the honest brokers that mediated the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. But the Agreement did not adequately resolve the problem of the Ngok Dinka of Abyei, an area that was contested by the North and the South.

The Ngok Dinka are Southerners racially and culturally, and had therefore been part of Southern resistance to the Northern attempt at assimilation. In 1905, they were annexed to Kordofan Province in the North by colonial government, ironically to provide them with better protection against Northern slave raiders. The Addis Ababa Agreement gave them the right to decide by plebiscite whether to remain in the North or join the South. That provision was never implemented and the people of Abyei remained under the oppression of Northern domination.

To remedy that impasse, shortly after my appointment as Ambassador to the Scandinavian countries, I recommended an alternative that offered a common ground. I proposed the autonomous development of Abyei as a model of the newly concluded peace, unity and reconciliation between the North and the South, instead of continuing to be a contested area. We secured funding for the project from USAID and invited the Harvard Institute for International Development to assist with its implementation.[iii] The proposal was however quite controversial among the various stakeholders. It appealed to both Khartoum and the regional government as a way out of their impasse over the area. But it was ambivalently received by the Ngok Dinka community whose aspiration was to join the South. And, indeed, the politicians among the Ngok Dinka opposed it as compromising Abyei's objective of joining the South. The Missiriya saw it as favoring the Ngok Dinka against their interest in the area. The Kordofan provincial administration also resented it as interference from the center in the affairs of the province. Overall, the project proved quite successful in relatively stabilizing the

situation in Abyei.

The Addis Ababa Agreement essentially granted the South political autonomy with very limited economic power or financial resources. But despite its shortcomings, the Agreement created a relatively congenial climate that could have facilitated peaceful interaction across the South-North divide to ultimately evolve an integrated national identity framework with which all Sudanese could identify on equal footing as citizens without discrimination.[iv]Unfortunately, Nimeiri unwittingly revealed in a meeting I attended that he initially saw the Addis Ababa Agreement as a tactical ploy that would make the Southern rebels put down their arms and end the rebellion, and after a period of consolidating the control of the central government and the unity of the country, be terminated, but that it had succeeded beyond their expectations. However, the increasing demand of the South for a fair share of economic power and resources, and the resistance against the increasing interference of the center in the affairs of the region, combined with the formidable opposition from the Islamists and the Sectarian parties against his military rule, prompted Nimeiri to take a preemptive move by imposing Sharia Law over the whole country.[v] Nimeiri abrogated the agreement as he had initially planned and essentially reasserted the assimilationist policies of all the previous governments.

The Struggle for a New Sudan (1983-2005)

Nimeiri's policy of Islamisation provoked a formidable rebellion in the South under the championship of the SPLM/SPLA whose vision was the creation of a New Sudan of full equality without discrimination on the ground of race, ethnicity, religion or culture. This vision of a United New Sudan, which was the brain child of the leader of the SPLM/A, Dr. John Garang de Mabior, was highly controversial in both the South and the North. In the South, it run counter to the aspiration of most Southerners for independence from Northern domination, but was accepted because it was viewed as a tactical ploy for neutralising national, regional and international aversion to secession. In the North, it was misconstrued as threatening to turn the tables and impose the Africanisation of the Sudan against Arabism and Islam. There was also a strong indignation verging on racism about the idea of the Black Africans having the audacity to impose their vision on the Arab-Muslim national character of the country.

Nimeiri's Islamisation agenda and opposition to his dictatorial rule led to his ouster in April 1985. The democratically elected government that succeeded him failed to end the war in the South. In June 1989, the Muslim Brothers seized power in the name of the so-called Revolution for National Salvation led by Omer Hassan Al-Bashir, a professional military officer, co-opted by the Muslim Brotherhood. Under the leadership of Dr. Hassan Al-Turabi, a brilliant lawyer with a tunnel-vision in pursuit of the Islamic agenda, the Brotherhood had transformed itself first into the Islamic Charter Front, and then into the National Congress Party in a clever ploy to foster parents national appeal.

Although the coup initially disguised its connection to the Muslim Brotherhood, and even contrived the detention of Dr. Al-Turabi together with the ousted Prime Minister Sadiq Al-

Mahdi, its true Islamic colours under Turabi's spiritual and intellectual leadership soon became manifest. I visited the country three months after the coup and was granted permission to pay a controversial visit to the ousted Prime Minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi and members of his government in detention. Turabi was still under the staged detention. In my brief meeting with him, he intimated to me that although they were not involved in the country, he sympathised with the move to break the impasse the country had been going through since independence and that he himself would adopt a more radically different path once out of detention.

And indeed, Turabi visibly emerged as the champion of the so-called revolution for national salvation. The regime pursued the Islamic agenda with a vengeance under the banner of *Jihad* holy war agains the South. The SPLM/A also waged its war for a New Sudan with determination and was making headways into the non-Arab areas of the North. In Darfur, the regime mobilised the Janjaweed militia of *Al-Tajamuo al-Arabi,* 'The Arab Gathering', led by Musa Hilal, as a force that terrorised the region in 2003-2004 with mass atrocities that have been determined to constitute genocide and crimes against humanity.

Although the word genocide is emotionally loaded and evokes unequivocal denial when alleged, and is in any case difficult to prove, the wars of identity that have threatened the unity of Sudan since independence can be credibly described as genocidal. Because the policies of Arab-Islamic assimilation threaten the survival of non-Muslim and non-Arab identities, it can be argued that they represent a form of religious and cultural extermination that is akin to genocide.[vi]

With the intensification of the identity conflicts in the marginalised areas of the North, the parties eventually realised that neither side could win and became amenable to a negotiated compromise. Regional efforts for ending the war needed greater support from the international community which eventually came from the United States. In 2001, a Task Force was constituted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, CSIS, in Washington to develop proposals for a US Policy for the incoming administration to end the war in the Sudan. I was honoured to co-chair the Task Force with the US diplomat, Steve Morrison.

Though initially suspected by the SPLM leaders and their allies in Washington as pro-Khartoum, the Task Force deliberated with sharp differences on the solutions for the Sudan conflict and the role of the US in the mediation. But members eventually reached a consensus and recommended a formula of 'One Country, Two Systems' for the interim period after which the South would decide through a referendum whether to continue with this arrangement or to become fully independent. During the interim period, efforts were to be exerted toward making unity attractive within this formula. This framework of 'One Country, Two Systems' was a genuine attempt to give national unity a chance and to create conditions under which the country would evolve toward a more integrated New Sudan of inclusivity and full equality. This recalls the central theme of my 1973 book, *Dynamics of Identification: A Basis for National Integration in the Sudan.[vii]*

In a volume I edited and published in 2010 on the prospects for the New Sudan, the

contributors were still optimistic. The working title for the Volume was *'New Sudan in the Making'*. But before its publication, the tide of optimism began to shift in a negative direction. It became increasingly apparent that Islam and ArabIsm were too deeply rooted to be easily reformed toward a uniting secular Sudanese identity. In the end, I added a question mark to the title of the book which was then published under the less optimistic title *'New Sudan in the Making?'*[viii]

As the referendum was fast approaching, the United Nations Information Office @ Khartoum which was still trying to advocate for unity, organised a symposium on the prospects, which I was invited to address. I initially declined on the grounds that it was too late to make unity attractive to the voters. I was eventually persuaded to attend and I made a case for the formula of 'One Country, Two Systems. But I also argued that prospects for preserving the unity of the country might be improved by expanding the formula to 'One Country, Multiple Systems

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, CPA, in which the US played a critical mediating role, was based on the framework of 'One Country, Two Systems'. But in the end, it failed to win a unity vote in the referendum. South Sudanese overwhelmingly voted for independence, which was declared on July 9st 2011.[ix]

I was on the delegation of the UN Secretary-General that attended the independence celebration. While the South jubilantly celebrated the achievement of a goal for which they had long struggled and sacrificed, I saw that achievement as a glorious but partial accomplishment which left the New Sudan vision still pending. The three areas under Northern administration, the Ngok Dinka of Abyei, the Nuba of Southern Kordofan and the Angassana (Funj), all of whom had fought side by side with their Southern Sudanese comrades, were ambiguously covered by the CPA through some anomalous protocols that were never implemented. President Kiir said in his address that South Sudan would not abandon them, but would instead assist their cause through peaceful means. But even that peaceful support in a situation of continuing internal conflicts lwould be certain to keep the two countries bound by conflict.

History was to repeat itself on the Ngok Dinka of Abyei, who, as noted earlier, are ethnically and culturally South Sudanese, and fought gallantly in both wars for the liberation of the South. The Abyei Protocol of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement gave them the same right granted them by the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement to decide in a referendum to be conducted simultaneously with the Southern referendum whether to remain in the North or revert to South Sudan. As was the case with the right granted them by the Addis Ababa Agreement, the Abyei referendum under the CPA was never held, as it was decisively blocked by the Sudan government. Abyei therefore remains a contested area with the people continuing in a status of virtual statelessness. In the wake of recurrent violent conflicts between the Sudan and South Sudan over Abyei, the United Nations Security Council established United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei, UNISFA.

As an aspect of history repeating itself, I came up with a proposal for the interim security and stability of Abyei as a peaceful and conciliatory meeting ground.[x] The proposal was similar

to the one I made in 1973 when the Nimeiri regime failed to implement the Addis Ababa plebiscite in Abyei. This proposal also became intensely controversial. The Ngok Dinka political elites saw it as compromising the goal of Abyei reverting to the South. But the proposal met with popular support from the Ngok Dinka generally. In 2013, in collaboration with the Africa Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, we developed a formula for an interim arrangement that would grant the citizens of Abyei an autonomous status under the shared sovereignty of Sudan and South Sudan until the status of the area was finally settled. Unfortunately, the war in the Sudan broke out at the precise time when we were about to submit this formula to the two governments.

This tragic situation is inducing the massive return of internally displaced persons and refugees to return to the area, which has been our goal for decades. In that sense, the tragic crisis in the Sudan is offering an opportunity for supporting the voluntary return of the Ngok Dinka to their home land. With security provided by UNISFA, the climate is conducive to promoting the peace, security, and stability of Abyei as envisioned in our proposed formula. We have now embarked on fundraising internationally and within the Ngok Dinka Community to support the return, resettlement, and reintegration of the displaced and refugees.[xi]

The broader response to the crisis in the Sudan must be to stop the hostilities, initiate the process of mediation, and articulate the broad guiding principles toward which the peace process should be directed. South Sudan as the country most connected to the Sudan, with which it is still bound by conflict in the unfinished pursuit of the New Sudan Vision must play a major role.

Resolving Being Bound by Conflict

The challenge for the Two Sudans has been how to replace conflict with cooperation in resolving their internal conflicts. In *Bound by Conflict,* published after the independence of South Sudan, I argued that unity and separation are degrees of on-going relations that could be weakened or strengthened, according to the will of the people and their leaders. The two countries were still negatively bound together by their internal conflicts that spill over their borders to adversely affect their bilateral relations. What was therefore needed was turning being bound by conflict to being bonded by cooperation in resolving their internal conflicts.[xii]

That indeed began to happen. Sudan, President Bashir personally, played a critical role in the mediation of the 2018 revitalised agreement in South Sudan. But, ironically, despite his positive role in mediating the South Sudan peace agreement, Bashir did not last long in power. The pressures of the conflicts in the Sudan and the persistent demand of return to civilian rule, triggered the massive uprising against his regime. Young people, specifically university students, supported by the professionals, have always spearheaded popular resistance to military dictatorship in the Sudan. In the uprising against Bashir, the determination and courage of the youth and women inspired sustained popular protests and engaged in various forms of civic resistance for months. Demonstrators from across classes, generations, faiths, educational levels and ethnicities continued to occupy the street infront of the military

Headquarters, exposed to arrest, harassment, and eventually gunfire. With enormous sacrifice of physical endurance and even loss of lives that won international admiration, they eventually compelled the Sudan Armed Forces to oust President Omer Al-Bashir in April 2019. Dr. Abdallah Hamdouk, an economist, who had senior positions in regional and international public service, was appointed Prime Minister.x

Bashir and leading members of his regime were detained in the infamous Kober Prison. History was again to repeat itself in a remarkable way. In 1989, Colonel Bakri Hassan Salih, the member of Bashir's coup responsible for security, who later rose to the position of First Vice President, escorted me to visit the ousted prime minister in prison. On the way, he jokingly told me that giving me permission to visit the detained former government leaders was an investment for when their turn to be detained would come, implying that I should then visit them. Their turn came thirty years later. On a visit to Khartoum, I requested from the coup leader, Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan to grant me permission to visit Bashir and his team in prison, citing the request made thirty years earlier, which to me had become a sacred obligation. I was granted permission and I paid what was a very controversial to the ousted leaders in prison.

Bashir and Bakri were brought individually to meet with me in the modest office of the prison director. In the meeting, I decided to make our conversation more substantive than merely a courtesy call. I said that seizing power by force to rule the country was a high risk adventure and that one must have a very compelling reason and objective to take such a risk. What was their compelling objective? Both appreciated the question and explained that ending the war in the South was their highest priority and that they were committed to reach an agreement with the SPLM/A even if that led to the separation of the South. Although the issue did not come up, it was well known that Bashir's hidden agenda was getting rid of the South that had always been an obstacle to the implementation of the Arab-Islamic agenda in the country.

After Bashir's overthrow, conflicts among the different stakeholders in the Sudan intensified. Various political stakeholders and regional liberation movements began to assert their demands on the fledging new government. It was now the turn of South Sudan to mediate the resolution of Sudan's internal conflicts. The vision of a New Sudan, though blurred, was still a quest in the internal conflicts in Sudan. In October 2020, the Juba Agreement, which was brokered by the government of South Sudan, was concluded between the new Government and the coalition of armed rebel factions and political parties. There was a resounding call for freedom and justice, which were echoes of the call for New Sudan. The agreement partially moderated the hostilities, but tensions persisted. Differences between the army and the popular demand for civilian rule reached an impasse. The army resumed full control with General Abdel Fattah Al- Burhan, the Chief of Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), as the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) the leader of the Rapid Support Force, (RSF) as his Deputy. The civilian Prime Minister, Dr. Abdalla Hamdouk, was forced to resign in January 2022.

Some rebel movements in Darfur and the Southern Kordofan (The Nuba), for which the goal of

New Sudan was still the declared objective of their struggle, did not join the Juba Agreement. There was also a call for the unification of the Army to absorb RSF into SAF. Burhan supported the proposal that the process be completed in two years, while Hemedti demanded ten years. The tension between the two armed groups and their leaders progressively escalated. As a member of a team from South Sudan that went to Khartoum shortly before the war erupted to explore ways of resolving the impasse on Abyei, we observed this tension on, but we did not foresee the explosion that took place in Khartoum on April 15, 2023.

Anatomy of the War of the Generals

The conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is essentially a continuation of the crisis of national Identity that has bedevilled the country in varying forms and degrees since independence. It has taken different twists and turns and the configuration of the parties has changed, but the challenge it poses for the country remains basically the same.

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) of RSF was one of the leaders of the Janjaweed Arab militia that devastated Darfur with the atrocities amounting to genocide. Hemedti emerged as the dominant figure and was supported by President Bashir to form RSF which became a formidable force parallel to the regular army. Granted concessions for trading in gold and other resources, he became one of the richest individuals in the country. President Al-Beshir twisted his nicknamed into Hemayti, which means 'My Protection'. Despite his tainted past, Hemedti has recently been speaking of justice, democracy under civilian rule, and the rights of the marginalised areas. But, currently in Darfur itself, the old conflicts between his Arab tribes and the non-Arab groups have flared up. The atrocities being committed are reminiscent of the genocidal devastations of earlier conflicts.

On his part, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan represents the army which is the core of the establishment and the symbol of national sovereignty. And yet, he himself had participated in the Darfur war against the rebels and the army he leads is said to have been heavily infiltrated and is even dominated by the Islamists.

Popular perception at home and abroad sees the war as a contest for power and wealth between the two generals. This does not address the root causes of the national identity crisis and the concerns of the constituencies tge generals purportedly represent. Any sustainable solution must go beyond stopping the violence and meeting the urgent humanitarian needs to formulate a framework of inclusivity and equality among the races, ethnicities, religions and cultures that comprise the national fabric of the country.

Options for the Constructive Management of Diversity

The paradox of addressing the crisis of national identity in conflicts is that there is a tendency to shy away from discussing racial, ethnic, religious and cultural factors in the conflict. They tend to be seen as too sensitive and intangible to be resolved. But without exposing these hidden agendas in the negotiations, they cannot be resolved or even constructively

discussed.[xiii]

It is often argued that identity is largely a subjective matter of how an individual perceives himself and herself and not a matter of objective determination. This may be valid if self perception, however distorted, does not affect others. But if the distorted self perception is then projected as the identification of the nation, with discriminating implications for the citizens who do not fit the label, then it seizes to be a private affair. It is of course wrong to discriminate on any ground, but it is doubly erroneous to discriminate on ill-founded grounds of exaggerated differences that are false.

The experience of the Sudan confirms that identity is fluid and dynamic and can be flexibly constructed and reconstructed in self promotion. Islam and Arabism liberally allowed people to pass and offered incentives for passing. The main incentive was the radical change from being a target for enslavement to being a respected person fully recognised as deserving human dignity as a citizen. Those assimilationist incentives are still being offered by Arab countries in terms of material benefits of employment and substantial financial assistance to the country. Those marginalised by this assimilationist trend have engaged in the violent resistance that began in the South and have spread to the marginalised parts of the Sudan.

A major paradox of conflicts and peacemaking efforts worldwide is that wars are generated and perpetrated for a long time, inflicting mass atrocities and destruction to the physical infrastructure, when the causes of the conflict are self evident and will eventually be discussed and resolved. Why is it necessary to inflict so much suffering, death and destruction to do what from the beginning was the obvious way out of the quagmire? A case can plausibly be made for stopping the killing on the understanding that the just cause of the aggrieved party will be fairly addressed with a sense of urgency.[xiv]

While the case of Sudan may have its own peculiarities, it represents a global phenomenon. Civil wars are a manifestation of extreme form of identity conflicts. In my extensive missions around the world, pursuant to my UN mandates on internal displacement and genocide prevention, I found the affected countries acutely divided by crises of national identity. What causes conflict is not the mere differences, but the discriminatory mismanagement of diversity.

Addressing Sudan's Crisis of National Identity

To reiterate the argument with which I began, the war currently raging in the Sudan is a symptom of a crisis that has its roots in the institution of slavery and the twin process of Arab-Islamic assimilation. This was a process which paradoxically adopted and Integrated members of the denigrated group into the privileged racial and religious category. But the communities that were raided for slaves developed a resistance identity that held at bay the process of Arab-Islamic assimilation. It also stopped the process from penetrating deeper into the African countries further South. This is often acknowledged with appreciation by Black Africans from those countries.

Although slavery in its crude form was abolished by the British, slavery-like practices dubbed

as domestic were tolerated and the legacy of slavery persisted in disguised and yet degrading formations. The identity of stratifying assimilation in the North and that of resistance in the South coexisted during the colonial era. This antagonistic dualism was elevated by British colonial rule into a peaceful, though still unequal, diversity within one country. Independence reignited the agony of inequality as the modern concept of the nation state brought together diverse groups under the centralised monopoly of power by the dominant Arab-Islamic identity group that succeeded the colonial rulers. The identity of resistance in the South rose up and asserted its demand for the recognition of their human dignity that was eventually achieved through secession.

At first, the subordinated and subdued non-Arab groups in the North, primarily in the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and Darfur, were not only removed from the liberation struggle by the South, but were in effect used as the foot soldiers by their Arab officers to fight a *jihad* holy war against the 'heathens' and 'infidels' in the South. Over time, the eyes of the marginalised groups in the North began to open to their Identity as Black Africans and the indignity inflicted upon their African humanity, for which the South was fighting. Although multi faced in its manifestation, the core of the war now raging in the Sudan is a belated awakening to the cause for which the Africans in the South have been struggling since independence. What is at stake is justice, equality, and human dignity for all, the core principles of the Vision of New Sudan.

The stakes in preserving the unity of the Sudan are high, not only for the country and the immediate neighbours, but for Africa, with global implications. The argument which was being used against the independence of South Sudan was that it would set an example that would threaten the preservation of the colonial borders, which was agreed upon as a cardinal principle by the Founding Fathers of the African independence movement. Although Somalia has in effect been broken up by the virtual breakaway of Somaliland and punt land, the independence of these regions has not been recognised regionally and internationally. The independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia was eventually accepted after a long liberation struggle not only as an agreed solution by the warring parties in Ethiopia, but also because of the fact that Eritrea had been a state that was incorporated into Ethiopia. The independence of South Sudan also came as justifiable not only on the grounds that the country had been governed by the British as 'two in one', but also as the outcome of the prolonged struggle of the South Sudanese against the Arab-Islamic domination of the North, which ended in a comprehensive peace.

The independence of Eritrea and South Sudan have however established precedents for overriding the dogmatic commitment to preserving the colonial borders. Breaking up the Sudan further would encourage the liberation movements in the neighbouring countries, such as in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromo in Ethiopia, to more confidently demand independence. This would open up Pandora's box for similar movements in Africa. Colonial borders throughout the continent would run the risk of being torn apart. The continent would descent into chaos. This would essentially mean that the modern state planted by the colonial intervention would fall apart. But Africa can no longer revert to the pre-colonial past. The integrating middle ground

must be flexible accommodation of diversity by creatively designing a governance system that recognises and equitably accommodates local and regional ethnic and cultural identities and their value-institutional peculiarities.

When we proposed the formula of 'One Country, Two Systems', it was our sincere hope that it was a way of saving the unity of the country. But we failed because the formula was misinterpreted as a step toward partition. As the break up of the Sudan is undesirable and inconceivable, an appropriate strategy for preserving the unity of the country might be to expand 'One Country, Two Systems' model that was applied to North-South relationship into 'One Country, Multiple Systems'. This formula, if tailored to the dynamics of Sudan's ethnic and regional composition, and the specificities of each context, might stand a better chance of success in preserving the unity and integrity of the country.[xv] The model is capable of replication elsewhere in Africa and indeed globally, as no country in the would can claim to be homogeneous without the demands of component groups for the constructive and equitable management of diversity in unity.

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[i] *See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peace and Unity in the Sudan: An African Achievement, Khartoum University Press, 1973;* Dunstan M. Wai, *The Southern Sudan: The Problem of National Integration, Frank Cass, 1973.*

[ii] See Yusuf Fadol Hassan, *The Arabs and the Sudan,* Edinburgh University Press, 1967. See also Francis Mading Deng, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan, The Brookings Institution, 1995*

[iii] Francis Mading Deng, 'Abyei: A Bridge or a Gulf: The Ngok Dinka on Sudan's North-South Border', in Jay Spaulding and Stephenie Beswick*, White Nile Black Blood, The Red Sea Press, 1999;* David Cole and Richard Huntington, *Between a Swamp and a Hard Place, Harvard Institute for International Development,* Harvard University Press, *1997.* See also Francis Mading Deng, *Frontiers of Unity: An Experiment in Afro-Arab Cooperation,* Routledge*, 2010;* Francis Mading Deng, Luka B. Deng Kuol, and Daniel J Deng, Editors*, Abyei Between Two Sudans,* Red Sea Press/Africa World Press 2020*;* and Francis Mading Deng, Editor*, Warriors From Abyei: In the Liberation of South Sudan,* Africa World Books, 2023)

[iv] See Francis Mading Deng, *Dynamics of Identification: A Basis for National Integration in the Sudan,* Khartoum University Press, 1973; Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Peace and Unity in the Sudan: An African Achievement,* Khartoum University Press, 1973.

[v] Nimeiri's unilateral abrogation was one more violation in a long series of broken agreements by the North. Abel Alier, *South Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonoured,* Ithaca Press, 1990. See also Mansour Khalid, *Nimeiri and the Revolution of Dis-May*, Kegan Paul, 1985.

[vi] See Francis Mading Deng, *Sudan: From Genocidal Wars to Frontiers of Peace and Unity,* Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs, Occasional Paper No.3, Fordham University, 2006; Francis M. Deng, in Laura N. Beny and Sandra Hale, '*Sudan's Genocidal Wars' in Sudan's Killing Fields: Political Violence and Fragmentation,* The Red Sea Press, 2015. See also Francis Mading Deng, 'War and Genocide: Disappearing Christians of the Middle East', *Middle East Quarterly, winter,* 2001, pp.12-21. And see also Marlowe, Aisha Bain, and Adam Shapiro, *Darfur Dairies: Stories of Survival,* Nation Books, 2006.

[vii] *U.S. Policy to End Sudan's War, Report of CSIS Task Force on U.S.-Sudan Policy,* co-chaired by Francis M. Deng and J. Stephen Morrison, 2001.

[viii] Red Sea Press/Africa World Press, 2010

[ix] See Mansour Khalid, *The Paradox of Two Sudans, The CPA and the Road to Partition,* Africa World Press, 2015; Mohamed Ibrahim Khalil*, Why South Sudan Seceded,* Africa World Press, 2021; and Dhieu Mathok Diing Wol, *Politics of Ethnic Discrimination in Sudan: A Justification for the Secession of South Sudan, 2nd edition,* Africa World Books, 2022.

[x] Francis Mading Deng, *Abyei Rising From the Ashes,* DETCRO Research and Advocacy, 2022; and Abyei at a Critical Juncture, DETCRO, 2022,

[xi] 'Raising Awareness About Abyei's Returnees' and 'General Appeal to the Ngok Community for Abyei', 2023. In partnership with dedicated individuals, we are Currently leading a fundraising campaign for the return, resettlement and reintegration of tge displaced populations and refugees from Abyei fleeing the war in Sudan and to initiate sustainable activities that approach development as self enhancement from within the community. ***To get involved in the Abyei Campaign, please contact Dr. Francis Deng at francismdeng@gmail.com.***

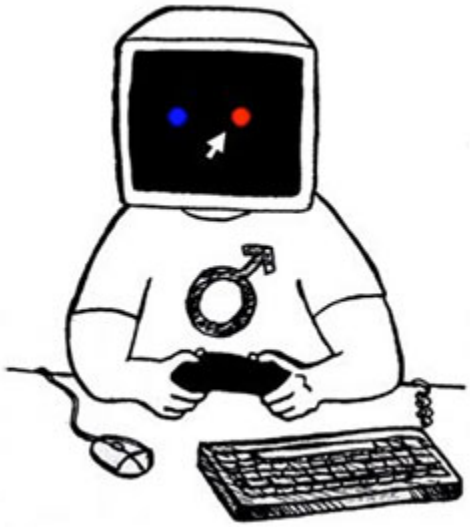
[xii] *Bound by Conflict: Dilemmas of the Two Sudans*, Fordham University Press, 2016.

[xiii] *See Francis M. Deng, 'What Is Not Said Is What Divides' in Managing the Crisis in Sudan, edited by Abdel Ghaffar Mohamed and Gunnar Sorbo , University of Bergen, April 1989. Francis M. Deng, 'Negotiating a Hidden Agenda: Sudan's Conflict of Identities', in I. William Zartman, Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars, The Brookings Institution, 1995.*

[xiv] See Fanie du Toit, *When Political Transitions Work: Reconciliation as Interdependence,* Oxford University Press, 2018.

The Global Grievance Network: How Viral Masculinity Endangers Everyone

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

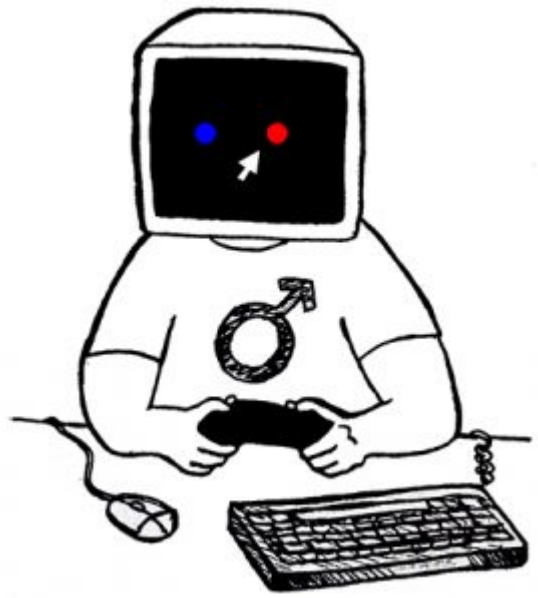


“Cyber misogyny” is sort of what it sounds like, a catch-all term for various forms of woman-hate spewing over the internet. Dig deeper, however, and you discover something unexpected. Women and girls may be its main targets, but they are not alone. Men and boys are harmed by it too. It can devastate entire communities, even jeopardize the environment. Believe it or not, everyone is at risk when misogyny runs rampant online.

Internet misogyny may seem like a concern specific to women and contained to virtual worlds. You might roll your eyes at these mad men and bad boys but think they pale in comparison to burning problems in the real world. Truth be told, the escalation of cyber misogyny is behind the pressing global challenges of our time.

Preview: Today’s cyber misogyny necessitates a paradigm shift

Over the past decade, cyber misogyny has utterly exploded, escaping the web’s dim alleys to spread its seething far and wide. In the early 2010s, it grew forceful enough to earn the nickname ***manosphere***. A boom that big would have been hailed a digital revolution were it not so wincingly hateful.[1] By 2015, the “manosphere” jumped all semblance of virtual borders and marched onto the main stage of global politics. Today, it moves comfortably among us, on and offline, saturating mainstream discourse in countless locations and languages.



This omnipresence is neither widely recognized nor readily apparent. Most people have never heard of the manosphere and know nothing of its antics. This is partly due to its endless variations. Some versions lead with bluster and bravado; others favor intellect and insinuation. Some present as pro-men, not anti-women. It can be hard to discern their connection. What binds them, coalescing the manosphere into a perceptible network, is one passionate conviction: that 'real' men (especially the straight, white Western kind) are under siege and must be restored to set society right. This feeling is the manosphere's signature.

So that we can recognize this feeling in all its forms, I propose to call it by a more precise name, ***aggrieved manhood*** (aka "manly grievance").[2] Manly grievance is the primary emotional fuel source behind the rise of the far right, though it is seldom acknowledged as such. Stoking this gnawing feeling across the manosphere, the far right took on a populist face and found attention, amplification, and traction around the world.

Put simply, cyber misogyny is the global engine of the far right and should be treated as such. I make that case, first, by introducing aggrieved manhood—the versatile feeling-in-common that powers the surge of rightwing populism around the world. Second, I explain how internet misogyny (aka the "manosphere") serves as a transnational 'superspreader' of aggrieved manhood, such that the feeling has truly gone viral. Finally, I show that viral manly grievance puts us all in harm's way. In this light, cyber misogyny becomes a pressing human concern that transcends politics.

Ultimately, I argue that viral, rather than "toxic," masculinity is an urgent challenge of our time from which no one is immune.[3] I offer a paradigm shift for addressing this situation. What if we respond to aggrieved manhood at the level of movement instead of content? The adage might go: *Never mind what manly grievance says, zero in on how it spreads.*

I come to these claims as both a feminist communication scholar and a populist daughter of the US religious right. Due in part to this oddly fruitful mix, my approach is rigorously pro-men.

Uninterested in any 'battle of the sexes', I believe in our interdependence and seek human thriving in all gendered forms. For this reason, I call foul on the manosphere's disingenuous claim to be pro-men: It neither has their backs nor serves their interests. Aggrieved manhood threatens the health and safety of men and boys as much as anyone else.

I. A biography of feeling: Aggrieved manhood and the populist sleight of hand

Aggrieved manhood is the feeling that virility has been victimized. It's a simmering sense of rightful potency, wrongly denied. It is not synonymous with "toxic masculinity" and should not be reduced to it. Toxic masculinity refers to rigid norms of manhood (like "boys don't cry" or "men hold their liquor") that bring harm both to those who live by them and to people nearby. To be clear, this pro-feminist concept was never intended to rail against men; it seeks healthier masculinities for men's sake, after all. Nonetheless, the term has become intensely polarizing.

Aggrieved manhood spits on the very concept of toxic masculinity, reframing it as evidence of discrimination against men. Basically, manly grievance is a backlash that doubles down on any masculine norm dubbed "toxic." It asserts a natural gender binary (male or female) and division of roles (masculinity *versus* femininity), then turns the tables on feminism, casting men and masculinity as the truly oppressed. Branded poisonous by the feminized cultural establishment, 'real' men have no choice but to revolt against the assault on masculinity. This they must do not just for themselves—to reclaim their rights—but also for the good of "the people," to save civilization from the softening of men. Aggrieved manhood thus offers toxic masculinity subscribers a sympathetic identity politics, that of heroic victim.

The offer stands for almost anyone willing to take up the mantle of manly grievance. People you might not expect—including plenty of women—will do so. There is no short supply of Marjorie Taylor Greenes and Giorgia Melonis in the world, but this should come as no surprise. As Isabel Wilkerson says in her best-seller *Caste*, "One does not have to be in the dominant caste to do its bidding. In fact, the most potent instrument of the caste system is a sentinel at every rung,

whose identity forswears any accusation of discrimination and helps keep the caste system humming" (2020: 244). These 'unlikely' suspects are actually probable, and their presence sheds light on the kind of manhood besieged. In the West, for example, women who take up manly grievance tend to do so expressly as wives, mothers, and daughters. This is a clue that the masculinity in question is heterosexual. You may also notice that white women are more prone to participate—aha, an index of the racial profile of aggrieved manhood.

The point is that the mere presence of women does not negate—on the contrary, it helps specify—the masculinity of a thing. How can you know that aggrieved manhood favors straight white masculinity? By the uneven involvement of white women invested through heterosexual partnership, be it economic, romantic, parental, familial, faith-based, and so on.

Aggrieved manhood is therefore *not* an equal opportunity feeling, even as it can appear open to everyone. This is a crucial point because, increasingly, manly grievance all over the world takes shelter under the guise of populism, which lends it a legitimate cover. Today, aggrieved manhood is pitched as the protest of decent ordinary people, an honorable uprising of the oppressed underclass.

Too many analysts take the bait, accepting the populist claim that "the people's" socioeconomic resentment is the main motivation. In doing so, they let aggrieved manhood get away with hijacking real class pain for its own selfish interest. Fooled by the populist costume, we fail to see that gender, racial, and sexual entitlement are really in the driver's seat. Certainly, class inequities are dire and demand attention. But manly grievance grabs that attention for itself, even as it leaks disregard for the poor and working classes.

For all its populist swagger, aggrieved manhood's underclass *bona fides* are an ill-fitting suit worn for sympathy. If a posterchild would help, think of J.D. Vance, the Yale Law graduate and venture capitalist who published *Hillbilly Elegy* in 2016 and, by 2023, became a rightwing populist US Senator spouting manly grievance talking points. Or how about Senator Josh Hawley, another Yale Law grad turned populist who recently published *Manhood: The Masculine Virtues America Needs*. You might remember him as the preppy-looking guy who fist-pumped the January 6 crowd and, later, ran from them.

We might be cautious about the label rightwing populism, then. I do not say this in an anti-populist spirit. Quite the reverse, calling these movements populist is unfair to populism; it tarnishes "the people's" good name. The populist form is operating here like a gender-laundering service that cleanses manly grievance, buffing it with an everyman front. "*He* the people," masquerading as "We the people."

Instead of falling for this ruse, we can challenge the populist frame and name the partialities at hand. Aggrieved manhood is an alternative label that achieves this. Let's face it: Contemporary rightwing populisms appeal most to certain kinds of manhood, and that is because these movements work to restore their 'rightful' stature. In many locations, the men and masculinities who stand to benefit most are straight, white, able-bodied, and cis-gendered,

possibly Christian too. Often, they are comparatively comfortable—some downright elite—in terms of class. Suffice it to say that populism is a stretch, at best.

It is vital to understand that aggrieved manhood is a bodily feeling more than a particular viewpoint. This feeling can hitch a ride on, and get attached to, all kinds of content, but it leads with sensation. Manly grievance is most combustible as a *felt* sense of things, an impression or perception that cannot easily be put into words and grows all the stronger for it. Aggrieved manhood bundles several blurry emotions into one heady package. Uneasy, silenced, entitled, misjudged, defensive, beleaguered, betrayed, lonely, lost, nostalgic, in a word, *wronged*… and outraged to the boiling point. The package arrives most powerfully as physical (not only ideological) agitation—a spiked pulse, set jaw, clenched fist, puffed chest.

In short, bodies with aggrieved manhood on board are primed to lash out. They are prone to what political scientists call "fast anger," volatile cycles of swelling and contraction that flare in detonations big and small (Davies 2020). Like shouting matches and fist fights at school board meetings, over "critical race theory" or Pride month. Like election insurrections in the US and Brazil. Like the fuel emissions flex of "rolling coal," or mass shootings and gun suicide. Yes, I mean to imply that these very different incidents have manly grievance as their common denominator; more on that to come.

A feeling like aggrieved manhood is made for the contemporary media landscape. As we will see, it passes smoothly through social networks, easily adjusting to different situations. One reason for this is that it operates first by bodily arousal and so, is content-flexible. Onboarded physically before thinking sets in, manly grievance can latch on to most any idea.

But the feeling flows especially well for another reason: It runs on the binary code of gender. "Manly right, wronged" translates better and faster across cultural differences than other forms of entitled resentment. A simple binary code (man or woman) readily adapts to regional circumstances. The gender binary can easily map on to resident specifics—more complex codes like race, ethnicity, religion, and class—to make aggrieved manhood feel locally compelling.

It may seem strange to speak of feeling, rather than people, in biographical terms. Yet tracing the life of catchy feelings is a much-needed fluency for a "post-truth" age when persuasion by physical resonance (aka "truthiness") rules. So far, we've considered the current character of aggrieved manhood—with whom it identifies, who it hides behind, how it acts and with what motivation, how mobile it is. But what of its trajectory in relation to time and place: Where does it come from, and where is it going? How should we understand its lifespan?

Aggrieved manhood has a colorful history. In the West, at least, claims that men are victimized go way back. For example, US history is speckled by periodic 'crises' of masculinity that served warrants to redress some social order (Ashcraft & Flores 2003). Aggrieved manhood appears to be more durable than earlier crises, however. It began as a reaction to the social movements of the 1960's and 70's—not only feminisms, but civil rights, gay liberation, and more. Together, these movements questioned the automatic entitlement of straight white men,

unsettling—without fully unseating—taken-for-granted social and economic privileges. Several "men's movements" began to grapple with shifting expectations around gender, race, and sexuality. Aggrieved manhood was born in the anti-feminist wing of these movements, which dug in on behalf of the good old days, when men were men and… you get the idea.

From the 1980s forward, the flames were fanned by conservative talk radio (hear Rush Limbaugh) and other "outrage media" (Sobieraj & Berry 2011). Straight white men's festering resentments were channeled toward various outlets, from "men's rights activists" and "fathers' rights" groups to anti-government militias and the religious right. In 2009, aggrieved manhood found new life in the Tea Party. Diverse phenomena, to be sure. And the throughline of manly grievance is unmistakably present.

This makes aggrieved manhood over 50 years old. Yet some still hold hope that the feeling will pass with those who birthed it. In 2013, the leading US expert on "angry white men" predicted as much (Kimmel, 2017). Within three years, aggrieved manhood won the US White House and fast-tracked its blazing global ascent. Far from busting, manly grievance is positively booming around the world. How did this happen? That's where internet misogyny comes in.

II. Feeling goes viral: Enter the manosphere

Where "cyber misogyny" encapsulates online activity hostile to women, "the manosphere" captures how all these acts are in masculinist community—networked in such a way that they operate like a unified force with a detectable signature. I begin with a brief introduction to this network and explain its cozy relation with the far right. Of the many gifts the manosphere has bestowed on global rightwing politics, two stand out: an aesthetic of countercultural cool and the physical radicalization of bodies primed to strike at culture war targets.

A global network, on and offline

Technically, the manosphere refers to the internet phase of anti-feminist men's movements. It's a symbiotic mesh of websites, blogs, memes, videos, books, seminars, talking points, and the like, which trade in manly entitlement and threats to it. The manosphere is not exactly *an* entity, however, more like "networked misogyny" (Banet-Weiser & Miltner 2016). Think of it as pods or clusters of activity that, on the surface, appear to be decoupled or loosely related, yet are wholly aligned in purpose. Their business? The constant sharing, and alleged salving, of aggrieved manhood.

In concrete terms, the manosphere is that web of relations binding disparate figures like Jordan Peterson, Andrew Tate, Ben Shapiro, and Tucker Carlson… with varied groups like the Proud Boys, Patriot Front, so-called incels ("involuntary celibates") and other men's separatist communities… with vengeful trolls, cyberstalking, and hate campaigns (remember "Gamergate?")… with an army of self-proclaimed experts peddling hacks for heterosexual conquest ("pick-up artists") and retaliation ("revenge porn"), semen count enrichment (aka "men's sexual wellness"), bodybuilding, and other surefire ways to 'let the bitches know who's

boss' and give your manhood a boost.[4]

No, these are not all the same or equivalent. And no, not everyone involved adheres to misogyny, or means to. The point is not to oversimplify—to reduce or conflate very different people and efforts—but, rather, to behold their connective tissue. They may have dissimilar goals and interests; they may not communicate or coordinate directly. They may denounce one another or engage in conflict and rivalry. Such infighting heeds the moral of *Fight Club*, that the best way to 'remasculate' is to spar with other men.

Paradoxically, fragmentation is what integrates the manosphere (Strick 2020). Widely dispersed, apparently detached, and endlessly brawling—what better 'proof' that the threats are everywhere, and the stakes couldn't be higher? Even when the manosphere's diverse inhabitants are at cross-purposes, they are connected by a common goal, which is to draw attention and energy toward manhood wronged in a million ways. This is how the manosphere 'acts' or exerts influence as a whole, regardless of any participant's personal intentions.

Concisely, the manosphere is a global network—a highly distributed, rather than centralized or synchronized, form of agency—that lobbies on behalf of manly grievance the world over. No headquarters to be found, no wizard behind a curtain. Just track the effects of all that activity.

"The manosphere" marks the role of the internet in enabling the explosive growth of anti-feminist men's movements. It is crucial to recognize, however, that the manosphere is *not* limited to online activity, even as aggrieved manhood whips into a frenzy and travels farthest and fastest there.

Today's manosphere obliterates the distinction between on and offline. It moves freely among fiber and filament, pub and workplace, bedroom and voting booth. It gets preached from pulpits and passed through prayer chains; it rips across social media and pours from talking heads. People and groups of all kinds get caught up in the manosphere, often unknowingly. *Networked* misogyny is a useful descriptor because it honors exactly this: how the force of cyber misogyny has infiltrated networks far beyond the internet.

Synonymous with the far right *and* worth mention

By this point, you may wonder about the relationship between the manosphere and the far right. The short answer is, they overlap so much it makes little sense to speak of them separately. They are two sides of one coin. That we only see one side is a problem.

An example might help. Some readers may recall when former prime-time Fox News host Tucker Carlson began to forecast an imminent "great replacement" that would turn the majority of the US voting populace from white to brown. Rightly, he was called out for far-right racist rhetoric. So-called replacement theory certainly originates in white nationalist thinking. Though lesser known, it is *also* deeply rooted in anti-feminist heterosexism. Replacement theory is a staple of the manosphere because it holds that women contribute to society mainly through sex and reproduction. Whereas women of color hyper-excel in these roles, white

women slack in a couple of ways, first by refusing their primary role as mothers in selfish pursuit of careers and, second, by breeding with men of color. Cutting to the chase, white women—double-duped by feminism and civil rights—are pretty much at fault for the impending replacement.

Like this, racism and misogyny are interwoven in the far right, essential to one another. They suckle like siblings at the dark web's bosom, bonded by the blood of manly grievance. When we only call that web "far right," then point out the racist parts but leave out the sexist bits—or save them for a separate conversation—we are missing something big.

Namely, gender is the linchpin that connects the far right around the world. Hear me carefully. I am *not* saying that sexism is more important to the far right than racism or other supremacies. Rather, I am saying that gender is the means of transport; it is how the far right moves and translates across cultural difference. Recall my earlier point about the relative simplicity of gender as a binary code. No wonder rightwing culture wars everywhere cling to the gender binary. What a convenient vehicle for cross-cultural travel.

Aggrieved manhood is how the far right finds global traction, and the manosphere disseminates and intensifies this feeling around the world. Don't take my word for it. Listen to neo-Nazi website editor Andrew Anglin's advice for spreading hard-right sentiments:

"What resonates the most, in my experience, is issues surrounding the displacement and disenfranchisement of the white male which has taken place as a result of feminism. That is a gateway to all of this… the preservation of male identity and the man's role in society should always be a core focus of the brand."[5]

If gender is so important, why do we keep overlooking it? One reason is that the far right wants us to. Don't underestimate their marketing skills; the distinction between internal and external branding is not lost on them. They know how to pivot from recruiting members to softening their public image. "Right" plays right into their hand.

By 2015, "alt right" became the common term for the (undeniably masculinist) movement that rejects mainstream media in favor of a parallel online mediaverse opposed to progressive identity politics. But get this: "Alt right" was the self-interested self-description of the very mediaverse it named. They chose this name strategically, as part of an image campaign to sanitize their anti-feminist, homophobic, transmisic, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, white supremacist, Christian nationalist agenda.

Bear in mind that digital scholars had already branded this mediaverse "the manosphere." Nevertheless, most media ran with the movement's own rebranding instead. Many commentators marked the racist nationalism of the alt right, whereas few mentioned its heterosexist agenda. Turns out, women's participation is key to preserving the white nation.

As this extreme universe went mainstream, the "alt" was eventually dropped in favor of "far." Still, most coverage of the far right ignores gender. This is astonishing once you open your

eyes to the evidence hidden in plain sight. With their very name, for instance, the Proud *Boys* say it outright. Yet they are routinely described as a "far right" group with no mention of gender.

For all the talk these days of "intersectionality" (a term for the ways that distinct vectors of oppression work in tandem), most analysts seem challenged to hold race, religion, gender, and sexuality together. Too bad, because the far right does not share this problem. "Straight white Western (some specify Christian) manhood is besieged," they cry. There you have it, all in one.

The difference between the manosphere and the far right is mainly a matter of emphasis, which foot they wish to put forward. If far right is their preferred public face, I think we should pause to ask why—and not let them choose. Since manly grievance is the "core" brand, I say rebrand the external face accordingly. Not "rightwing populism," but "aggrieved manhood." Not only the "far right," but also the "manosphere."

Learning to recognize the manosphere and call it by name is an important first step to grasping cyber misogyny as the far right's global engine. With "the manosphere" on our tongue, we are ready to process how it became so.

Manufacturing and distributing countercultural cool

The name manosphere came about in the early 2010s to mark a tipping point in cyber misogyny (Jane 2017). By this time, online cultural warfare was increasingly vitriolic. The battleground was identity politics, the battlelines drawn between a purifying left and a violent right. As the furious combat evolved on Web 2.0, researchers observed that online misogyny was escalating sharply and strangely coalescing. It mushroomed into 'an organization' of sorts, the distributed but nonetheless decipherable agency of networked misogyny.

"Manosphere" became shorthand for this budding phenomenon. Basically, masculinist web subcultures that were previously insular and elitist began to converge around a shared feeling signature: aggrieved manhood, the sense that 'real' men are under attack, especially the straight white ones we ought to be thanking for Western civilization.

In the coalescing process, this well-worn feeling—by now in its fifth decade—was undergoing a dramatic transformation. Manly grievance was getting a makeover, refashioned in an ironic, countercultural aesthetic that stopped resisting a leftist syntax of power and instead leaned into it (Nagle 2017). This fresh face appealed to younger generations reared on both feminist teachings and tales of awakening like *Fight Club* and *The Matrix*. No longer the bile of old mad men, aggrieved manhood was becoming a badge of cool.

The public first met the manosphere in 2014, when the press briefly covered "Gamergate," a vicious online harassment campaign targeting women and LGBTQ+ people in the gaming industry. If you remember Gamergate at all, you might recall it as the lark of far-out pranksters fed up with outspoken feminists. That is how it was portrayed: a head-shaking incident with violence from one side and stridency on both. In truth, it was no side show to shrug off.

Underestimated to this day, Gamergate was a game-changer.

Gamergate gave a preview of the manosphere's methods and gathering momentum. It was a capacity-building event, though few paid attention. In this campaign, the manosphere found a new level of force, honing two of its greatest contributions to the far right: (1) mobilizing an aesthetic of countercultural cool and (2) perfecting the art of physical radicalization.

Gamergate refined the makeover of misogyny, from 'crusty old guy' to 'edgy anarchist'. This new face magnetized young men disinterested in politics but gripped by gaming, metalcore, and similar pastimes. Gamergate effectively tapped into their appetite for riot and mayhem and channeled it toward fighting the left's culture war victories. Like a video game come to life, "politically correct" identity politics became *the* tyrannical order to overthrow.

The ironic, countercultural aesthetic remains the primary hook for young men today. With the promise of non-conformity, boys are enticed to take the "red pill," a pervasive manosphere reference to a scene from *The Matrix* (1999) where a character must choose between taking a blue pill that affirms his current reality or a red pill that reveals his docile condition. In manosphere lingo, the blue pill is feminist brainwashing, and the red pill bares the oppression it hides: Men are victims of "gynocracy," and straight white guys suffer the most.

The manosphere teems with guidance for reaching the young and innocent through countercultural cred. Soft-sell strategies like "the slow red pill" and "The Red Pill Primer for Boys" remind content producers to lead with sarcastic humor and relatable memes. Keep it light and playful; soothe them with a sense of superiority to all the "normies" out there.

The worth of the manosphere's countercultural style cannot be overrated. Beyond its value for recruiting young blood, it activates a populist pardon of self-defense, which the far right continues to deploy. Gamergate billed itself as a resistance movement, defending the integrity of gaming from invasion by a feminized elite. This turn toward a common *tyrant*, not just enemy—"save endangered men from the feminist *establishment*"—energized the manosphere. It electrified a motley crew into a globally oppressed class of ordinary men.

Polishing the countercultural aesthetic, the manosphere began to consolidate a populist sensibility and harvest its potential for rightwing politics. Fascist aggressors, you say? Try hippie, better yet hip*ster*, underdogs.

Essentially, Gamergate was proof of concept for a posture that now defines rightwing populisms around the world. Envision COVID lockdown protests, for instance, and their sardonic appropriation of leftist social movement mottos. Like the old feminist slogan, "My body, my choice." The irony abounds—and that is the point.

To be clear, it was cyber misogyny that prototyped and disseminated this clever reversal, refashioning the far right as victimized heroes, not belligerent attackers. Defense, not offense. We are the guys who bravely combat the invisible regimes most "passives" accept… is now the pose of the mainstream right. Make no mistake, this flip was made in the manosphere.

Gamergate 2014 was a wildly successful practice round for assembling an eclectic online army and harnessing its vigor toward rightwing populist politics. It was also the first time that anti-feminist men's movements, simmering since the 1970s, had lashed out so publicly. The manosphere has been emboldened ever since, skipping all barriers thought to contain it. It is no exaggeration to say that the manosphere won the US presidency in 2016; marched into the public square at the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, SC; stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, and the Brazilian Congress on 8 January two years later. Fast work, and the accelerator remains floored. We have a second major contribution to thank for that.

Priming bodies, or physical radicalization

Gamergate was also a window into another gift the manosphere gave the far right: agitated bodies, all over the world, primed to lash out on cue. Physical (more than ideological) radicalization is the manosphere's most formidable method of spreading far-right sentiments.

Notice how the new countercultural cool is about aesthetic, attitude, and atmosphere. It succeeds not by leading with ideology, or a platform of extreme ideas, but with a potent gateway vibe that beguiles the body first. The idea is to warm bodies up to radical content by inducing and quenching their thirst for radical play—again, like a video game come to life.

This is how the manosphere works, by turning politics into gaming, with all the attendant pleasures: mutual goading, one-upmanship, striking at targets, racking up points, gaining skill and notoriety, winning. Sure, the evil regime that players fight so excitedly is the feminist left. But it's more about the physical thrill of playing—how it makes you *feel* manly—than it is about belief in the game. The ecstasy of play becomes intrinsic motivation. Who needs centralized coordination when the players are habituated? Just keep fresh targets coming.

I do not deny the importance of ideology and disinformation; nor do I mean to sever content from feeling. Quite the opposite, my point is that ideological fidelity and fondness for misinformation come from the physical rush of the game. Dedication to creed is not what drives passionate play, more like the reverse. Feeling is in charge here, and content serves it—with pretexts and targets, swappable and stackable, rinse and repeat. Manly grievance in search of an outlet and chomping at the bit.

Research clearly demonstrates that this is how Gamergate worked, through "affective intensification" (Just 2019). Meaning, amplify the feeling of aggrieved manhood through continuous replay. Repetition and riffing, in point-to-point encounters, keeps manly grievance *moving* in every sense: drawing clicks, extending view time, animating bodies, traveling from place to place, mutating to new circumstances, building up and brimming over, claiming new space.

The manosphere keeps growing its share of the attention economy by replicating and fine-tuning manly grievance, such that it occupies ever more physical territory (Strick 2020). As more bodies get stirred and smitten, the feeling escalates. Agitating one another, they salivate for more. Diverse and competing pockets of activity appear 'organically' around the globe. Now

that's a next-level men's movement = the transnational *movement* of 'fellow' feeling.

Picture that moment in a pinball game when the ball goes beyond player control and starts flipping around the flashing, chiming field, accumulating value all on its own. Just like that, through kinetic motion, the manosphere produces huge energetic momentum for the far right. By relentlessly bouncing the ball of manly grievance around a global circuit.

You may have noticed that this is how the right fights cultural warfare these days, identity politics 2.0. The goal is to get more bodies—women too—hooked on the high of aggrieved manhood, er, "the people's" entitled rage. To achieve this, supply endless opportunity to *play* politics. "Sour the brand" of one target after another to keep the threats scrolling by: mysterious child sex-trafficking rings ("pizzagate"), "critical race theory," trans women athletes, "diversity, equity, and inclusion" initiatives, drag queen story hour, and counting. Players are primed to strike for the thrill of it and activate one another in the process, creating a sustainable emotional fuel source. Just keep that ball bouncing.

Physical radicalization is the currency of a "post-truth" communication economy. The manosphere perfected this method of cultural warfare. By persuading the rest of the body before the mind—developing physical reflexes that get ahead of reflection—it delivers renewable energy to be harnessed for rightwing political battle.

Countercultural cool and physical radicalization are by no means cyber misogyny's only contributions to the far right. The manosphere market-tests all kinds of content too. In style, method, and substance, it is the playbook for rightwing populism. I highlight these two contributions because they make for one priceless present to the far right: The manosphere acts as an incubator or supercharger—or how about, furnace and blower—for the feeling of aggrieved manhood.

Succinctly, cyber misogyny is a superspreader of aggrieved manhood, which has truly gone viral around the world. I do not say this flippantly, in the waning fad of pandemic metaphor. What I mean is that the manosphere has exerted significant influence on the amount, quality, momentum, and trajectory of feeling in a world where feeling increasingly rules the day. As a global circuit of sensation, the manosphere has vastly accelerated the physical (not only social) transmission of manly grievance to the point of wide communal spread.

In this way above all, internet misogyny is the far right's engine: The manosphere expedites a pandemic of feeling that powers rightwing 'populisms' around the world. The next question is, where is viral manly grievance headed? Sadly, the answer is nowhere good.

III. A pandemic of feeling: Aggrieved manhood as a global public health challenge

Most critics stress how the far right threatens democracy. The same could be said of cyber misogyny, the far right's superspreading machine. The manosphere may well be a menace to

democratic institutions, even national security (the Jack Teixeira leaks come to mind). But you don't have to agree for us to share concern about it. Who or what democracy needs is not the nub of this essay. I prefer to bypass a political frame altogether.

Why risk validating the populist charge of elitism by judging "the people" who feel manly grievance unfit for democracy? Especially when that risk is unnecessary. There is a greater cause for concern, an existential threat that transcends politics with a clear human interest in common. Thanks to the manosphere, aggrieved manhood is surging to an extent that endangers global public health.

This is a strong and unusual claim, I know, so "terms and conditions" first:

1. This is not a slier way to excise some of "the people," now dismissed as bad for health instead of democracy. Rather, a public health frame directs care to people who serve as vessels of manly grievance without making them either vile or victims.
2. Nor is this a technocratic call for rescue by "the experts," as if "the people" can't be trusted to think—or feel—for themselves. Instead, I call attention to something we rarely consider, which is the physical transmission of social feeling and its public health consequences.
3. By *health*, I mean physical (which includes mental) safety and well-being.
4. By *public* health, I signal that viral manly grievance elevates risk for the population as a whole.
5. By *global* public health, I mean that the world shares this risk. Though aggrieved manhood affects certain bodies and places more than others, the entire planet bears the brunt of its intensification, as I will explain. But let's begin slowly.

It is well-documented that aggrieved manhood regularly leads to harmful, even deadly violence. You may know, for instance, that manly grievance is a leading motive for common offenses like domestic violence and sexual assault, as well as all manner of atrocities based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and/or sexuality. Rarely do we hold these together, preferring to divide "violence against women" from other "hate crimes." Only when we consider them as variations on one theme—a category called "supremacy crimes" (Steinem 1999)—does the long and lethal arm of manly grievance begin to appear.

You might respond that these threats, however endemic, are targeted at certain groups and, therefore, not exactly a *public* health problem. Well, groups in the crosshairs of supremacy crimes make up the majority of the population in most places, if you take them together (women alone are close to half). We needn't quibble over numbers, though, because the risk has become generalized, and 'collateral damage' is common.

Consider US mass shootings, which have spiked along with the manosphere. This is no coincidence. Bogged down in the murkiness of personal motives, we miss the connective tissue. Undeniably, aggrieved manhood animates the overwhelming share of mass and school shootings. "Lone gunmen" are anything but. On closer inspection, most are in evident

community with the manosphere. Manly grievance is often present even when the shooter does not fit the customary demographic of straight, white, non-poor cis males. From Aurora to Charleston to Orlando to Las Vegas to El Paso to Atlanta to Buffalo—from Columbine High to Sandy Hook Elementary to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High to Robb Elementary—aggrieved manhood destroys lives and shatters entire communities. By now, events like these are habitual, a chronic threat in the fabric of public life. No one is safe from supremacy crimes when loathing for certain groups is sprayed indiscriminately.

Mass shootings are a stark example of how aggrieved manhood threatens public health, particularly in (but not limited to) the US. More subtle examples abound, like environmental health. The link between traditional masculinity and "anti-green" behavior has been established for some time. Going further, recent research specifically connects *aggrieved* manhood to the transnational rise of anti-green movements and so-called climate-damaging lifestyles (e.g., Pulé & Hultman 2019; Meyer 2021). The latter is epitomized by "rolling coal," where a driver (usually of a truck) purposefully puffs a black cloud of diesel smoke (preferably at electric cars). Or recall Andrew Tate, a British darling of the manosphere, taunting Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg with his extensive "car collection and their respective enormous emissions."

The climate illustration shows how the health threats posed by aggrieved manhood can swiftly scale up, from individual perpetrators to backlash movements to government policy. When manly grievance is elected to national office, for example, countries rescind climate accords, and ravaged forests burn. These too are supremacy crimes of a sort, and the whole world ends up suffering the risk. The effects of aggrieved manhood can already be felt where the feeling may not (yet) flow.

Supremacy crimes leave no victors. This is most visible when they imperil the planet, but Earth's fate is not our only shared risk. Future generations are also endangered, for instance, when women's reproductive health suffers from the laws of manly grievance.

It is at such scale, in governing, that aggrieved manhood most clearly harms the very men it claims to profit. For example, following gun legislation gutted in the name of manly grievance, simply being a white man is now a statistical risk for gun suicide in some US states (Metzl 2019). All over the world, men who face real challenges fall into the self-destructive 'solutions' of the manosphere. Cyber misogyny targets women *as well as* men it convinces to target women. Aggrieved manhood is a dead end for everyone, including its alleged beneficiaries.

The turn to public health is thoroughly pro-men, for it embraces the reality that viral manly grievance threatens the safety and well-being of men and boys, especially those who come to feel it acutely. To call aggrieved manhood a pandemic of feeling—to be alarmed by the manosphere hastening its spread—is not an indictment of men but a renewed commitment to them. It's an appeal for mutual survival.

The culture wars of aggrieved manhood can and do kill. A public health frame allows us to

recognize and defuse this fact. It marks this viral form of masculinity as an urgent global challenge and, at the same time, depoliticizes it. How? By engaging at the level of movement instead of content. By treating it as a real pandemic of feeling that puts the general population at unsustainable risk. By addressing how it spreads and ignoring what it says.

If feeling is in charge and surging, we need a line of response that meets it. Chasing and flogging the content or spokespeople through which it vents can be as futile as bewailing a virus each time it strikes. As COVID reminded us, sometimes the primary task is to slow transmission. Wouldn't energy be better spent 'flattening the curve' of aggrieved manhood than arguing or empathizing with its symptoms?

What this looks like in detail is another conversation. The task for now is hard enough, though worthwhile. Try reorienting your focus, from whatever topic the feeling gets hot about ("CRT" in schools! Vax mandates!) and whomever its rep du jour may be (Ron DeSantis or RFK Jr.)—*no matter how objectionable*—to the empirical question of how the feeling moves.

This essay began to address that question. How is aggrieved manhood managing to claim ever more terrain around the world? The answer is networked misogyny. So let's contend with the global circuit of transmission—the manosphere—instead of defaming its latest proxy. *Never mind what manly grievance says, zero in on how it spreads*. We all have a stake in that.

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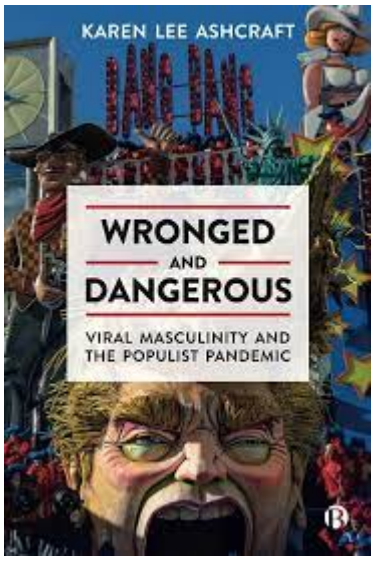

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[1] An observation made by digital culture scholar Angela Nagle in her 2017 book *Kill All Normies*. Nagle's politics have drawn controversy, but her early research on anti-feminist online organizing is highly instructive for the claims formulated here.

[2] Sociologist Michael Kimmel coined the term "aggrieved entitlement" in his 2013 book *Angry White Men*, which was reprinted in 2017 with a new preface addressing Trump. I use "aggrieved manhood" to specify this feeling and capture its contemporary evolution. Kimmel has since been accused of exploitation and sexual harassment. I cite his book because it provides essential context for my own research (Ashcraft 2022).

[3] For the full development of this larger argument, see my 2022 book *Wronged and Dangerous.*

[4] For an accessible introduction to the manosphere's varied constituents, see Laura Bates' 2021 book *Men Who Hate Women*.

[5] Quoted in Bates (2021: 280-281)

Our Flattening Culture

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

We find ourselves in a cultural collapse far more total than anything I have seen in my lifetime, and perhaps greater than any in US history. Similar signs appear in other nations. People seem stupider, more inclined to violence, partaking less of reason, motivated by vague feelings of personal grievance. We are interested more in our own stories than in those of others, or of the larger world. We are ever more assertive of our own identities rather than considering ways in which we might improve ourselves. Balanced subtlety has given way to blunt aggression, and care to unleavened hatred. The unacknowledged driver of all this are the ways in which technology has welded itself to consumerism to produce instant gratifications in exchange for our money, focusing us on our separated selves and pleasures. Another factor could be subconscious fears of our planet's impending ecological collapse, as we increasingly fill our surroundings with both greenhouse gases and tiny particles of plastic, the latter e making their way into our bodies and our brains. I try to keep reminding myself that it is always hard to understand what is happening in one's own time, and where it all will lead us, and that it has been a mistake in the past to deny the power of advancing technologies to solve problems.

Still, I cannot avoid the feeling that we are experiencing the unwinding of human civilization. The things that represent humanity at its most unique, complex analysis of social and political issues using facts and reason, aesthetic experiences created through the carefully constructed intricacies of form in art works, neither never very fashionable in popular culture, now feel as if they are, removed from the discourse, snuffed out by the denial of reflective thinking in all our "feeds," with their deluges of social media comments, memes, online videos, assertions of personal identity, immersive television, active shooter games, and manipulative popular music. The moving and changeable parts of our minds, that use time and sequential thinking to compare one proposition against another in the social sphere and one form of aesthetic discourse versus another in the arts, are going dark. The experiences in depth, experiences

that make us more intelligent, more thoughtful, more aware of our potentials as humans, and more sensitive to discoveries in the world around us are being replaced by a commercial assault that sells us the mindlessly pleasurable instant, the hot emotion that replaces careful considerations, the endorphin-releasing highs that current movies and music try to elicit in order to make more money for their "content providers." This flattening leads to experiences without complexity and that replace thinking with immediate emotions, thereby robbing individuals of agency. The mechanisms of popular culture perform to perfection their task of transforming us into passive, drone-like creatures whose functions are to work, consume, and pay.

The situation is not helped when a vast number of Americans, including many of our supposedly knowledgeable elected representatives, that is to say the great majority of Republicans in the House and Senate, make statements so obviously false about issues upon which our nation's future depends that they should never be taken seriously: that the 2020 election was stolen, that January 6 consisted of "ordinary citizens engaging in legitimate political discourse" (the official position of the Republican party), that our ex-president is being prosecuted by "Biden" for political reasons. Indeed, that so many have joined an apparently brain-dead, fact-denying cult, or pretend to have joined it to win reelection even when secretly knowing the truth, is a huge part of our problem, in that without admitting it they are supporting the reinstallation as president of one who has said that the power of the U.S. President is "absolute," and that "that is the way it has to be." His constant "feed" of multiple lies and falsehoods each day during his term helped prepare the groundwork for our collapse by devaluing the value of words and of truth.

Presidents can effect seismic changes in a nation's ideology. I remember from my early teens how the idealism expressed by John F. Kennedy with "ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country" inspired a shift in thinking, especially among the young. It is worth remembering, too, that those words were preceded in the same speech many others far less nationalistic, advocating for human rights "at home and around the world," for freedom rather than tyranny in newly decolonized nations, and for our country's possible role in alleviating poverty worldwide. I remember too the shift away from concerns about the world and toward personal economic self-interest inspired by Reagan with his profoundly earth-is-flattened campaign question, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" It should be no surprise, then, that hate crimes, hate murders, death threats against election officials and teachers and so many others greatly increased under Trump, who spews hateful and violent rhetoric as easy as breathing, and who during his 2016 campaign expressed support for the unprovoked physical assault on a journalist by a Republican congressman who later pled guilty.

2

In recent years I have been beginning my classes at two different Chicago colleges by distributing large topographic maps with downtown Chicago at the center. I discuss how most of us, me included, navigate today, using undeniably convenient apps that tell us exactly when

and which way to turn, whether walking, bicycling, using public transit, or driving. But years ago, I would sometimes go to a new city with a street map, walk or bicycle wherever I felt interested in going, get lost, and then find myself on the map using street names. In this process, I got to know more of each city. To get to a location back then, one would find it on a map and figure out a route, thus becoming more aware of the whole region. Now our apps encourage us to ignore the larger world, instead bringing us directly to the restaurant, the club, the party, the friend's house, or, increasingly less likely, the library. During our trip, we may not know north from south, east from west, where we are in relationship to other parts of the city, or observe much about the areas we are passing through. If we are in a subway, we are not encouraged to develop any awareness of the larger transit system. The more effortless such travel, or purchasing needed goods, becomes, the more we transform ourselves into machines seeking, and centered around, the often thoughtless highs that movie makers, television creators, video game designers, and popular musicians, have become so expert at providing.

We thus reinvent ourselves as increasingly self-centered humans. We obtain our pleasures without any trouble; we just dial them up. Tech offers us exactly what we say we want, or even what it "thinks" we want, often guessing correctly. And so instead of stoking our curiosity about aspects of the world we do not know, it recreates us as individuals whose main task in life is to stay within our existing limits, consuming, posting photos, bragging, and later forgetting.

Here there is an unfortunate confluence with "identity politics." Once it was much needed. I was young in a truly "don't say gay" world, you would immediately lose your job for doing otherwise. Never mind trans people, considered freaks if even considered at all, just as gay people were officially characterized as suffering from a mental disorder. Women were treated as lesser than men to a degree far greater than is the case today. People of different races were discriminated against, insulted, disregarded, and even, especially if Black, murdered, also to a greater degree than today. The top universities had quotas limiting the number of Jews who could be admitted, and many law firms and corporations refused to employ Jews at all, also of course refusing Blacks and women. Encouraging everyone to enjoy the validity of their own existence has been a giant, if nowhere near completed, step forward.

But steps can step too far, as is the case when our senses of our identities are located less in the facts of our origins, what we have accomplished in life, and what we hope to accomplish in the future, but rather in what we are feeling about ourselves at this very moment. We are encouraged to conceive of ourselves as natural, beautiful, and self-validating, but also not subject to self-questionings, criticisms, or needs to change. Should not celebrating who we are go alongside asking what we can become?

I encountered flattened, frozen identities in 2017, when, deeply depressed by the election of Mr. Trump, I found my way to a Facebook page run by a Chicago Republican who I worked with briefly years earlier. I'll call him Henry. I had found him intelligent and honest then. I began participating with the idea that no one who believed in facts, reason, our Constitution,

and basic humane values, could possibly support Trump, whose life has been based on a denial of all four. His supporters must change their views, I thought, in the light of careful arguments. I would address some issue, offer information, and show, I thought irrefutably, why Trump was wrong. I made such a post early on; I cannot remember on what. Henry replied with something like, “Let me explain something to you. You hate Trump. Well, I hate Obama.” I read this and thought it so ridiculous, so much not an answer, that I ignored it. Big, big mistake. Henry had actually explained to me the essence of Trumpism. It is not public policy, such as Trump’s “beautiful” health care plan that apparently never existed. It is not facts nor reason. It is not fidelity to our Constitution, which Trump falsifies, denies, and violates. It is not keeping promises, as in our nuclear pact with Iran or our promise to protect the Kurds in return for their fighting and dying with us, or his promises to repay the buyers of his companies’ bonds or the contractors who worked for his businesses. It is hate, pure, unadulterated, personal hate, one person to another, or one person to a whole group. “Go back to your country,” Trump himself once said to four Americans of color in a centuries old racist trope. I should have seen the “truth” of Henry’s hatred post right away. He even offered me a second chance, replying to a link I posted to a Washington Post story with, if I remember right, this one-liner: “I hate Jeff Bezos.” Had I thought about these, rather than rejecting them outright as irrelevant to my idea of truth, I could have saved myself huge amounts of time in subsequent online argumentations, some of which were answered with similarly non-responsive assertions, such as “And he’s going to win in 2020,” which did help me to understand the way the “winning is the only thing” ethos of spectator sports has polluted our politics. In reply to my complaint about the incivility of our president’s calling a congressman “Adam Schitt,” someone replied to me, “He really is a shit.” Based on similar experiences, a request for evidence of this rather vague assertion would likely have gone unanswered. More than once a poster openly disparaged expertise. Lies and distortions were presented as “evidence.” To paraphrase Max Planck’s account of a meeting with a dictator who shall go unnamed here, “There are no terms with which one can speak to such men.”

Since I first started reading newspapers, newspaper prose has become increasingly dumbed down. Sentences are now simple and declarative, unqualified by the subordinate clauses that are perfect for expressing the nuances of an issue. The instant metrics made available through the Web tell editors which articles, and which headlines, get the most clicks. I would like to think that on their own, editors who care about the future of our nation and our world and who didn’t have to run a for-profit enterprise would not be prioritizing articles with headlines such as “The 50 Best Films to Stream on Netflix Right Now.” But like so much else today, newspapers have become vehicles for consumer satisfaction, not for helping us find truths. Two decades ago, a journalist with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* told me he didn’t much like the transformation that newspapers were then undergoing, from trying to inform their readers to trying to become their friends. If your focus is on your self and your gratifications, rather than the world as whole, isn’t a new friend what you most wish for?

In a way that I find perhaps unduly frightening, headlines of news articles, in keeping with our takeover by consumerism, try to sell their articles to readers rather than simply stating the article subject, and editors can instantly see how successful a headlines is at its sales job, even

testing one against another. But these market-tested headlines then often falsify the act of thoughtful reading. “Four Takeways From the President’s Speech,” or “Six Takeaways From the Ex-President’s Latest Indictment,” are now commonplace. I gag on the resemblance of “takeaway” to “takeout,” as in a food order. In any case, in the act of reading a news article, learning new facts, evaluating the statements of quoted experts, and attempting to form one’s own opinion, should be key parts of reading. Practical matters in our mass civilization are complex, and it would be quite reasonable when considering a thorough account of an issue for a reader to find no “takeaway,” just a series of unanswered questions for further contemplation or research. “Takeaway” connotes the falsifying reduction of an issue to a completed object, a flattening of language that is inimical to thinking. Constructing articles around “takeaways” to make journalism easier to consume is one hallmark of our collapse.

I largely stopped watching television after studying the 1988 presidential campaign by viewing hours of it each day, coming to understand how the whole campaign had become a theater of trivialities, from the infamous Willie Horton commercial to George H. W. Bush’s “successful” but substanceless attack on Dan Rather over an issue in which Bush seemed possibly guilty of something or other. I have since viewed entire seasons of some of the newly emerging “long form” TV series, praised in recent years as the modern equivalent of the novel. I mildly enjoyed some, found *The Wire* a bit more intelligent than the rest, but in the end got nothing from any. Then two different friends who had viewed all five seasons of *The Wire*, and whose tastes in literature (Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Balzac, George Eliot, Proust) I much admire, rejected it using almost exactly the same words, something like “The connections between its characters and stories are far too simple compared to the best literature.” My fear is that the best literature is little known to most TV viewers today. If you lower the level of your comparisons, from *The Wire* versus Balzac to *The Wire* versus *Gilmore* Girls, you will deny yourself the deepest possible human experiences.

Imagine a novel with a gripping story and engaging characters, but artlessly written in the blandest of prose. Your “takeaway” will be unambiguous escapist engagement, with little serious thought. That is my limited experience of long form TV. Most great films articulate themselves through a use of cinema: compositions, light, movements within the frame, camera movements, sound, and editing. The result are uniquely expressive spaces, paintings-in-time that represent the world both visually and, at times, also rhythmically, kin to the weave of words and sentences and prose rhythms in a fine novel, and giving the works contained in such forms the uniquely untranslatable qualities of art, never reducible to statements or themes. Escapist television instead offers “takeaways,” characters and story as easily-graspable objects rather than as the rounded mysteries a great work of visual expression can convey. It asks of the viewer a certain blindness, blindness to its attempt to render its photography and editing as transparent containers of content, replacing active viewing with passive identifications.

Even comparatively right-thinking TV can be a problem. Four years ago I viewed a few hours of Rachel Maddow while visiting a dear friend who has her program on as much as possible. I hated it. It seemed to me that its rapidity, loudness, and rhythm all discourage thought. Factoids are flung at the viewer one after another like a torrent of mudpies. But I can’t entirely

blame Maddow; perhaps to survive in relation to the competition, you must crank your "volume" way up. To acclimate oneself to such conditions, however, is to also make it harder to appreciate attentive reading, a great painting viewed in silence, or the deeply engaging quietudes of much classical music.

Our children are growing up on the garbage flood of television, videos games, and especially social media, with little or no serious reading. The constant buzz of our culture, the popup messages and ads of the Internet, destroy the focus that reading requires. This barrage has its own blurring-out effect, each element to some extent cancelling the other, creating a noisy flood that levels everything to a drone of hypnotizing stimuli. It's not hard to understand why an encounter with an art work that is so great that it stands above all else, that it moves one to tears, that it changes one's life, seems less and less likely. One must start by approaching such a work with respect, and an openness to silence. It sadly makes sense that "awesome" no longer means "awe-inspiring," but something more like "cool," as in, a little better than what is around it. It is thus that we are being dulled to the very best human culture has to offer.

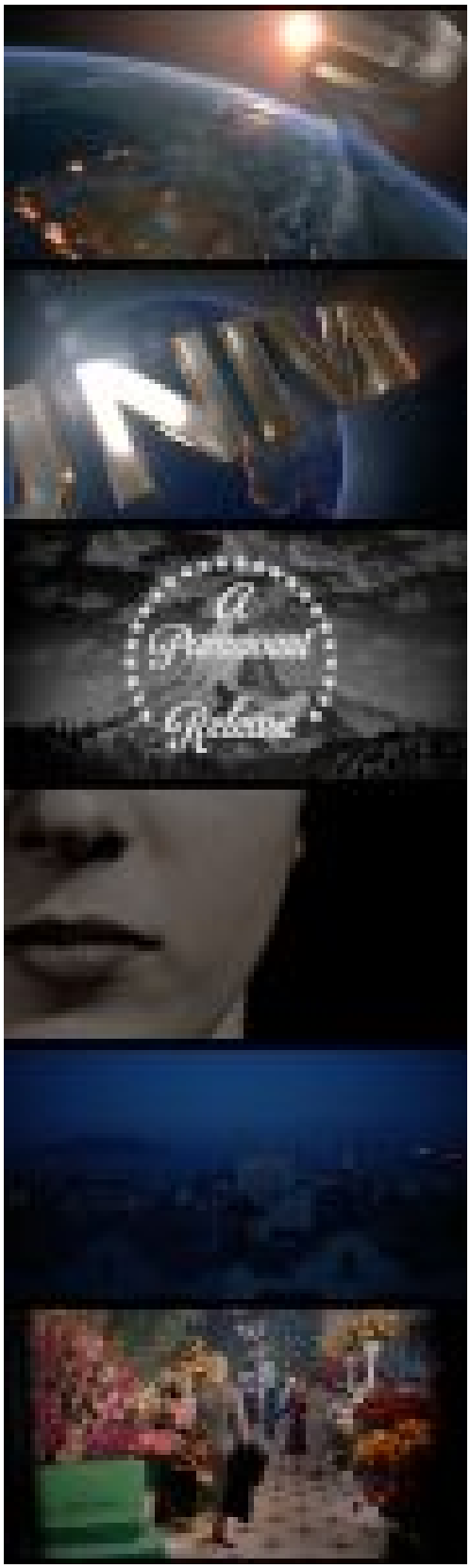
I could argue that even reading "junk" – I once struggled to get through a bad romance novel to see what the genre was like – still requires more intelligence, and imagination, than watching the equivalent on film or TV. In reading, you imagine what characters and scenes look like. You imagine movements, and dialogue. This all involves some degree of intellectual activity. It is easier to watch an immersive TV series, all its elements pre-digested for you, while it fills you with its characters, its sounds, its events, its detailed plotting. Doing so also makes one stupider.

Even better at making us stupider is the contents of our various "feeds," endless streams of clickbait spiked with isolated, often lurid, facts that make little sense out of context. Trying to understand our world partly depends on trying to understand history, which is much devalued today. Posts on Facebook have grown increasingly cryptic, images or memes posted without explanation: if you're sufficiently "cool," you will already "know." A few do post to ask. This online tumult disguises itself as information, itself disguised as knowledge, so that people who grow up with it, and without much reading, can be easily fooled. One of those might have been cryptocurrency trader Sam Bankman-Fried, thought to have been worth billions until he and his customers lost their illusory fortunes allegedly due to his own fraud. Before that, he told us that not only did he not read books, but that, "…if you wrote a book, you f—ed up, and it should have been a six-paragraph blog post." Blog posts, of course, are not known for their subtlety, complex analyses, careful marshalling of facts and logic, considerations of ethical principles, or references to history (Charles Ponzi, anyone?).

3

I now turn to the least-understood of our major arts, cinema, and begin by offering an apparently trivial example of flattening that also stands for much more. Alfred Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* is acknowledged to be one of the greatest in film history, a consensus with which I agree. The flattening involves Hitchcock not at all, but the digital versions of this film offered

long after his death.



The original film began with the Paramount Pictures logo, a mountain with a “crown” of stars, as films from this studio did in 1958. This logo image appears in the film in black and white, as

it would for a black and white film. But the next image, of a portion of the mysterious face that continues throughout the credits, is flesh color, which later becomes a more monochromatic dark red. The black and white opening has fooled us. Gradually more color enters the credits, though never the full spectrum. The logo had announced a black and white film; are we dreaming? There are rotating abstract geometrical shapes, but with only minimal depth effects. The dark blue night scene that follows is also rather monochrome. The scene after that is brighter, but still dominated by a single color, in this case yellow. The next, in an office, is mostly brown. Madeleine, the beautiful woman that is to be a principal subject, appears only after 18 minutes, in a close-up whose suddenly brightening background suggests she could be an illusion. The dominant color of that scene is red. In fact, the full spectrum of colors arguably only enters the film about 21 minutes in, when Madeleine visits a flower shop. Hitchcock thereby subliminally suggests that his entire film is a gathering illusion, and one reading even suggested, implausibly in my view, that almost all of the film could be taken as one character's death fantasy. The cinematic magic here is partly to be found in the gradual emergence not only of color but of this climaxing in the cluttered flower shop, its details a faint echo of the graphics of the credits but much lusher than anything we have seen thus far. Reality is shown as somewhat unsteady, even hypnotic.

As the film continues, its use of cinema as art becomes ever more apparent. The alluring colors are balanced by a calculated compositional formalism common in Hitchcock. When we cut to a high or low angle image, the change is calculated both in relationship to the narrative at that moment and in terms of its destabilizing effect on the film's space. Destabilization is indeed a central theme. We twist and turn left and right, sometimes rising and falling within the same few seconds, as in the car pursuit scene that leads to the flower shop. The power of all of this is greatly enhanced by the feeling that it has magically sprouted from that first flat black and white image. The studio logo is not perceived as being a part of most films; in *Vertigo*, it surely is.

To view the film digitally, however, as most would today, is to have this entire effect destroyed. Universal Pictures had purchased the rights from Paramount, and we begin not with their black and white logo but with a highly ornate, loudly rhythmic, brightly colored and almost pornographically aggressive, especially in comparison to the film that follows, three-dimensional Universal logo. The effect of a carefully calculated progression of cinematic difference, of a possibly illusory world emerging from black and white, is flattened when we begin with computer generated illusions far "louder" than anything in the following film; the calibrated changes that follow barely noticeable in comparison. The aggressiveness of our current culture, reaching for the most obvious of kinetic effects, trumps (pun intended) subtle distinctions, reducing the film's initial minutes to rubble. This is what is happening all around us: subtle difference is replaced with unsubtle manipulations that drown out any competition, just as advertising is replacing writing and raw emotion substituting for thinking. This is also the effect of Trump's own eight-year "feed" of distortions, falsehoods and threats; their volume leaves us no breathing room to notice all the lies. Few commented when Trump declared, at least twice as president, that the Constitution gives him "absolute" power, making him a dictator. The effect here is not only a political one: it devalues the human mind.

The great Austrian filmmaker Peter Kubelka, above Hitchcock on my personal list, uses the word “articulation” to refer to cuts between two shots, or the editing together of a sound with an image, or for related conjunctions. Some version of meaning, whether verbally translatable or not, is produced by such juxtapositions. Any idea of meaning, by contrast, is obliterated in today’s chaos.

Examples such as the *Vertigo* credits demonstrate the effacement, but also characterize much of our viewings of film on video. We begin with a DVD box logo, whether on the box or, more troublingly, on screen. Advertising must come first. Yet a great film, whether Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* or Stan Brakhage’s silent and “abstract” *The Text of Light* (a pairing that, to be fair, Brakhage himself strenuously objected to when I made it in an earlier essay while he was still living), establishes itself not as a series of stories or pictures, but as deeply expressive visual spaces in which each tiny part reinforces every other, so that how the space begins is a crucial part of it, and noise that interferes does so only to art’s detriment.

With some care, one can try to solve the logo problem. I can cue *Vertigo* to its true opening when showing it to students. I can advise students to do that themselves when viewing *Vertigo*, or any other film, at home even if some will not, and even though DVD players will sometimes not hold such a cue in place for long, and in any event cueing the film will expose you to seeing what precedes it.

There is also a rather literal kind of flattening at work when viewing films in most digital formats. Some students, seeing the same film on DVD and on projected celluloid, correctly note that the film version has a greater feeling of depth, a more life-like presence. Part of the reason for that may be that the film strip is never completely flat in the projector gate, but can vary slightly in its positioning, and because of that the image seems to breathe. Another reason may be related to differences between analog and digital technology, which one can notice when comparing CDs to vinyl on a high-quality system. With *Vertigo*, and many other films of its era, we have the added problem that its release prints were produced by a process that no longer exists, in which they were not made photochemically but with a printing closer to lithography, IB Technicolor, meaning that a wider choice of color dyes was available than those amenable to photographic chemistry. The hues of an original IB print have a prime-color vividness, an intense purity, greater than that found in the photographically made prints one can see of any film in the rare theater that shows films on film today. Some original IB release prints do survive, and are occasionally screened. If you ever have the rare chance to see one, and especially if the film is *Vertigo*, which calls for great vividness, do take it.

There are still other kinds of flattening in viewing films digitally. Have you darkened the room? Ambient will reduce the contrast, and the power, of the imagery. Do you view the film without interruption, taking care to use the bathroom before starting it? Do you view it in silence, or chatter with your companions? Do you turn off your phone? if you are viewing it on a computer, is it open to popup alerts and sounds for things such as text messages – and do you stop to the film to check them, or check them while leaving the film running, or ignore them as you should during any film? Are you, in other words, giving an art work the full attention and care

necessary to either be moved by its greatness or to make an informed determination that you don't find it very good?

Then too, where have you positioned yourself in relation to the screen? I am not alone in observing that an old style movie theater had some resemblance to a temple, or a church. One directs one's attention to a large screen, which was often located above one's line of sight. Silence was encouraged. The movie, if a worthy one, took over your consciousness. All too often, all that took you over was the escapist reduction of cinema to the characters and story fostered by an artless use of the medium, but even then, at least those were taken seriously, without the ironic undertone that informs so many of our responses today, perhaps an inevitable result of the excesses of our "feeds." But if the film be great cinema, one can be captivated by light, color, movement, rhythm, and the particular ways in which compositions can constitute paintings-in-time. To have hope of seeing any of this, you have to approach each film with an openness and humility when so many feel superior, and separated from, most all things, even the miraculous ones, that one encounters throughout one's life. Indeed, the very idea that a great work can be miraculous, a visionary transformation of seeing and hearing and thinking, a complex experience that changes the viewer forever, rarely surfaces today in discussions of any of the arts.

Also today, many view films on their phones. "What?!?!?@%#," I might ask. Then the position of the screen is not only no longer fixed, but adjustable to whatever position one sits or lies in or otherwise occupies. Likely the space is not dark. The film image becomes just another consumer object in a room likely filled with them. This may be fine, even preferable, for a film whose absence of cinematic merit suggests that the images be seen mostly in terms of their content, but is utterly destructive of visual art. Yet it fits our current ethos, in which we no longer care to "know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception," in Stan Brakhage's memorable phrase, but as our inferior-to-us possessions, even as our personal fashion accessories. In an art school critique a few years ago in which a student's interestingly fleshy abstract painting suggested to me that she might also find the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch of interest, I asked her if she knew his work. At first she drew a blank, but then suddenly brightened and said, "Oh, I have a pair of Bosch Doc Martens." Instead of regarding the best art as a mystery, even a miracle, something outside oneself to approach as a seeker after understanding, something that might require a journey to, oh, say, Madrid to experience fully, we regard it as something for self-adornment.

In 2010. I returned to teaching after a long absence, as a part time instructor at first one, and then another, arts school in Chicago, mostly on cinema but with one of my courses also focused on other arts. I have loved doing this, and found students excellent, interested, and responsive. One must reject the common instructor complaints about the ignorance of "these kids today," which, it turns out, go back thousands of years, and I believe largely stem from the teacher comparing their present state of knowledge to those of their students, conveniently forgetting how little they themselves knew at 18. It does seem, however, that fewer are serious readers than would have been the case a few decades ago. Also worth noting are the changes in some of the words students use, even in the thirteen years since 2010. (I mean such observations in

no way to critique individual students, but rather to read in these choices indications of current culture.) More often now, a work is praised for being "relatable." That can be noticed, but how important should it be? Such praises are usually connected to a character or a plot situation; only occasionally to a theme, and not yet, in my observations, to aesthetic form. The OED has two citations for this use of the word, but both are to finding other people relatable, not a cultural product, suggesting this usage for art works may be recent. My half-joking riposte would be that I long for the student who says, "I was fascinated by the Fritz Lang films that we viewed, and found them very relatable, because in in my abstract color field paintings I have been struggling to use rectangles to suggest spaces beyond what is enclosed by the canvas edges, and that is what Lang does in his films. I feel I can learn so much from them." The unlikelihood of such a comment signals that "relatable" usually indicates a response to a film reduced to its characters and story. Prose is sometimes praised for being "digestible," truly consumerist language. In uses of this word, students seem to mean, "not too hard to read." But is initially hard to read always a bad thing? Some of my favorite writing gave me serious indigestion at first, before multiple rereads and a little thinking revealed how wonderful it is. Some of my greatest experiences of art have been with works that I not only do not find "relatable" in the usual ways, but whose ideologies I abhor. It is one of the worst forms of flattening that in reducing our judgment of a work to a disagreement with its ideology, we obliterate the very separate qualities an art work usually has from an essay or a manifesto.

The language used for describing films has also changed. A forward camera movement is said to be a "push in." There are a few camera movements in which the camera really does appear to push; most are more gentle. A director or actor who does a great job is said to have "crushed the scene," or even "killed the scene." What is the reason for these words of aggression? Are they needed because more polite praise would not stand out against the chaos of verbiage that engulfs us? If language is defined through usage, then "kills" now seems to mean "does a great job with." Is this a change we should welcome? A great job to me would mean that the scene not only breathes together with the rest of the film, but also lives on in one's memory, growing in vividness and beauty. No scene should, in other words, be "killed," a usage that suggests fixity. "Simplistic" is now used as a word of praise, rather than with the disparaging meaning it still, if one can believe dictionaries, primarily has. Does this usage mean that complexity is now disliked? Another word that has grown in popularity is "showcase." It is now used as a verb, to mean "show." Why add the extra syllable? Doing so connects the word to the superficiality of a "showcase" displaying its wares. Both reek of the ethos of the distracted consumer.

Sometime around the 1980s, if not a bit earlier, people began recounting conversations by stating, "She told me her opinion, and I was like, 'I disagree.'" "I was all, 'I disagree'" was, and still is, another option. One researcher has suggested that this evolved from the use of the word "like" as a kind of devoid-of-meaning filler, as in "I was, like, speeding," said by someone high on speed. Initially "was like" for "said" was thought to be a passing fad, but it has now become acceptably mainstream. I would argue that, unlike the uses of "like" as a filler, this usage has a deep ideological bias. "I said, I disagree" suggests that you are taking responsibility for a position that you might be open to changing. "I was like," or, "I was all" conflates your position with your identity. Once this is done, the individual is more likely to feel

frozen in that position, as it is a declared to be part of the self, of one's "brand." Changing opinions has long been disparaged in American politics too, even though it should be a sign of an intelligent rethinking, or response to new information or a change in a situation. This is one way in which we are starting to lose the complexities and contradictions of any sensitivity to a changing world, becoming more static and predictable, akin to static consumer objects – and admired by some for sticking to our "brand," ignoring emerging new realities. It should be no surprise that despite some individual efforts and the enlightened policies of a few small nations, we are collectively doing absolutely nothing to mitigate the long term effects of climate change. It isn't even that we don't choose to disregard the future of our children, or of all life on earth; we simply do not think about them. This is reflected in our news sources, which focus mostly on present climate disasters, and how to mitigate their effects on us right now, not on how we might change our collective behaviors for the sake of the future.

Our stress on our own identities above all else is blatantly manifest in selfie culture. All over the world, visitors to amazing locations, to scenes of great beauty, come to appreciate looking at them, but at the same time the main purpose of many others seems to be to take, and post, selfies. In this way, as in others already noted, the assertion of the self seems to have become more important than looking at the world. The supposedly spectacular Oregon canyon I was unable to visit last year is doubtless not the only site that is now closed because it is considered unsafe due to hordes of selfie-takers. Many art history instructors now require that students prove they have seen an art work in person by submitting a selfie of themselves in front of it. I might argue that this encouragement of selfie-taking, which will undoubtedly have the subliminal effect of refocusing one's attention in a museum visit, is more damaging than risking that students view such works in reproduction.

4

I hope I am not alone in finding much in common between taking the time to gather facts and apply reason as a way of thinking through a complex issue, as happens in some of our best writing but rarely in our daily journalism, and the structures of those art works that are constructed of complex relationships between parts, which the viewer must take time and care to navigate through. Not all art can be described in this way; if there is any single truth about art that we should have learned from the last century, it is that anything can make a great work. I speak now of works with many moving parts interrelating and interconnecting, work with which an encounter requires time and attention and perhaps further encounters, as it comes to enrich your thinking, deepen your intelligence, even encourage you to change aspects of your identity — and can bring enormous pleasures unlike any other. If you don't find these works relatable, well, they are not supposed to be. They take you out of your personal self, offer you different ways of seeing and thinking, deepen your sense of what it means to be human by allowing you enter into consciousnesses other than your own. Such art offers an ecstasy true to the word's etymology, "I stand out of." It deepens and expands us. Instead of occupying an instant, it occurs in time.

Art occupies time in many ways. Its formal complexity can take the viewer a while to fully

apprehend. It took me years to appreciate Rembrandt, but then, suddenly, whammo! Artists speak in different languages, and depending on your experiences and biases a new language can take some time to learn. One virtue of the much-derided canon is that it identifies artists whose work has offered sublime experiences to different people in different cultures and eras. That alone might encourage one to take time, and make multiple tries, with an artist whose work does not register at first. (Of course doing so should never discourage any art viewer from taking time with the work of lesser-known artists; that is how any canon should be formed, and reformed.)

Time is involved with art one loves more immediately too. First, there is always more to see, to absorb, to understand while one stands in front of the painting, reads and rereads the book, or sees and resees the film. There is more too in memory after the encounter ends. Then, if we view art from a period and a culture quite different from our own, the consciousnesses we so encounter will likely surprise us. Do we learn only by looking in a mirror, or also by looking at others? That so many are interested only in recent art is another sign of searching for what is most accessible to us, while rejecting otherness; of wishing to stand on familiar ground rather than expanding one's sense of possible seeings and thinkings. Chinese landscape painting from the Song Dynasty of a thousand years ago is nothing like our art today, not Western and from what I have seen not modern Chinese either. It suggests ways of being in the world, and in the world of nature, foreign to us and likely not fully decipherable now, but that, at the very time we are ignoring nature while destroying our planet, we sorely need.

Getty Tomb, Graceland Cemetery, Chicago

Choices of favorite artists and favorite art works are somewhat arbitrary, and subject to change when coming from any active viewer, but declaring a favorite is one way of calling attention to something one loves. For some years now I have named as my favorite piece of architecture in Chicago, the city in which I live, Louis Sullivan's Getty Tomb. Its almost cubic shape sits on a base, is topped by an unusual roof, and divides into two parts in its midsection. The walls in the upper part are heavily ornamented with Sullivan's brilliant, nature-inspired patterns. The lower part has bare limestone walls punctuated on one face by a highly ornate metal gate. To view it is to be almost immediately struck by the tension, or dare I say "articulation," between strong

solid geometrical shapes and delicate traceries. Colliding as they do at the center, revealing as one steps back a somewhat serrated roof, the shapes come together with that untranslatable fusion that recalls for me Ezra Pound's definition of an image as an "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." If you visit, and do not see ineffable beauties in this combination, look again. Walk short distances in the same cemetery to Sullivan's own tomb, not designed by him but adorned with one of his designs, and then to Sullivan's very different Ryerson Tomb. Visit his Wainwright Building and Wainwright Tomb in St. Louis. Once you feel you "get" these, you might be ready for the surpassing pleasures of his late banks.

One of the worst depredations of our current culture is the reduction of art to political and ideological messages. Many art works do have these. Perhaps Sullivan does too. There is a not totally implausible gay reading of his architecture. But a key to understanding art is to realize that its effects are somewhat walled-off, fortress like, from our everyday experience and the exegeses of language. Many artists themselves have asserted this. William Butler Yeats, in his late poem, *The Circus Animals' Desertion*, critiques some of his early work as having been inspired by his own lusts, and then ends with unforgettably uncommon metaphoric images for the things he must now search for. Otherness is part of what makes the experiences art offers so valuable. They offer ways of seeing and thinking that cannot be reduced to anything less than themselves. We already know a whole range of feelings from our daily lives. Art offers something else, tying evocations of such feelings in a knot of enchanting perceptual complexities that take us out of the quotidian. The other related essential to understanding is that one does not have to "agree," or even find relatable, the politics or themes or ideologies one thinks one finds in a work in order to appreciate it. Quite the contrary, its beauties, constituting an argument for its themes, and can cause the viewer moved by the aesthetics to believe those themes, even if only for a little while.

When it comes to preferences, I long identified Paul Cézanne as my favorite painter. Albrecht Dürer might have been next on my list, but then after a large Dürer show at the National Gallery of Art in Washington focused on his works on paper from the Albertina in Vienna, he joined Cézanne at the top. Since not that many Dürer paintings survive, and many museums will be reluctant to let them travel, large Dürer shows are relatively rare, but I have been able to see seven big museum exhibits of Cézanne since my first, in 1971, and each illuminated different aspects of his work. Coming to understand an artist can indeed be a lifetime's journey.

Mont Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine, by Paul Cézanne, Courtald Institute, London

I can best speak of Cézanne by using contradictions. In my late teens, for reasons I cannot identify, I had a print of a Cézanne landscape tacked to my wall. Unlike the Renoir that I also had, but soon rejected as syrupy, static, and just plain awful, the Cézanne never seemed to reduce to a moment or a feeling. On the one hand its lines and volumes seemed frozen in time; on the other they never became a gently harmonious composition.

In the best of his later works, nothing seems out of place, but the work is also ever-changing. Seen from certain perspectives, an entire picture can look like a failure, as if it is "about" its inability to come together. Surely it is intentional that while at times seeming frozen, it never reaches stasis. The work struggles against itself, as if each part is passed through the eyes of a child learning to see, trying to figure out its place is in the larger composition. One also thinks of looking at any object in nature. The edges seem defined, until they are not. Is there anything that seems peculiar to the eyes about the area just outside the edge of an actual piece of fruit? There surely often is in Cézanne's still lifes. Is he not being true to the details of eyesight that we try to ignore when we look at an apple and think of it only as something to eat? Everything in his pictures lives not among the familiar emotions that many painters bake into their works, a style that Rainer Maria Rilke, writing on Cézanne, called "the painting of sentiments." Cézanne rather explores a level before our humanizing eyes and minds have reduced things to our the everyday. His subject is neither objects nor emotions, but the paradoxes of perception itself, and his objects occupy a state before living things seemed to settle down into what "alive" customarily means. The viewer is inside the painting, struggling to put it together, to make sense of it all; to, in a profound sense, complete it. These art works live in a perpetual process of becoming themselves, never undergoing what Henry James, in an early short story, called a painting's "final process, its reduction to unity."

At 15 I began to discover, and love, classical music. There was a classical DJ in New York who called himself Watson. He played Bach and Mozart, and his all-night program began with its "theme song," the uncannily beautiful duet from Bach's Cantata No. 78. Hearing its opening multiple times in a row opened up Bach for me.

A Bach fugue makes my case for the value of complexity in art. You hear the fugue theme solo at first, and then other voices enter repeating it one after the next. As a dense polyphonic texture is woven to perfection, the music will continue without the theme at all, and we are surprised by hearing it reenter in one voice or another, the intervening material every bit as beautiful. I might only half-jokingly say that I also find a message here, which I will now reductively mistranslate: “Here is a theme (or, an idea); here it is changed by being heard in a different context, so that we see how important context is; here it is even heard against itself; here are continuations of the thought without it being literally restated that go off in different directions and suggest new but related thoughts; here it is again, both the same and further transformed. Many things are true, and can remain true on repetitions in different environments. They also change, and yet can in some ways remain true.” The nuances suggested by my storytelling are meant to evoke subtleties and shadings I often find lacking today.

True polyphony at its best, the type that informed much of Western music from before 1200 to Bach’s death in 1750, will always make my case. The listener navigates through a forest that few, certainly not I, can fully parse, but that seems all the more beautiful for its irreducibility. Every listen means hearing it anew. Every moment requests maximum attentiveness. The listener comes to feel as if their soul is interwoven into the music’s fabric in an inarticulable dance. “Dance” is important here, because even as I listen in a chair or lying on a bed, my body is invoked along with my mind, and with vague feelings that there is more at stake than either of those of my aspects, which is why we have words such as “spirit” and “soul.”

Bach’s largest group of works are his cantatas, vocal compositions in multiple movements which can include choruses, chorales, arias, duets, recitatives, and instrumental sinfonias. Most are sacred, and performed in Lutheran church services; a minority are secular. Bach wrote about 300; some 100 are lost. One way of describing them is as a kind of inventory of the possibilities of human experience, from despair to joy, from faith to its absence, from certainty to doubt, from longing to restfulness. The words are brilliantly articulated by voices and accompanying instruments in melodies that often engage in “word painting,” illustrating the meanings of the texts in varied ways. When I first started listening to these works intensively, I also explored the word painting through reading Albert Schweitzer’s study of Bach, and was a bit annoyed; such imitative mechanics seemed like a trivialization to me. Partly in reaction I would often listen to a cantata for the first time without knowing the German text or its meaning, but then there were times, as when in Cantata 21 the soprano sings “Komm, mein Jesu” and the bass replies “Ja, ich komme,” when you get the meaning anyway. In the end, I realized that many works can have seemingly “trivial” aspects that are transformed beyond their obvious effects into key parts in the larger whole.

There came a day in the late 90s when, after a long period of not having been able to listen to music at home, I played Ton Koopman’s cantata recordings on my new though cheap system. In the opening aria of Cantata 24, a singer is accompanied by strings, both playing, in a manner characteristic of the cantatas, the same melody but at different times, the voice echoing the instrument. For reasons I still do not understand, something happened to me that that had

never happened before in Bach, despite many years of listening, but that has happened more than once since. Suddenly I felt I was inside the music, helping it come together, almost as if I were composing it while listening. While unlike with Cézanne, there were certainly emotions being expressed, they moved into the background, and I was amidst the music's structure – something that had long already been happening to me with Bach's instrumental fugues. This feeling supports my critique of our current culture, a critique I had not developed very far by the late 90s. I was no longer experiencing the music on the level of my daily passive encounters with feeling and living, or with receiving feelings in typical ways such as talking with a friend, but actively, as co-creator. I had become far more intelligent, far more capable human being due to my active participation in these complexities. Something quite similar happened some two decades later at the Dürer exhibit referred to above. I had always thought of Dürer's paintings as evoking a certitude, a solidity though also with intricateness, the permanence of a sculpture, or at least, of an object created by a fine silversmith. But now, seeing the drawings and prints together with some of the paintings, even the most apparently fixed of the paintings seemed to become the process of reconstructing it at every second of my viewing. That continues to happen when I see Dürer paintings I had already seen earlier.

As long as I am presenting the strongest arguments I can for the value of art as independent of the identity of the artist, its theme, or its ideology, but also as freeing the viewer from needing to agree or disagree with any of those in the process of appreciating it, by using some of my personal favorites, I will turn in closing to my favorite poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. I could easily make an argument for why he is not at all the greatest English poet; in many ways, Shakespeare is clearly greater, and it would not surprise me to learn that Hopkins had agreed with this assessment. Still, Hopkins is my favorite.

Like Cézanne and Bach, Hopkins has also been a love since my teens. A Victorian, his work can seem ornate, even mannered. But it has a hardness, the hardness of diamond, or as he might write of "immortal diamond," that one cannot find in most of his contemporaries. The sounds and rhythms of his verse alternate between the sonorous smoothness of Thomas Gray's famous *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (but in Hopkins's verse, better) and harsh collisions:

Whether at once, as once at a crash Paul,

Or as Austin, a lingering-out swéet skíll,

…in which, in the context of the poem, "crash" and "Paul" are one-syllable-long metric feet, thus spoken more slowly and more heavily stressed than otherwise, giving a striking irregularity of stresses to the line and hence a coloration to the event described, the conversion of St. Paul, consistent with the suddenness and even violence with which it is usually portrayed.

I started with Hopkins's short lyrics – *Pied Beauty* would be one suggestion for a new reader — and as is best with any poem one loves, memorized many. The two lines quoted above are from

his longest poem, the 35 stanza *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. This is a hard one. Hopkin's closest friend and fellow poet, Robert Bridges, refused to even reread it, later calling it "the dragon in the gate" that bars entrance to Hopkins's work. It does have difficult syntax and many obscure references, but if you simply read its first stanza enough times, it should be clear that it is verse of amazing power. Hopkins wrote using what he called "sprung rhythm," which allowed one or many syllables for each metrical foot, rather than for example iambic pentameter, five feet with two syllables per foot, a weak followed by a strongly stressed one. Hopkins's rhythms are, by contrast, less predetermined; his use of mixtures of feet of various syllabic lengths together with his extreme sensitivity to word sounds produces effects forceful and quiet, harsh and soft, violent and gentle. His poems feel as if they had the strength and permanence of a jeweled stone, but with constant pressure needed to hold it together, creating a feeling of an architecture filled with active tensions. His subject is a shipwreck, which interested him because on it died five nuns exiled from Germany by anti-Catholic laws. And, yes, Hopkins was Catholic, a Jesuit priest. He had converted from the Church of England, and like many converts sometimes seemed more Catholic than the Pope. It took me years before I understood that when he wrote of "the lost" in his poems, he meant only one thing, people who were not Catholic.

His poem is in part a shipwreck narrative. It is also a meditation on the dual nature of God, creator of storms and of shelters, violent and kind, who binds our bodies together and can take them apart. The verses' tensions are constantly being altered by evocations of movement, what sometimes feel like rolling rhythms evoking rises and falls of the sea, leading to an "ocean of a motionable mind" which can be calmed by the God that underlies all things. Indeed, throughout the poem the visible manifestations of the world are described as intertwined with the "master of the tides."

The poem is also, from beginning to end, one gigantic prayer. We don't even get to the "story" until the twelfth stanza. The impatient fans of Hollywood movies would presumably be unlikely to make it past the first few, because the "plot" takes so long to get moving.

After several attempts, I began reading it seriously together with the booklength commentary I needed to understand phrases such "Tarpeian-fast." In the process of rereading, I found myself memorizing it until knowing about two thirds, and with its words and rhythms running around in my head I set out to learn the rest. Memorizing a poem is another way of offering it attention and care, and what I have also found in choosing to memorize a less than great poem that I very much like is that it will not sustain memorization because you don't much want to say it again when it has ceased to reward repeated attentions. This is never the case with Hopkins. His unusual use of word sounds and meanings and rhythm cut into consciousness like a scalpel, outlining the objects and the concepts invoked with the precision of, well, a Dürer, but also causes them feel almost invasive in their vividness. Sound, rhythm, and meaning all come together, and I feel myself becoming both the ideas and objects and the music with which they are rendered.

There is, also, an ideology. It is a thoroughly Catholic one. Hopkins brings his long search for

the meaning of the shipwreck – how could God have taken the lives of five already-persecuted nuns? – to a close by wondering if their deaths "on English shores" could serve to cause the conversion of "rare-dear Britain" to the Roman Catholic faith. His prayer concludes with the wish that it will.

The Pope at the time Hopkins wrote his poem was also Pope when he converted, and while originally somewhat of a liberal, was now reprehensibly ultra-conservative. Most today who read about this Pope's involvement in the case of a kidnapped Jewish boy named Edgardo Mortara (hint: despite international protests the Pope refused to return him and had him raised in the Vatican to be a priest who never wanted to see his family again) will agree. This Pope favored of a theocratic authoritarian state in which other religions would be treated as inferior to his. Not only am I not Catholic, but some aspects of Catholic doctrine even today are reprehensible to me.

So why is it that when I arrive at the final stanza of this magnificent poem, I feel even after five decades of reading not completely removed from tears, and still more improbably find myself praying along with the poet for the conversion of Britain? Why is it that I always recite the final stanza at close to half the speed of the rest? Why does it take me a minute or two after the final phrase, "our thoughts' chivalry's throng's Lord," to recover my original identity? And most of all, why do I feel like I am so much more of a better person each of the many times I have gone through this process of losing myself to the heart and soul of another?

It is my genuine hope that the words I have written here might lead to an answer.

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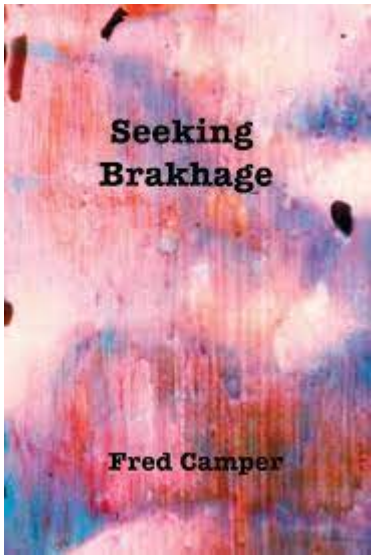

Constructing a Boogeyman: Myths and Realities of Antifa Activism

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

For many people in the United States, antifa activism is a relatively new phenomenon that they view with suspicion at best and derision at worst. Short for antifascist, antifa is a term used by activists who organize to oppose the political activity of far-right movements and their members. Because activists on the far right frequently deploy violence against their enemies, opposition work is especially dangerous, which necessitates anonymity and identity protection strategies by antifa activists. The diffuse nature of antifascist activism also means that there are few spokespeople and no official organizations that speak on behalf of the movement. All of this results in a movement that has been defined much more by its opponents than by its adherents creating a number of persistent myths about the antifascist movement and the activists who engage in it.

Myth #1: Antifascism is a relatively new phenomenon in the U.S.

For the casual observer, antifascist activism might seem like something that appeared in response to the campaign and election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States in 2016. Antifa activists seemingly materialized out of nowhere in 2017 beginning with the militant demonstrations against Trump's inauguration and the infamous punching of Richard Spencer, the far-right gadfly who coined the term "alt-right," that happened in the context of the protest. A series of high-profile clashes between antifascists and far-right activists defined much of that year culminating in the deadly "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville. The night-time tiki torch march by far-right rally-goers on August 11th shocked much of the nation. The following day, militant antifascists clashed with far-right activists successfully defending pacifist protesters from violence and routing the assorted neo-Nazis, Klansmen, Proud Boys, and assorted alt-right trolls who came to ostensibly protest the removal of Confederate monuments from a city park. The day turned deadly when a neo-Nazi rally-goer drove his car at high speed into a march of people who were leaving the site of the day's protests to celebrate their antifascist victory killing Heather Heyer and injuring 19 others. The following week over 40,000 people mobilized in Boston to oppose a rally of fewer than 100 far-right activists. Images from that counter-protest showed many of the attendees praising antifa in signs and banners that demonstrated support for the movement and its role in opposing the far-right.

It is somewhat unsurprising that many people would only be familiar with the most recent incarnation of antifascist activism. Much of the antifa activism of the last 40 years has taken place in the sometimes literally subterranean world of subcultures where racist skinheads proliferated and antifascist participants self-organized to expel them. The lack of education about radical social movements in U.S. history either writes out or deradicalizes the long history of antifascist struggle. However, antifascism has a long and storied history that resonates with today's activists who draw upon it for inspiration and iconography.

Contemporary antifascist activism is simply the latest manifestation of a history of resistance to

reactionary movements and politics in the United States. One of the earliest historical inspirations for today's antifa activists is the militant abolitionism of John Brown. Although Brown's battle against slavery pre-dates the formation of fascism as an ideology and movement by over 60 years, his militant resistance to the racist institution of slavery is seen as an inspiration for the confrontational approach of the antifascist movement. Contemporary antifascists frequently use Brown's image and struggle as a symbol of their resistance to the racist right in American society, and the network of armed leftist John Brown Gun Clubs is a direct homage to the man and the movement that he represents. In the post-abolition struggle against organized white supremacy, contemporary antifascism can be understood as the latest manifestation of the militant resistance to Ku Klux Klan violence that began during reconstruction and persisted through most of the 20th century.

Direct, and often violent, confrontation against fascism has its own storied history in the United States with a direct lineage to modern antifa activism. The earliest American fascist movements modeled after their Italian and German counterparts began in the 1920s and drew popular support throughout the 1930s. Chief among them was a German American Bund, which had direct connections with the German Nazi party. The Bund quickly drew the attention of American leftists and the Jewish community who saw it as a direct threat and organized to disrupt it by attacking meetings in cities such as New York, Newark, Chicago, and Milwaukee. This resistance culminated at the Bund's 1939 rally at Madison Square Garden which drew 20,000 attendees and 100,000 antifascist counter-protesters. As protesters outside the venue clashes with police and fascist rally-goers, Isadore Greenbaum snuck into the venue and stormed the stage during the keynote address by Bund leader Fritz Kuhn briefly punching the Nazi leader before being attacked by Kuhn's security and arrested by the police (Bernstein 2014). The Bund collapsed shortly after this rally when Kuhn was arrested for embezzling organizational funds, and American fascist movements were actively repressed during World War II as "antifascism from below" receded in the shadow of official state antifascism.

Post-War antifascism in the U.S. was largely marked by resistance to the Klan discussed earlier; however, the direct antecedents of today's antifascist movement became evident by the late 1970s with two disparate events – the Skokie affair and the Greensboro massacre. Beginning in 1976, the National Socialist Party of America challenged the denial of a permit to hold a rally in Skokie, IL, a city with a significant Jewish population many of whom were Holocaust survivors and WWII veterans. After a legal battle that involved the ACLU defending the neo-Nazi group's first amendment right to assembly and Supreme Court intervention, a march was held in Chicago on June 24, 1976. A crowd of several thousand counter-protesters, some armed with baseball bats and other blunt objects, met the roughly 20 neo-Nazis who abandoned their march after about 10 minutes. In contrast to the victory in Illinois, the Greensboro massacre stands as a harsh lesson about the dangers of organized fascist violence. organizers with the Communist Worker's Party (CWP) had experienced some success organizing workers in the textile mills of the North Carolina city. In July of 1979, they successfully disrupted a screening of the infamous racist film *Birth of a Nation* that was organized by local Klansmen. Based on this successful confrontation, the CWP organized a "Death to the Klan" march on November 3rd of that year. As marchers were preparing, several

vehicles with members of the Klan and American Nazi Party who had formed a "United Racist Front" arrived and armed fascists began to shoot the antifascist marchers some of whom returned fire. When the shooting was over five antifascists were killed and another 10 were injured (Bray 2017). There is some evidence that the lack of police response may have been part of an intentional strategy to undermine the organizing efforts of the CWP and that members of the Klan may have colluded with federal and local law enforcement (Waller 2002). The Greensboro massacre is viewed as an important lesson for antifascists on the potential collusion between the far right and the state as well as the limits of militant language without the potential for action.

Contemporary antifa activism has its most direct roots in the 1980s. The John Brown Anti-Klan Committee (JBAKC), which formed in 1978, represents the transition from New Left and Civil Rights movement activism to the more subcultural antifascism of the 1990s. The JBAKC organized militant counterdemonstrations against Klan and neo-Nazi rallies and marches. Its newspaper, originally titled "Death to the Klan," was renamed "No KKK – No Fascist U.S.A." drawing inspiration from a lyric by the punk band MDC. They actively reached out to the American punk scene where racist skinheads began organizing in the early 1980s. Throughout the U.S., local punk scenes faced similar problems of racist skinhead infiltration, which was reflected in the lyrics of notable bands such as the aforementioned MDC, Dead Kennedys, and the Dicks. In 1987, a group and anti-racist skinheads in New York formed the first American chapter of Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice to confront their racist subcultural counterparts. Similarly oriented anti-racist skinhead groups were forming in the Midwest in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis that would band together in the Anti-Racist Action network (ARA) in 1989 with chapters established in Denver, Portland, and the Bay Area shortly after its foundation. ARA chapters quickly spread across the country throughout the 90s bolstered by traveling punks and skinheads, articles in fanzines with large and small circulations, and support from touring punk bands of varying levels of fame. This antifascist network successfully confronted racists within local punk and skinhead scenes driving them underground and mobilized to oppose marches and rallies by national neo-Nazi organizations like the Klan, the Aryan Nations, the National Alliance, and the Creativity Movement.

The first groups to formally use the antifa name in the United States formed in the early to mid 2000s. Beginning with Northeast Antifascists in Boston in 2002, then followed by Rose City Antifa in 2007, these groups were affiliated with the ARA network but chose to use the antifa name specifically because of criticisms levied against the network for its lack of focus on structural and systemic racism as well as an influence of European antifascist activism within these specific groups' membership. These groups also formed as antifascist activism in the U.S. was on the decline in some part as a result of the success of ARA in the 1990s. The ARA network formally disbanded in the early 2010s and was replaced by the Torch Antifa network in 2013 with some overlap in membership. The Torch network continues to this day linking independent, local antifascist affinity groups throughout the U.S. However, it would be incorrect to assume that the network constitutes an "Antifa" organization.

Myth #2: Antifa is an Organization

Despite the claims of those who speak or write about “Antifa” or “ANTIFA” as if it were a formal organization, there is no centrally organized group that operates as such. While the Torch network has official points of unity and member affinity groups, it is a decentralized network of member collectives rather than a formal, hierarchical organization. There is no Antifa headquarters, there are no Antifa leaders, and there is no Antifa centralized organization. The antifascist movement in the U.S., similar to antifa movement globally, is a decentralized network of individuals and relatively small, local affinity groups linked by a common opposition to the far right or, for lack of another umbrella term, fascism. In my research with antifa activists, I found that antifascism exists on a scale of informal to formal with a category of independent in between.

Informal antifascist activism is relatively spontaneous, spatially as well as temporally limited, and performed by people who may or may not be affiliated with a formally organized antifa affinity group. Much of what constitutes informal antifascist activism is the “everyday antifascism” of spontaneous reaction to the presence of people who openly identify as far-right activists or movement members in the social spaces of daily life. This type of activism can range from public confrontation through verbal shaming to acts of physical confrontation. It occurs when a person who on some level opposes the politics of the far right chooses to stand up against their presence in a social space. Examples include the attendees of an underground music venue spontaneously ejecting people who indicate far right sympathies on their clothing or through their tattoos to people who confront someone expressing bigotry in a public space to a person being knocked out for wearing a swastika armband on public transit. What makes these actions forms of informal antifascism is that they are not being committed as part of an organized effort to oppose the far right but are simply actions that people take spurred by their conscience.

In contrast, formal antifascism is undertaken by groups of people who form affinity groups with theoretical and tactical agreement in order to engage in sustained activity against the far right. Formal antifascist groups have criteria for membership and some durability over time. These

groups will engage in long-term campaigns against far-right activists and groups in their communities. A formal antifascist group may be relatively small, closed to outsiders, and secretive or seek to engage in mass organizing to counter fascist activity. The key distinguishing factor of formal antifascism is that it has a long-term strategy for opposing the far right that is carried out through sustained forms of activism.

The category of independent antifascist activism bridges the gap between the informal and formal categories and can approximate one or the other. Independent activism is carried out by an individual or small group somewhere between the two categories in the continuum. It can range from short term, or one time, antifascist projects implemented by a handful of people to continuous work by an individual. The degree to which independent antifascism approximates informal or formal forms is based on whether the number of participants and the continuity of activism with some being one off, spur of the moment forms of activism typical of a formal group (e.g. doxing a fascist) to ongoing research on the far right conducted over an extended period of time.

Because there is no such thing as a large, centralized antifascist organization, the myth that antifa is a well-funded organization carries little weight. This narrative frequently dovetails with antisemitic conspiracies theories involving billionaire George Soros and the foundation that bears his name. To the degree that formal antifascist groups have access to monetary resources, it is the result of direct fundraising campaigns from supporters. Many formal groups will produce merchandise that they sell typically at subcultural events or through networks of ideological supporters on the left. These funds are used to pay for access to documents such as court records of suspected fascist movement members as well as intelligence gathering and verification projects. Some formal groups also raise money to support antifascists who are incarcerated for their political activity. The idea that antifa is a money-making operation that enriches participants is an absurd fiction.

The diffuse nature of contemporary antifascist activism also means that there are no direct ties between antifa activists and the Democratic Party, another common myth associated with organizational structure. Most contemporary antifa activists identify as anti-authoritarian or anarchist, so they are unlikely to work hand-in-hand with a mainstream political party, and certainly not a centrist one. There is no coordination between the Democratic Party and any antifa activism. In my research, I found that antifa activists frequently do have links to other activists typically on the radical left. In some cases, antifa activists were part of anarchist groups while others worked with left-oriented campaigns for economic, political, and social justice. Because of the network of links between activists, antifascists were frequently embedded in a wider milieu of leftist activism; however, they are not an arm of any political party in the United States.

Myth #3: Antifa Can Be Classified as a Gang

This myth represents the first attempt at a backlash against antifascist activism following the events at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville. First articulated by the mayor of

Berkeley, CA in response to militant action during a counterprotest of a far-right rally in late August 2017 (Porter 2017), this charge was given intellectual weight by criminologists and research experts David C. Pyrooz and Daniel A. Densley (2017; 2018) in a *Wall Street Journal*editorial that was later expanded into a scholarly article published in the journal *Society*. In these pieces, they claim that antifa activists can classified as a street gang because they meet criteria in the California Penal code and the Eurogang program of research: illegal activity, a street orientation, group identity, and durability across time. Setting aside the fact that the defining criteria used by Pyrooz and Densley is so vague as to potentially apply to American police as much as antifascists, much of their argument is based on a superficial understanding of antifa activism constructed by sensationalist media reporting.

The first assumption that antifa activism is defined by illegal activity, namely violence, is itself a major myth regarding antifascism. It assumes that the primary activity of antifa activists is the violent clashes featured in media portrayals. Pyrooz and Delsey (2018, 233) argue that histories of antifascism frequently focus on the violent conflicts between antifa activists and the far right, “the history of antifa reads like a history of violence.” In my research on antifa activism, I point out that the focus on violent defeat of fascism serves primarily as a rallying cry; a “proof of life” of the antifascist movement and the myriad groups of people threatened by fascist violence and a “proof of death” of the far right and the threat that it poses (Vysotsky 2020). Antifascists glorify violence both in their histories and in their symbolism precisely because fascism is predicated on violence. For fascism, violence is both a means and an end in that it is both the way of achieving the society that they long to see and the primary organizing principle of that society. Fascists venerate violence as intrinsically good and the violent person as spiritually and physically superior. For the far right, the non-violent opponent is ineffectual, inferior, and easily suppressed. Antifascist violence is, therefore, both defensive and necessary to undermine one of the central principles of far-right ideology. My research also found that antifa activists had firsthand experience with fascist violence. All of the militant antifascists whom I interviewed experience verbal threats and direct physical from people on the far right. They were targeted because they were LGBTQ+, Jewish, people of color, or leftist and

antifascist. These threats occurred because these interviewees were in the same social, primarily subcultural, spaces as far-right activists. For antifa activists, violence is a strategic defensive response to a violent far-right movement.

Beyond the lack of understanding of the rationale for antifascist militancy, the assumption that violence is the primary organizing principle of antifa activism, and that said violence occurs in the context of street protest (read: a street orientation), simply misses the vast majority of what constitutes is the routine, nonviolent stuff of most contemporary social movements. Even the majority of antifascist protest activity is nonviolent (Ellinas and Lamprianou 2021). Antifascists, like other activists hold meetings where they discuss strategy and plan actions. The vast majority of action committed by antifa activists involves intelligence and information gathering, education and public shaming campaigns, and cultural activity. Information gathering consists of learning about far-right movements and activists through everything from reading scholarly and journalistic accounts to open-source intelligence gathering to infiltration of fascist organizations and groupuscules. This information informs education and public shaming campaigns which are designed to either enlighten the public about the far-right activity in their midst or to leverage the stigma against open expressions of fascism in contemporary society. The latter is also designed to increase the cost of participation in far-right movements by threatening activists' access to education, employment, and even housing. This may seem harsh to some, but as the slogan for the antifascist group One People's Project states, "hate has consequences." Finally, like so many other contemporary social movements, a great deal of antifascist activity is social. In my description of the sites of ethnographic research, I stated that I attended "a variety of social events such as Punk, Oi!, and Hardcore shows, DJ nights, film screenings, house parties, and informal gatherings in bars and other social spaces associated with punk and skinhead subculture" (Vysotsky 2020, 20). While most social movements have cultural and social aspects, the volume of these in antifa activism is in part strategic. Because far-right activists target certain subcultures for recruitment, antifa activists seek to build robust antifascist cultures to defend against such encroachment.

The final criteria for defining antifa activism as a gang, group identity is true, but presented completely out of context. Since the mid-to-late 1980s, scholars of social movements have noted that in post-WWII era, most forms of organizing are based on group identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc.). As indicated above, antifa activist group identity is primarily defined by a shared perception of threat from the far right. Activists find commonality in their understanding that far-right activity poses a physical, political or spatial threat. Physical threat consists of "a fear of direct physical harm or danger at the hands of fascist activists that stems from the individual being a member of a category of people targeted for fascist violence" (Vysotsky 2020, 129). The political threat posed by the far right is both ideological in that it represents the polar opposite to the anti-authoritarian beliefs of antifascists and pragmatic because fascists frequently recruit from a similar base. Spatial threat occurs when far-right activists seek to control social spaces and impose their ideology upon the people who frequent them. In my research, I found that antifa activists experienced all of these forms of threat, sometimes simultaneously as part of their day-to-day activities. While most people are unlikely to come face-to-face with a far-right activist outside of a

counter-protest setting, the antifa activists whom I interviewed had personal experiences of threat from the far-right. These experiences of threat motivated them to become involved in antifascist activism as a form of self-defense as well as an extension of their political activity.

Pyrooz and Densley are correct when they indicate that antifa activists express their group identity in easily recognizable forms; however, they mis-identify that expression and the context in which it occurs. To classify antifa activism as a gang, they claim that "members" may be identified through a common clothing and symbols, "Bloods wear red; Crips wear blue; antifa wear black" (Pyrooz and Densley 2018, 234). This argument mistakes the "black bloc" tactic of groups of militant protesters wearing all black and covering their faces with some sort of movement uniform. There is significant debate within the antifascist movement regarding the utility of this tactic in antifascist counterprotest with many making the case that it has more negative than positive value. The assumption that black bloc dress is an antifa uniform also makes an incorrect association that anyone dressed in that style in a protest context is an antifa activist, a myth that I will discuss later in this article. Pyrooz and Densley's assertion that antifa activists display similar symbols is entirely correct but makes a bold assumption about the function of those symbols as indicators of criminal identity rather than a political one. Antifa collective identity is expressed through a variety of cultural markers such as music, art, clothing, and even tattoos that serve as a means of expressing a person's position in opposition to fascism, not as an expression of collective gang identity. Unlike gang members who must "earn" their right to wear certain symbols or colors, antifascist identity expression is open to anyone who takes an ideological position against the far right. Formal groups and individual sympathizers sell clothing, patches, and buttons with antifascist symbols and slogans to anyone who is willing to buy them as part of a strategy to build a culture of resistance. These displays not only serve as a way of expressing a political belief no different from any other social movement but also as a way of marking certain subcultures and social spaces as unwelcoming to far right recruitment. Antifa group identity serves as a means of creating bonds and cohesion among movement members and a form of resistance to the far right.

The final argument that antifa activism is durable across time is also true on its face, but similarly ignores context and social movement scholarship. Pyrooz and Densley point out that although individual participation may change over time, there is a persistence of antifascist activity across time. This is, of course, true of any social movement. Scholars of social movements point to "cycles of protest" where movements mobilize and demobilize as well as "abeyance structures" that sustain movements during periods of demobilization or low levels of public support (Tarrow 1998; Taylor 1989). Antifa activism is persistent across time because it is a countermovement against the far right. Antifascist movements continue to mobilize because far-right movements continue to organize and agitate. The cycle of protest for antifascists is entirely tied to that of the far right. When such movements are prominent, so are antifascists. When they go into abeyance, so does antifascism. One unique feature of antifascism is that it may continue to be active in the abeyance structures, the spaces and practices that sustain a movement when it isn't actively mobilizing (Taylor 1989), because in recent history these have become subcultural spaces where fascists organize. The key feature here is that antifascism is persistent across time because of political activity rather than

criminality.

The attempt to criminalize and discredit antifa activism as a gang activity largely faltered because of the thin premises upon which it was built. Chief among these was the key fact that antifascism is a politically motivated form of activism rather than the use of criminal violence for short-term gain typical of gangs. As a countermovement, antifa activists mobilize in opposition to another social movement rather than define themselves as a criminal enterprise that competes with rivals for criminalized markets and control of territory to monopolize said markets. Simply put, antifascism is political activism that is militant at times, not a gang.

Myth #4: Antifa Activism Can Be Classified as Terrorism

The relative failure to criminalize and delegitimize antifa activism by labeling it as gang activity resulted in a strategic shift on the right that framed militant antifascism as terrorist activity. This framing was driven by the ideological component of antifa activism coupled with the misrepresentations of antifascism as inherently violent and focused on the beliefs of people on the right. The argument put forward was that antifa activists were engaging in politically motivated intimidation through violence, which constitutes terrorism. Bolstered by several local, state, and federal law enforcement assessments, the antifa as terrorists frame was publicly repeated by then President Trump and inspired the introduction of a resolution by Senator Ted Cruz to investigate antifascist activism under RICO statutes (Sunshine 2019). While the antifa as terrorist organization frame has been more successful than the antifa as a gang frame, it is still predicated on an intentional misunderstanding of antifascist activism; namely that the primary form of antifascist activity is violence that meets the threshold of terrorism and antifascist militancy is a form of political intimidation.

The first premise of the terrorism argument is based on an exaggeration of the scale and scope of violent acts committed by antifa activists. As discussed in the previous section, the vast majority of antifa activity is non-violent; however, this does not necessarily preclude a terrorism designation. The context of antifascist violent acts indicates that they are not

terroristic in nature. First, as indicated above, antifa activists are frequently the targets of far-right violence. Antifascist use of force is defensive against a far-right movement that seeks to at best intimidate people through violence and commit genocidal acts at worst. Second, antifascist violence is primarily enacted in very specific political and social contexts. Most people are only familiar with the violent acts committed by antifa activists in a protest context. In these cases, these are actions that fall well within the dynamics of opposing social movements; specifically, the strategy to damage and destroy the opposing movement by raising the cost of participation (Zald and Useem 1987). Violent clashes between antifascists and far-right activists in part contribute to some activists disengaging from fascist movements (Bowen 2008; Linden and Klandermans 2006). Antifascist violence also occurs in subcultural and social spaces that far-right activists target for recruitment or ideological control. In these cases, acts of antifascist violence occur as part of the process of ejecting fascists from these spaces and ensuring the safety of other people. “Put simply, they do not leave when they are made to feel unwelcome or asked politely to do so; therefore, it becomes incumbent on the anti-fascists to motivate them to leave a space where they are unwelcome and/or pose a threat” (Vysotsky 2015, 248). This violence is no different than what one might face from a bouncer or law enforcement officer when being ejected from a space. Finally, the acts themselves simply do not meet the threshold of terrorist violence and are not included in databases of terrorist activity (LaFree 2018). Antifa activists strategically employ restrain in their use of force in order to maintain a defensive position (Merrill and Copsey 2022). Fist fights with far-right activists in protest and social settings are simply not the equivalent of murders, bombings, and arson attacks that are typical of terrorism.

The framing strategy by the far right to label antifascist acts terrorism is a false equivalence that that engages in projection and obfuscation of right-wing terrorist violence. The occasional clashes between antifa and far-right activists pale in comparison to the gruesome bias crimes, mass shootings, bombings, and arson attacks committed by the far right. Year after year, research by the Anti-Defamation League indicates that far-right activists are responsible for the vast majority of terrorist violence in the United States. By proclaiming that antifascists are terrorists, activists on the far right, right-wing politicians, and credulous journalists consistently minimize fascist violence.

The final argument used by those who would label antifa activists terrorists is that their violent acts are a form of political intimidation. This claim is based in part on the reality of antifascism as a political stance against the far right. Proponents of this position argue that antifa activists target people for their right-wing beliefs and that anyone who holds such beliefs may be a target of antifascist violence; the latter being a distinct myth that will be addressed later in this article. This assumption misses the key aspect of antifascist activism; that it is focused on the deeds of far-right activists rather than their beliefs. The context of antifascist violence described above clearly indicates that it is that act of being a far-right activist that engenders an antifa response. Antifa activists do not wish to engage in a “battle of ideas” with the far right nor do they prioritize changing the minds of individual believers in right-wing ideology. Instead, they focus their activism on known far-right activists and obvious fascist events such as rallies and recruitment efforts. Antifascist violence is meant to disrupt the activity of the far

right, not to engage in a debate of ideas. As such, it is again, the routine stuff of countermovement activism.

There are some who argue that antifascism constitutes terrorism because of clashes between antifa activists and police or acts of property destruction. This is an error of context that ignores the role of police in repression of antifascist movements and association with the far right. Antifascists are typically critical of the state from an anti-authoritarian perspective and understand their actions as part of a "three-way fight" against it and the far right. However, clashes between antifa activists and police frequently occur in a specific protest context where the latter actively protect far right activists or engage in repression of antifascist counter-protest under the guise of crowd control or the restoration of order. Police routinely mobilize in a manner that provides protection to far-right rallygoers focusing their attention of antifascist counter-protesters. This dynamic places them in conflict with antifascists while also literally turning their back to far-right acts of intimidation and violence. In other cases, police have taken a "soft" approach to dealing with far-right violence and even engaged in outright collusion such as in Portland, OR where officers told right-wing activists to remove a sniper nest trained on antifascists without detaining them, stood by as activists attacked antifascists, warned activists of potential arrests on warrants, and even exchanged supportive text messages with a far-right leader (Knox 2019; Shepherd 2019). In this type of context, the antifascist position of opposition to the state and the far right seems clear.

While the myth that antifa activists are terrorists is persistent, it doesn't accurately reflect the reality of antifascist activism. Clashes between antifascists and far right activists almost never reach a level of violence beyond that of a street fight. This type of violence pales in comparison to actual acts of terrorism committed by the far right and is meant to obscure and obfuscate that reality. Even though antifascist violence may be political in its orientation, it is part of a movement-countermovement dynamic or in response to acts of repression on the part of the state.

Myth #5: Antifa = Black Bloc = Black Lives Matter

As mentioned in the previous section, there is persistent rhetoric that equates antifa activism with the black bloc tactic and blames this for the militancy of racial justice protests in the summer of 2020 in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. This framing assumes that the black bloc tactic is inherently an antifascist one and that all militant protest is therefore committed by antifa activists. This myth is persistent to such a degree that criminologists Michael K. Logan and Gina S. Ligon (2021) used arrests during racial justice protests in the summer of 2020 in Portland, OR to analyze demographics of "anti-fascists." Their logic presents the most benign version of this strange equivalence – antifascists oppose racism and Portland is notorious for its militant antifascist movement, so anyone arrested in that city during a racial justice protest would likely be an antifascist. Contortions of logic aside, the black bloc tactic is not proprietary to antifa activists nor is protest militancy. The myth that antifa, black bloc, and Black Lives Matter are essentially the same thing is meant to distort and discredit all three.

The black bloc tactic was developed by European autonomist movements in the 1980s. These movements were primarily anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, feminist, anti-racist, and antifascist. The tactical innovation of the black bloc, where protesters dress in non-descript black clothing and march together in a disciplined group, was developed to allow protesters to engage in militant tactics with relative anonymity that would protect them from repression at the protest or investigation after. This tactic was imported to North America in the 1990s via radical magazines and anarchist punk fanzines that covered global protest movements. It was deployed at demonstrations against the Gulf War in the early 1990s and anti-globalization protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s primarily by anarchists and anti-authoritarians. The black bloc served as a means of bringing together people with similar tactical approaches to engage in militant protest (Dupuis-Déri 2013). Because of its association with militant protest and its deployment at some antifascist demonstrations, the black bloc was labeled as a key component of antifa activism as indicated by Pyrooz and Densley's misrepresentation discussed earlier in this article. As we can see, the tactic, however, is not inherently antifascist and is not even the preferred tactic of many antifa activists. Because of its association with militant protest, the black bloc draws heavier police attention in protest settings and can hinder confrontational tactics. Many antifa activists now prefer a strategy of attending demonstrations in normative, non-descript clothing to better fit into a crowd rather than standing out in all black. This allows them to engage in confrontational tactics while still being able to be part of the protest. And while it might be safe to assume that everyone participating in a black bloc in the U.S. identifies on some level as an antifascist, they may not necessarily be a formal or even independent antifascist as described earlier in this article. One cannot even assume that the black bloc is an inherently anti-authoritarian or antifascist tactic because it has been appropriated by far-right factions in Europe and North America. The association of the black bloc with antifa is, therefore, largely a construction of right-wing media in an attempt to stoke fear in its audience.

When racial justice protests flared up across the country and globally in the summer of 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers and the continued violence against people of color by police, right-wing media had a field day of fearmongering. The thousands of protests across the country and solidarity globally combined with the righteous anger that led to the burning of the 3rd district police station in Minneapolis, property destruction in some major cities, the abandonment of the Capitol Hill police station in Seattle

and establishment of an autonomous zone in that area, as well as the over 100 days of protests and rioting in Portland provided fodder for the right-ring media machine and online conspiracists. The association of militant protest with antifa activism that had been commonplace in right-wing media and online spaces for at least 3 years prior created a narrative designed to discredit the protests and sow dissention among racial justice activists. The narrative equated militant protest with antifa, which in the context of the racial justice protests was equated with the movement for Black lives. In a variation of the great replacement conspiracy theory that claims that Jewish elites seek to displace white people by encouraging non-white immigration and civil rights for people of color, a narrative developed that the movement for Black lives was an antifa front to sow dissent in American society and destroy the nation. A related conspiracy developed that claimed that antifa militants were being paid to travel across the country by the busload to cause chaos and destruction. This narrative became so pervasive on social media that law enforcement officials with right-wing sympathies opened investigations and groups of vigilantes organized to "defend" their communities from the antifa threat.

These narratives and conspiracies were, of course, completely unfounded. While it is safe to say that people involved in formal and independent antifascism were sympathetic to the protests and certainly attended them, they did so not as "ANTIFA" but as sympathizers to the cause of racial justice. There are no formal connections between organized antifa affinity groups and the Black Lives Matter organizational network or any other formal organization for racial justice. To the extent that antifa activists may be involved in racial justice activism the relationship is inverse; they became involved with antifascism as an extension of their racial justice activism, not the other way around. However, that relationship should not imply that antifa activism is a front for Black Lives Matter or other racial justice organizations either. There is also absolutely no evidence that the militant protests that occurred were organized by antifa activists or that antifascists were responsible for property destruction and clashes with police. In fact, investigations by the Justice Department under William Barr found that none of the people arrested during the racial justice protests had direct ties to formal antifascist groups (Lucas 2020). Furthermore, an analysis of racial justice protests by Shane Burley and Alexander Reid Ross (2020) using data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project database found that over 90% of protest events were non-violent, and that much of the violence that occurred was instigated by agent provocateurs such as the "umbrella man" in Minneapolis, right-wing vigilantes like Kyle Rittenhouse who killed two protesters and injured a third in Kenosha, WI, or police repression. If anyone is to blame for the "violence" of racial justice protest in 2020, it's not antifa activists but far-right activists and police.

The attempt to equate antifa activism with the black bloc tactic and with the movement for Black lives is clearly unfounded. While it has been successful because of the combination of right-wing media messaging and online-based conspiracy theories, there is little evidence of the kinds of relationships that have been constructed. The black bloc is a tactic that is used by a variety of different activists, including increasingly appropriation by the far right. Antifa activists certainly are in support of racial justice protest and movements; however, they are not directly involved as antifascists in these movements or protests. There is also no evidence that

antifa activists were responsible for any of the property destruction that accompanied the minority of protests for racial justice that were militant, and much of the violence that occurred at these protests was instigated by right-wing provocateurs, far-right vigilantes, and law enforcement.

Myth #6: Antifa Activists Target People for Their Beliefs

A narrative that is popular with the mainstream right, centrists, and even among some liberals is that antifa activists target people for their beliefs. This framing is based on the correct notion that antifascists are opposed to fascism, which is an ideology; and therefore, a belief. A related argument made in mainstream right-wing media is that if antifa activists are successful in repressing the far right, they will then turn to run-of-the-will conservatives, which puts anyone who holds right-wing beliefs a potential target for antifascist violence. These arguments are based on a misunderstanding of antifascist strategy and hyperbolic presentations of antifa activism.

As discussed previously in this article, the beliefs of people on the far right are a second order issue for antifa activists. Militant antifascists are more concerned with the actions of people on the right, particularly the imperative toward violence inherent in right-wing ideology. Antifa activists focus on far-right activists because they advocate for violence against historically marginalized people. They do so through actions such as rallies or recruitment campaigns. The antifa strategy focuses on stopping these actions through direct action rather than debate that might change the beliefs of right-wing activists. Part of that focus on action is the “no platform” strategy that argues that far-right activists should not be given a forum to spread their ideology. This position rests on the assertion that far-right ideology has already been thoroughly discredited through debate, research, and even war which means that far-right activists are merely using public debate, discourse, and media representation as a recruitment tactic. Platforming fascists only discredits them in the eyes of those who already disagree with them, but it also provides exposure for those who might be sympathetic to their ideology and an avenue to become involved in their movement. The only way to curtail this far-right recruitment strategy is to limit their exposure as much as possible. The pathway to far-right activism is effectively hindered by making access to their ideology harder.

The “slippery slope” argument that antifa activists will eventually target people with mainstream conservative views rests on the assumptions that antifascists do not have a clear definition of what constitutes fascism and that they engage in indiscriminate attacks. The first assumption comes from a lack of understanding of how antifascists develop their position and make decisions about actions that they will take. In part, the assumption that antifa activists don’t have a clear definition of fascism rests on the devaluing of the term in American society. For decades, fascism was used as a pejorative against any type of perceived authoritarianism in colloquial discourse. It is assumed that antifa activists simple label anyone with whom they disagree a fascist. However, people who become involved in formal antifascist activism frequently go through processes of political education either as part of the process of becoming involved in an affinity group or out of personal interest in the subject of fascism. Antifa

activists' knowledge of fascist history and ideology may rival that of a graduate student because they consume a great deal of scholarly and popular writing on the subject of fascism. Statements that accompany antifascist activity from doxing to counter-protest explicitly indicate the ideological position and activities that are indicative of the fascist activism of the target. Antifascists are extremely specific about whom they are targeting and why. The idea that there are roving gangs of antifa activists looking to assault conservatives for their beliefs and invade "red state" America is the stuff of conspiracy theories discussed in the previous section.

If there is any worry that antifascists might turn their attention to conservatives, it is a failure of the mainstream right to distance itself from the far right since the Reagan era. American conservatism has drifted into the territory of fascism to such a degree that outright white nationalist groups attend mainstream conferences like CPAC and right-wing media celebrities routinely repeat anti-Semitic dog whistles and conspiracy theories on cable television and popular YouTube channels. To the extent that antifascists might respond to conservatives of any sort, it is because their ideology is indistinguishable from that of the fascists.

Myth #7: Antifa Activists Are Extremists No Different from The People They Oppose

The "horseshoe" of "fishhook" theory of politics that asserts that the far left and far right are more similar than they are different is popular among centrist liberals who are overly concerned with civility and disingenuous conservatives who provide cover for the far right. This theory asserts that at their extremes, both the left and right are intolerant and violent. This assertion is frequently used to draw false equivalence between antifa activists and the far right as a way of mostly discrediting the antifascist activists by using opposition to the far right as a rhetorical shield. As anti-authoritarians, antifa activists represent a polar opposition to the far right rather than a mirror image of it.

The assertion that antifascists are as authoritarian as the fascists they oppose is based on a misinterpretation of the strategic dynamics described in the previous section. For credulous liberals like Peter Beinart (2017), the surface-level understanding of antifa activism limits it to violent street confrontations and staunch opposition to the free speech of far-right activists. Antifa activism is painted by such people as a kind of intolerance of contradictory ideas rather than a recognition of the violent outcomes of far-right ideology. Antifa activists express a rationale for their actions similar to that of the "paradox of tolerance" posited by Karl Popper (1945) and Marcuse's (1969) "repressive tolerance" that acceptance of the free speech and free assembly rights of the far right represents a threat to a free and egalitarian society that must be stopped by any means necessary. It is crucial here to understand the importance of power in the dynamics being discussed. As authoritarians, the far right seek to supress the speech, expression, and assembly of people whom they deem to subordinate. The far right seeks to engage in domination through that subordination and uses violence to ensure it. As an opposing movement to the far right, antifascists seek to curtail those attempts at domination and suppression using a strategy that employs the use of force and deplatforming. For antifascists, these are tactics deployed in specific circumstances against specific activists

rather than an end in themselves. In contrast, far right ideology seeks violence and repression as an end in itself in a world defined by hierarchy and domination. Antifascists seek to eliminate hierarchy and domination by opposing the far right.

It is precisely in these future visions that demonstrate the fundamental difference between antifascists and the far right. As anti-authoritarians, antifa activists seek to create a world based on principles of equality. In their activism, antifascist or otherwise, they work to create a world free of the hierarchies of class, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other form of domination. For these activists, the far right represents not just an opposing ideology in the "marketplace of ideas" but an actual threat as discussed earlier in this article. The far right, by contrast, seeks to assert a world of domination where upper class, straight, white men dominate and everyone else is subordinated in a strict hierarchy that is enforced through violence. The two ideologies are inherently in opposition to one another. To assert that there is any similarity between them requires fundamentally misrepresenting both.

A Way Forward: Challenging Myths and Asserting Realities

This article presented some of the more persistent myths and realities regarding antifascism. It is by no means an exhaustive accounting of them; however, it can serve as a starting point to address these claims whenever they arise. As I have indicated throughout this piece, the myths propagated against antifa activists are central to a strategy of discrediting both antifascism and the left in general. They are part of a concerted effort on the part of the far right to shift the Overton window to include their ideology and activism in mainstream politics and they are winning.

In order to challenge the far right, it is crucial to take a stand in support of antifascism, and I hope this article serves as a means to address the false claims made about antifa activists. One need not agree completely with all of the tactics used by antifascists in order to support them, but understanding the strategy is fundamental. Strong social movements engage in a constant process of debate and discussion of tactics that leads to consistent innovation and adaptation. The history of fascism and antifascism demonstrates that when the opposition is fractured, the far right wins. By challenging the myths and asserting the realities of antifa activism, we can stand in solidarity against fascism.

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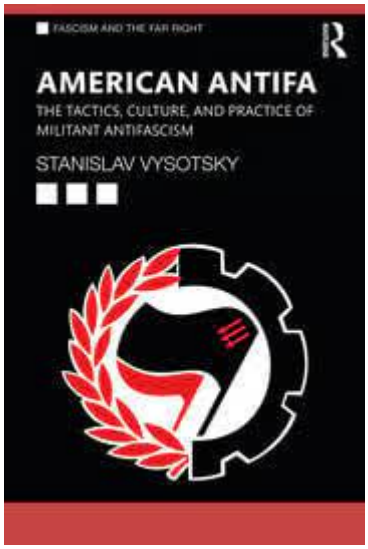

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What We Owe the Past: William MacAskill, Effective Altruism and the Wrong Life

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

‘The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living’

– Karl Marx

It was, after all, too good to be true. Following the aftermath of the allegations of corruption and bankruptcy of the cryptocurrency exchange company FTX Trading Ltd., William MacAskill’s Twitter fell silent. The Oxford philosopher was closely associated with FTX founder and CEO, Sam Bankman-Fried. Bankman-Fried had promoted crypto as a means to do good, his trading was said to have a social purpose. The more money made, the bigger the donation to charity. In March 2022, MacAskill sent Elon Musk a text after seeing the billionaire post about buying Twitter to save free speech. MacAskill suggested his ‘collaborator’ Sam Bankman-Fried might be a worthy business partner since he also wanted to buy the company and make it ‘better for the world’. Musk’s reply was simply, ‘Does he have huge amounts of money?’ MacAskill wrote back, ‘Depends on how you define “huge” He’s worth $24B, and his early employees (with shared values) bump that to $30B. I asked about how much he could in principle contribute and he said: ~$1-3b would be easy ~$3-8b is maybe possible but would require financing’.

In these text messages, released as part of court proceedings investigating Musk's Twitter take over, MacAskill promotes Bankman-Fried as a vision for the future. Musk asks 'Do you vouch for him', MacAskill replies 'Very much so! Very dedicated to making the long-term future of humanity go well'. MacAskill introduces the two, writing 'You both have interests in games, making the very long-run future go well, and buying Twitter'. MacAskill linked Musk to his 'Future Fund' which he co-ran and FTX financed, claiming it would move '$100M to $1B this year to improve the future of humanity'.[1] By November FTX had collapsed and under Musk, Twitter was being run into the ground. In a thread of tweets, MacAskill publicly distanced himself from Bankman-Fried and logged off, not to return to the platform till June 2023.

It could appear that this is a question of embarrassing friends. Why point to MacAskill's private texts, when his public comments about the allegations of FTX fraud are in general laudable? MacAskill no doubt felt some moral imperative to explain his close association with a man who had just been arrested for defrauding thousands of people of their savings. However, MacAskill's attempt to broker a deal between Bankman-Fried and Musk makes explicit the political upshot of his philosophical project. More broadly MacAskill probably felt the need to defend the close association of his moral commitments outlined in his writings to a now failed (not to mention potentially criminal) economic venture. The old story still rang true. Billionaires and technocrats had taken the money of everyday people under the guise of moral rightness, and spent it on themselves. It was a bad look for someone who had staked their moral position and career on a so-called 'long termist' commitment to the future of all of humanity.

MacAskill is a principal figure in the Effective Altruism 'movement'. This philosophical and social movement, in MacAskill's own words, 'us[es] evidence and reason to figure out how to benefit others as much as possible, and tak[es] action on that basis'.[2] He co-founded 'Effective Ventures', a 'federation' of ten research centres, charities and philanthropic enterprises all promoting effective altruism. In 2017, MacAskill made Forbes '30 under 30' list of 'Social Entrepreneurs' for his efforts to research and action the most efficient means for 'the most

good for the most people'. MacAskill's much publicised *What We Owe the Future* (2022) is an attempt to lay out a popular presentation of 'long-termism', the core tenet of effective altruism.

MacAskill's fundamental claim is that positively prioritising the future is *the* key moral consideration. In a long line of utilitarian philosophers, like Peter Singer, MacAskill's argument rests on the assumption that effective moral decisions are arrived at by a disinterested, rational agent from a neutral, universal perspective. The philosophy of effective altruism is designed to directly map onto the various organisations set up to promote social entrepreneurship. But since the organisations are created by the effective altruists themselves, it is genuinely hard to see if the philosophy informs the entrepreneurship or the entrepreneurship informs the philosophy. Effective altruism may be the first attempt to remove any distinction between moral philosophy and business enterprise.

In this article, we assess the philosophy and politics of effective altruism by giving close attention to MacAskill's *What We Owe the Future.* This approach deepens our previous attempt to criticise the politics of utilitarianism, which we argue is in essence, a philosophy of the status quo.[3] First, we outline the foundation of MacAskill's 'long-termist' position. The book provides a long historical narrative which is intended to support the moral argument, however despite this, MacAskill's moral philosophy is positivist and determinist, showcasing a strangely naive understanding of history. Second, we address a concrete example of this view of history, specifically his account of the British abolition of slavery. Third, we locate the politics of effective altruism within a broader conception of social change. Effective altruists claim to provide a philosophy to practically improve the world. We argue that not only is effective altruism unable to make good on this claim, but its politics reinforce structural inequality and antagonistic class relations. Fourth, drawing on Walter Benjamin and T.W. Adorno, we argue for a moral philosophy that confronts, rather than reinforces social domination. We suggest this confrontation requires coming to terms with *what we owe the future as something that is predicated on what we owe the past.*

1. Doing Badly

What We Owe to the Future opens with MacAskill's fundamental claim: 'Future people count'.[4] He suggests that while there is a common intuition that future people 'matter', it has not been taken seriously enough by 'activists, researchers, policy makers'. In this first part, we will argue that MacAskill's moral position, regardless of its good intentions, is hindered by a positivistic, and ultimately deterministic account of the relation between moral action and the future. MacAskill argues that the future of humanity is at a turning point and unless we change the way we think about our future, we are at risk of discounting the moral worth of those who are not yet born, and hence are without a voice in public affairs. Indeed, MacAskill suggests his vision of 'long-termsim' is an extension of struggles for civil rights and against oppression,

Though we cannot give genuine political power to future people, we can at least give consideration to them. By abandoning the tyranny of the present over the future, we can act as trustees—helping to create a flourishing world for generations to come.[6]

From this premise, MacAskill quantifies the problem by relating future population growth with predictions about the 'life expectancy' of humanity.[7] According to his 'long-terminst' view, if there is going to be a large global population that will live for longer, then we need to think about the future. He asks the reader to:

assume that our population continues at its current size. In that case, there would be eighty trillion people yet to come; future people would outnumber us ten thousand to one.[8]

The notion that 'future people matter' is indeed a significant moral issue, but MacAskill does not quite start there, in fact it takes a long time for him to introduce his major philosophical interlocutor, Derek Parfit (to which we will return). Instead, MacAskill makes a number of predictions about the human species that reach hundreds of thousands of years into the future. MacAskill declares he is making 'informative estimates' but it is hard to see the analytical value of setting up a moral argument about an unknown future from this data.[9] As a result, his discussion struggles to get past speculation: his predictions are not just wildly unknown, but are question begging, insofar as there is a basic assumption about how certain major socio-cultural and technological trends will unfold.

This is, in essence, the old nineteenth century story of the history of progress. Not content with speculation about the entire future of human beings, MacAskill seeks to ground his account in a story of progress – of measurable improvements to bring people out of poverty, improved medical care and individual freedom. The declarations about the future are strangely turned to the past, as MacAskill, in a chapter titled 'You Can Shape the Course of History', whizzes through prehistoric times to demonstrate how decisions made a long time ago can affect the future. As an example of the contingency of human action in history, MacAskill describes how the hunting practices of early hunter-gatherers wiped out the megafauna on many continents such as Europe and South America, but not in Africa, due to the fact that African species evolved alongside Homo sapiens for longer, and thus had more time to adapt.[10] What might be seen as a fairly straightforward case of the contingency of historical events, is given a strange moral register by MacAskill. While he understands that hunter-gatherers could not have foreseen the implications of species extinction, MacAskill suggests that if they had our modern knowledge 'of ecology and evolutionary biology, they would have understood what it is for a species to go extinct and the potentially irrevocable loss that was at stake.'[11] He depicts the hunter-gatherer with a degree of patronising sympathy – as if they were simply too ignorant to know the stakes of a human life.

However, crucially for MacAskill, 'we in the modern era can do better'.[12] MacAskill completely ignores the fact that the hunting behaviours of the earliest human beings might be reflections, not of moral or evidential ignorance (thereby enforcing this story of moral progress) but entirely different moral codes, or the kinds of life pressures wherein his moral presuppositions are rendered entirely meaningless. In other words, MacAskill reduces human history to an almost linear story of growing moral awareness, and ignores the fact that certain actions and behaviours of past people may require an account of the historically specific forms of life to situate a period that is now largely remote and unknowable. Instead, MacAskill forces pre-

historical people into his nineteenth century understanding of human development. Perhaps even more importantly, while he recognises that history can be influenced by contingent events, he fails to take seriously the idea that human societies have been equally shaped by material factors, as the internal 'developments' of our rational and moral faculties. As a result, while he pays lip service to the idea that human beings can radically remake themselves during key moments of history, as we discuss below, MacAskill ultimately falls into a highly deterministic theory of human development and moral change.

In Part Two of *What We Owe the Future*, MacAskill addresses two key ideas: the ways in which moral attitudes and values can and do change over time, and the extent to which some or all of these values are 'locked in', whether by virtue of elements of our biology, history, or power dynamics. He suggests that human history is marked by 'moments of plasticity' wherein 'ideas or events or institutions can take one of many forms', which are followed by 'a period of rigidity or ossification…[where] further change is impossible without remelting'.[13] MacAskill is of course talking about changing norms and he points to an immense variety of instances, including the division of Korea, the formation and changing of the US constitution, nuclear weapons and climate change.[14] MacAskill believes that our current moment is a 'period where the values that guide civilisation are still malleable', meaning that we are at a crucial period in which human beings can actively shape our future.[15] We are, in other words, at a moment of historical juncture, where there are many paths to choose from. Of particular concern for MacAskill is the ongoing development of various forms of technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence. While he sees enormous potential for humankind in these developing technologies, he also worries they may be a vehicle for what he calls 'value lock in', in a way not entirely dissimilar to the persistence of values derived from the major religions:

What if AGI [Artificial General Intelligence] is still centuries away? It would still be of enormous importance because it creates a date at which the predominant values of a time could get locked in…Values could become even more persistent in the future if a single value system was to become globally dominant. If so, then the absence of conflict and competition would remove one reason for change in values over time.[16]

This is the crux of MacAskill's moral position in its relation to historical time: human beings lurch from periods of moral and value 'plasticity', or opportunity, in which the world can be remade, to periods of moral 'lock in', where value becomes rigid, and change is either very difficult or impossible. He rightly recognises the manner in which new technologies like AI might be co-opted by the powerful forces in human societies, and correctly sees this as a serious moral concern. The significance of the threat for MacAskill seems to derive from the fact that such an event would deprive human beings of 'value competition', a situation in which moral norms emerge victorious in a liberal marketplace of ideas. From this perspective, value competition is a necessary condition for genuine moral change.

But if MacAskill is so worried about the serious implications of, for example, an alliance of technology and power that would condemn human beings to a world in which the values and ideologies of the powerful were 'locked in', perhaps permanently, why does he side so

instinctively with the powerful? Perhaps more tellingly, why do the powerful seemingly love what he has to say?[17] Further, why does he consider today a period of 'malleable' values, rather than one of extraordinary ideological hegemony (a claim that is at the very least arguable and defensible)? The reasons are not due to nefarious intentions on behalf of MacAskill, but rather the naive nature of the effective altruism paradigm, of which he is a key representative. This movement, which as MacAskill himself says, uses 'evidence and reason'. Although he never spends any time reflecting on what is meant by these two ideas. Reason is assumed to be a natural, and largely neutral faculty that human beings employ, and evidence is considered to be neutral data that the rational faculties can process in order to reach a purely rational judgement. MacAskill ignores the fact that human concepts are themselves historical, and by extension marked by ideologies. He also seems uninterested in the idea that empirical evidence is almost never entirely ideologically neutral and must in any case be mediated by those very concepts. The explanation is that MacAskill, along with the rest of the Effective Altruism movement, are restricted to a very narrow positivistic account of what constitutes as evidence and reason, in which only some data is taken seriously, and only some accounts of the future of humanity are taken to be an example of urbane, neutral consideration. That the picture painted in such a theory follows the fantasies of the wealthy (we see depictions of both technological utopianism mediated by neurotic fears of the destruction of the planet) should come as no surprise, but they point to an important fact about MacAskill's argument. His positivism leads to a form of historical and technological determinism. While his model might allow for historical fluctuations between moral plasticity and rigidity, the bigger picture remains the same: moral progress relies on the commitment of individuals to choose wisely in the marketplace of ideas, in a quasi-Hobbesian competition of values. This kind of reason and evidence can only point to more of the same because the historical and ideological basis of its agenda emerges entirely from the status quo, from the ideas that are sanctioned by political and economic power. In what follows below we provide some concrete examples of the ways in which this approach leads to dubious and shallow readings of the historical sources and a highly limited philosophical understanding of social and moral change.

2. History Gone Wrong

The historical grounding for MacAskill's moral argument comes in a lengthy chapter devoted to the British abolition of slavery. This example is given considerable weight to provide an illustration of what moral change can do for future generations and at the same time helps tie his 'long-termist' view with struggles for rights. Indeed, his discussion of British abolition is one of the few parts of the book to address historical injustice. Unfortunately, his understanding of abolition, which he presents as closely following current scholarship, in fact betrays MacAskill's own political assumptions. Curiously, MacAskill declares at several points that Eric Williams' famous thesis in *Slavery and Capitalism* (1944) – that slavery had lost its profitability in the global emergence of capitalism – now 'doesn't hold up to scrutiny'.[18] Strangely, rather than introduce or engage readers with central issues in the history of abolition, MacAskill just dismisses Williams' position out of hand. Without any primary analysis, MacAskill paints Williams' thesis as simply one of economic inevitability, and instead offers a narrative of 'contingent' changes to moral attitudes as the decisive factor.

While there are many reasons to question Williams' argument, its continuing relevance is to refuse explanations of slavery that fail to acknowledge the relationship between capitalism and slavery.[19] William's *Slavery and Capital* plays this role in many contemporary accounts of slavery.[20] Ironically, Williams is used by MacAskill as a strawman in *What We Owe the Future* precisely to deny such a link.

The only time 'capitalism' is mentioned in the entire book is when the word appears in Williams' book title. Yet, the history of slavery cannot escape capitalism. The assumption underlying MacAskill's discussion is that moral factors and economic ones act relatively independently; the past, present and future of moral good is isolated from the history of capitalism. We will return to this point to argue that this approach reveals a major defect in his account of social change. But what we will focus on now, is that MacAskill's dismissal of Williams' thesis is less the careful approach of a considered objection, but rather evidence of a thesis that Williams himself attempted to challenge: that slavery was ended by British liberals with a faithful mission of moral progress. Williams was urged to change the title of *Slavery and Capital*. Struggling to publish the book, itself an adoption of a near heretical Oxford doctoral dissertation, Williams refused and was determined to publish the text with its now famous title. As Nick Nesbitt notes,

The mere titular conjunction of these two substantives, *capitalism* and *slavery*, in itself constitutes an ideological intervention, uniting what liberal, imperialist ideology had studiously held apart: the moral odium of slavery and the glorious historical progress of capitalism. Williams's considered formulation of this object of inquiry forced historians to confront the relation of these two social forms as a single variegated and historically evolving totality, initiating a debate that has only intensified with the passage of time.[21]

More significantly, MacAskill is at such pains to discredit Williams that he fails to consider the scholarship that he has himself provided as evidence. To take one example, MacAskill quotes the work of Robin Blackburn, a Marxist historian of slavery. MacAskill does not just draw on the statistical analysis Blackburn offers in his seminal *The Making of New World Slavery* (2010), but goes so far as to cite him as an ally against Williams and what he takes to be the economic explanation of abolition.[22] This is a surprising claim indeed, since as Blackburn maintains, the exhaustive empirical work in *The Making of New World Slavery* is 'consistent with the strong version of the "Williams thesis"'.[23]

Regardless, MacAskill rejects an economic explanation to place greater power in the hands of the individual who can agitate to shift moral values. MacAskill presents changing attitudes in the work of activists who challenge values and shift popular mindsets. While it is unfortunate that MacAskill only mentions the resistance of the enslaved in passing, he spends considerable time telling the story of the radical eighteenth-century Quaker, Benjamin Lay. MacAskill relies entirely on Marcus Rediker's wonderful *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist* (2017) to tell the story of this incredible figure. Rediker excavates Lay's life and thought to show the impact of activism to fight for social change. However, problems with MacAskill's scholarship emerge once again. A key part of

Rediker's argument is erased from MacAskill's selective narrative. Rediker makes clear that Lay 'believed that abolition must inform a revolutionary revelation of all life, premised on a rejection of the capitalist values of the marketplace' and 'would fold his antislavery principles and practices into a broader, more radical vision of human possibility'.[24] A central aspect of Lay's moral motivation to fight against abolition, as Rediker demonstrates throughout his book, was his politics.[25] Lay saw the struggle against slavery as part of a struggle for a just political order against slavery *and* capitalism. Of course, MacAskill might disagree with Lay and Rediker that there is a connection between capitalism and slavery, but it is strange to use this account as evidence for his position and remove such a core aspect of the political motivations in Lay's story.

These problems in MacAskill's use of historical sources points to a more fundamental issue in his understanding of history. It is telling that MacAskill's historical account so deliberately avoids politics, because it tells us something crucial about the philosophical tradition in which he is working, and its fundamental limitations when it comes to thinking about how human societies might be other than what they are.

3. Philosophy and Social Change

The question of history raises its head again and again in MacAskill's analysis, by virtue of its absence. *What We Owe the Future* not only showcases a lack of historical analysis, but also a lack of curiosity about the question of history itself, and by extension the changes human societies have undergone (again, supposedly a core interest of MacAskill).

Indeed, MacAskill's approach must be situated in its own history and immanent logic. We suggest that this is a vital aspect of analysis, as it highlights the intellectual debts MacAskill relies upon in *What We Owe the Future*, and the philosophical tradition in which it can be situated, as well as showing clearly why it is a failed project from the outset. The two major problems of MacAskill's project are interlinked: it begins with a lack of engagement with the historical tradition of moral philosophy, typical of the kind of moral philosophy in which he is working, and ends, (once his project's limitations begin to appear on the horizon) with the resignation of philosophy's capacity to affect change in an historical moment. At best, philosophy can simply be an assistant to the mechanisms of contemporary power. Philosophy can request more funding, but little more. This initial historical ignorance, we argue, goes beyond a mere lack of knowledge or interest in 'the history of ideas', the latter phrase implying that the past is simply a matter of curiosity, and not an active site of rational engagement. On the contrary, the failure to engage seriously with the rich tradition of moral philosophy, leads MacAskill to an ahistorical and naive 'first principles' approach, which overlooks contemporary and nuanced engagements with the very problems he seeks to answer. The result, in the end, is the abdication of philosophy's genuine normative potential.

One philosopher to whom MacAskill owes a great intellectual debt is Derek Parfit, one of the leading Oxford moral philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century. MacAskill, who considered Parfit a mentor, is open about these debts. The beginning of the chapter 'Is it Good

to Make Happy People?', is devoted to introducing the lay-reader to the mythos of Parfait's life. Here was a man who 'lived almost all of his life in educational institutions', who was 'utterly single-minded in his pursuit of improving our moral understanding', and who 'would read philosophy while brushing his teeth'.[26] MacAskill quotes a New Yorker profile: 'The driving force behind Parfit's moral concern was suffering. He couldn't bear to see someone suffer'.[27] As Stephen Mulhall recently wrote in the *London Review of Books*, 'You don't have to be Nietzsche to see in Parfit's adult life a particularly stark version of an ascetic ideal that has its historical roots in the religious framework his family inhabited, but which has mutated into a variety of avowedly secular cultural forms, in science, art, and philosophy'.[28] This asceticism led in the end to a form of intellectual withdrawal. Despite Parfit's obvious genius, what he lacked was an account of how philosophy might engage seriously with its intellectual tradition, in part because he considered our moral traditions to be too steeped in religious doctrine. This worry led to a style of philosophy highly reliant on counterfactual thought experiments that sought to extract the grounding of our moral intuitions. But his fierce intellect was almost entirely unmoored from the tradition of moral philosophy, and did not recognize the engagement with its history as a feature of genuine philosophical reflection. There is a similarly ascetic streak to MacAskill's own approach (he preaches simple living and vegetarianism, and gives away a significant portion of his income) which sits awkwardly with his orientation towards the rich as collaborators. Living a simple lifestyle, but looking for capitalist patrons cannot but help excuse the excesses of capitalism. While we do not doubt either Parfit or MacAskill's good intentions, we suggest that their brand of ascetic utilitarianism is reflective of an intellectual tradition that has no conception of how philosophy relates to its past. As we will show, this has profound philosophical implications.

MacAskill's failure to engage with a serious account of social change derives from a failure to understand the relation between the past, and an alternative future. A core part of MacAskill's argument concerning our debts to future people, deals with the non-identity problem, the paradox popularised by Parfit in his landmark *Reasons and Persons* (1984).[29]The problem, part of the sub-area known as 'population ethics', grapples with the idea that an act may still be wrong if it does not directly harm anyone in particular. The paradox emerges from the troubling observation that it is impossible to simultaneously hold three core beliefs: one, that for an act to be wrong it must harm someone (person affecting), two, that bringing someone into existence whose life is pleasurable although flawed is not a bad thing for that person and, three, that some acts that bring people into existence are wrong even if they do not harm anyone.

Talking in broad strokes, the traditional route here in analytic philosophy of the past fifty years has been to deny the first of these beliefs (person-affecting) but in a manner that suggests this is a radically new and ground breaking position. It ignores entirely the fact that there are several intellectual traditions that accept it as a given that this first belief is clearly false. While Parfit to his credit saw the need to overturn the person affecting view, he saw it as a radically new path in philosophy, and one in which he struggled with for the remainder of his life. As a committed utilitarian, how was one to ground an account of the good that simultaneously maximised the utility of as many people as possible, while also accepting that some things

could be wrong without directly affecting someone or, to put it another way, without affecting the ledger of utility? This is, of course, a serious challenge within the domain of utilitarianism, and one that Parfit was never able to fully address successfully. But Parfit was unwilling to look beyond his methodology of poking at our moral intuitions by increasingly obscure counterfactual thought experiments. This is a process that largely ignored the question of radical normative transformation and assumed an almost naturalised account of the utilitarian basis of our collective moral common sense, and simply looked to discern the reasoning behind our already established moral commitments. This is typical of the ahistorical approach of the tradition in which MacAskill is operating: it is not simply a case of historical ignorance, but rather a case of failing to engage philosophically with core arguments. In short, it is actually quite straightforward to conceive of an account of moral wrongness that is unrelated to how it affects someone. Problems like climate change, a popular example for the non-identity problem, can be (and perhaps may *have to be*) conceived as wrong (and wrong in a manner that catalyses ethical action) in ways that do not focus on the experiences and harm of the atomised subject. But for the utilitarian, this is a serious impasse.

MacAskill is similarly stuck, but for different reasons to Parfit. Where Parfit rejected the so-called 'Repugnant Conclusion' (a situation in which a world with many more only marginally satisfied people can be counted as having a greater net utility than a world in which a smaller number of people are fabulously happy), MacAskill, somewhat controversially, is open to accepting the repugnant conclusion.[30] This preference for the 'Total-View', in his own words the view that 'one population is better than another if it contains more total wellbeing', leads him to conclude that, 'we should hope that future civilisation will be *big*. If future people will be sufficiently well-off, then a civilisation that is twice as long or twice as large is twice as good'.[31] MacAskill visualises a utopian future, with humanity living for a million years, exploring and colonising space, a case of exponentially expanding utility. He argues that the repugnant conclusion is inescapable because it rests on what he considers three incontrovertible arguments.[32] The arguments themselves are less important than the process of argumentation – all of the arguments are confined entirely within the intellectual domain of utilitarianism – that this approach to ethics is the best is simply taken for granted. For MacAskill, the repugnant conclusion, a worldview that consigns an entire population to what Parfit described as 'listening to Muzak and eating potatoes', is the best option because, in his view, the others are even more repugnant.[33] That these are the only options possible for living a human life is seen as self-evident and is dictated purely by the weight of numbers. We are left, then, with differing modalities of a repugnant future.

While MacAskill wants to depict the potential future of humanity in optimistic, utopian terms, it is difficult to see the justification for this, given his argumentation. This level of repressed resignation is a product of his historical blindness, the cul-de-sac of technical and complex population ethics a direct result of his failure to engage with other moral traditions. Again and again, he does not recognise, or simply ignores, that such traditions have existed since the beginning of philosophy: for example, Aristotelian ethics, or neo-Aristotelianism as shown in the moral writings of Alasdair MacIntyre. There is not a single reference to John Rawl's account of justice, or indeed to other Kantian accounts. Kant's idea of the moral law has

provided many contemporary moral philosophers with a rigorous account of why something may be wrong, not for its consequences, but because it violates norms to which we might rationally aspire. For instance, according to Christine Korsgaard's moral philosophy, itself an interpretation of Aristotle and Kant, human beings act by rationally evaluating reasons that bear normatively on the ends we value.[34] Our moral self-evaluation requires acting on laws that are self-legislating, that is, norms which we take to be binding on our own action and meaning as moral beings. Similarly, but unsurprisingly, MacAskill omits the rich criticisms of modern moral thinking (utilitarian and otherwise) in G.W.F. Hegel and Friedrich Nietszche, as well as contemporary thinkers as varied and important as Charles Taylor, Martha Nussbaum, Iris Marion Young, and Robert Brandom. While MacAskill might very well disagree with these arguments and points of view, to fail to engage with the core of the Anglo-American moral tradition in which he claims to take part, betrays not just a mere disagreement, but a failure of philosophical process. Engagement with such scholars would not necessarily affect the popular style of *What We Owe the Future*, since the book cites a wide range of disciplines. In fact, the absence of engagement with philosophical scholarship is noticeable, as if MacAskill's employment as a professional philosopher makes detailed analysis of other philosopher's work unnecessary. Aside from the engagement with Parfit, out of the 42,500 words of notes and 22,000 bibliography – which must be accessed at https://whatweowethefuture.com/ – philosophical discussion is seldom cited, drawn on or engaged with. Simply put, the book is not supported by sufficient philosophical argument.[35]

Despite the secular framing of MacAskill's project, and in particular his focus on *applied* problems of moral philosophy, his admiration for Parfit the man betray the real roots of this particular brand of Twentieth century analytic moral philosophy: namely, a fundamental retreat from the world, an ascetic refusal to engage with reality itself. This may seem a strange claim about a book that's core concern is the material welfare of future generations, and a philosophy that purports to want to be accessible to everyone beyond the ivory tower of academia. However, the architecture of MacAskill's claims are symptomatic of an intellectual tradition that has lost entirely any genuine understanding of how critical reflection may alter the lives and social reality of human beings.

That this future will be mediated by rampant population growth, particular forms of economic organisation, and the increasing presence of AI is taken for granted, and thus naturalises one comparatively recent account of human beings' socio-historical reality. There is no serious engagement with the phenomenon of social antagonism (class or otherwise), and almost no confrontation with how happiness (net utility), relates to social relations and power structures. Contextualised within the history of the utilitarianism of the past fifty years, MacAskill's work can be seen as a form of treading water – intellectually the dead end was reached some time ago, but the full implications of that death are still to be fully borne out. Rather, once the highly-abstract methods like Parfit's were seen to lead nowhere, when the supposed 'purity' of utilitarian thought experiments and first principles reasoning failed, moral philosophy was reduced to an instrumental role. It abdicated its responsibility to whatever the reigning ideology considers most effective: the charities, the policy makers, the ruling class. In short, in a book about humanity's future, and of how we might escape the disasters of our past, there is

no understanding of human beings as historical creatures and, by extension, what is actually required for human beings to re-imagine and remake our material conditions.[36] While MacAskill would undoubtedly deny this charge, and point to the ways in which *What We Owe the Future* is geared towards practical research and policy, it is very notable that beyond some of his broader speculations about how states might reconcile their antagonistic relationship with future challenges like climate change and AI, his specific normative directives are almost entirely focused on the actions of the individual. The role of ethics, once again, and as Adorno warned, is reduced to a form of personal administration: who to vote for, which charity to donate to, and which billionaire to root for.

4. What We Owe the Past

In the final (and curiously short) chapter entitled 'What to do', MacAskill unwittingly conjures an image that gets to the heart of a fundamental tension of his moral philosophy. Although his book is predicated on the necessity of making educated projections about the future, he also concedes that it is intensely difficult to know what the future may look like.[37] MacAskill muses that some of this difficulty derives from the grammatical form of almost all languages, the necessity of grammatical tense in some way mediating our collective comprehension of our relation to the future and the past: 'the future is ahead of us and the past is behind'.[38] A model for reorienting our perspective comes, he argues, from the Aymara language, in which 'the future is behind us and the past is in front of us'.[39] For the Aymara people, life is predicated on what can firmly be known: namely, the present and the past. Their thinking about the future is inferred from what we know about the past. MacAskill suggests: 'The implicit philosophy is that, when making plans for the future, we should take much the same attitude as if we were walking backwards into unknown terrain'.[40] Here, MacAskill unconsciously conjures the historical metaphor of Benjamin's Angel of History, without any of the associated implications. Benjamin writes of the Angel,

His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. His face is turned towards the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe…The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings…This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.[41]

Benjamin's famous passage is much disputed in the scholarship, but it strikes us that in some key respects it is precisely MacAskill's vision of morality and history that Benjamin was seeking to criticise, not merely as a philosophical exercise, but also as a crucial political act. Benjamin sees the Angel's plight as representative of a broader, deterministic perspective on humanity's predicament in a world operating under the ideology of progress. It embodies a situation in which human life in the present (in particular the ways we organise ourselves politically) is linked in a very specific and ossified way to our understanding of the events of the past. We are, in a sense, products and prisoners of a gradual historical progress. This blind adherence to the status quo eliminates any other articulations of what it might mean to live a free human

life, and the ways in which the past might be used productively to catalyse such an articulation. Benjamin understood that a real moral philosophy, derived from a renewed interrogation of our relationship to our past, might assist in re-imagining humanity's relationship to power. Instead, Benjamin suggests that 'conformism' to such a status quo stultifies thought. He argues that class struggle which is so often written out of history, provides a conception of change in terms of 'the tradition of the oppressed'. For Benjamin, history is not a story of linear progress, but a struggle for emancipation. To look forward towards emancipation requires renewing the past, to 'wrest tradition away from conformism' in the name of future shapes of freedom.[42]

Despite suggesting that, all things being equal, the present is largely a positive 'place to be', MacAskill simultaneously seems to want to use the past as an important anchor for an account of our ethical commitments to those who are not yet born. As we have outlined, he spends a good deal of time in the opening chapters arguing for the ways in which human beings can influence the future, and the manner in which the future is not set. He argues that 'the future could…be very good – or very bad.'[43] But he also maintains that things are for the most part better now than they were in this nebulous time before the present. While he insists that progress is not inevitable, that a positive future for humanity rests on our moral actions (both individual and collective) today, he nonetheless assumes in his model that the future will be marked by much the same set of political, social, and economic relations that the liberal understanding of historical progress deems likely.[44] Notably he seems to consider the spectrum of possibilities for humanity future to range from a dystopian 'one where a single totalitarian regime controls the world, of where today's quality of life is but a distant memory of a former Golden Age' to a 'world where everyone lives like the happiest people in the most well-off countries today.'[45]

What Benjamin understood, and what MacAskill fails to consider, is that if we are to think seriously about human life and its future, our moral lives cannot just be generated by a mere looking towards the future and an uncritical acceptance of whatever common sense deems important about our past. While the question of the good life may involve a gazing upon the past as a renewed point of orientation, as MacAskill clumsily suggests, Benjamin shows that it is not simply a case of looking back at the 'barbaric' past and thinking about how it might be improved. In particular, Benjamin illuminates the way the myth of progress hides the fact that all the great achievements of humanity were also marked by the violence of power; that human history was not a story of gradual liberation, but one in which even the greatest achievements of human beings was a testament to its barbarism. For Benjamin, these traces of the past, both legacies of barbaric cruelty, as well as unfulfilled other possibilities for a free human life, can be recognised in the present, and generative of a genuine interruption to the status quo. These 'lost' possibilities of the past can thus be, in a sense, redeemed, for the sake of those living now and, by extension, those who will live tomorrow. We suggest that by taking seriously the examples from history (even if only half-remembered in fragmented form) that refuse to be subsumed into the victorious narrative of progress, that alter our collective understanding of what humans beings were and might still be, there is a genuine promise of re-imagining and re-making the present.

Ultimately, Benjamin's account gestures to a nuanced understanding of how a serious historical understanding that acknowledges the past both as a series of disasters, but also as a locus of hope, can orientate our moral actions today. This allows us to see the past not as something chronologically behind us, and a series of past events to 'learn from' in a march to progress, but rather a contested site in which human beings seek to articulate an alternative way of living and acting together. Thus, our future will need to have a history. In our view, our moral orientation cannot detach one from the other. Because MacAskill has an uncritical concept of history, and of how things might be different, it makes sense that his practical morality leads him to ally himself with the powerful entities that *could* change at least some things in our current historical moment. But of course, this change would be conditional on things staying the same. As Benjamin's use of the Angel of History shows, MacAskill's understanding of what might change is highly restrictive, and implicitly accepts the premises of only one particular account of what the relationship between the ethical and the political might be. Uncritically accepting the power dynamics of the present day, he fails to see that it is this understanding of humanity's future – wherein a particular social relation between human life and happiness is reified – that dooms us to continue on the trajectory he rightly suggests may 'lead to the complete destruction of civilisation'. [46] Again, capitalism must be named.

The implications of Benjamin's critique of progress, in particular the moral dimensions of such a view, are taken up more concretely by his friend and colleague T. W. Adorno. In a 1963 lecture, Adorno spoke of the possibility of moral philosophy in the present:

On the question of whether moral philosophy is possible today, the only thing I would be able to say is that essentially it would consist in the attempt to make conscious the critique of moral philosophy, the critique of its options and an awareness of its antinomies.[47]

Adorno understood that the very historical conditions that humanity found itself in following the Second World War (conditions that continue to obtain now) made the possibility of a genuinely moral life extremely precarious. The antinomies of philosophy reflect the dualism of a form of life defined by the production and exchange of commodities. Adorno is deeply critical of moral trends that restrict thought and maximise action, the intellectual origins of which he considered to be forms of domination.[48] Adorno argues that approaches to moral action that seeks to undercut the critical reflection immanent within are not moral and, instead, serve only the goals of reigning ideology. The reason for this was because such an individualistic approach to moral action becomes an atomised, administrative form of personal regulation and development; it contains no self-reflective moment wherein one 'hold[s] fast to moral norms, to self-criticism… and at the same time to a sense of the fallibility of the authority that has the confidence to undertake such self-criticism.'[49] In other words, it contains no critical moment that interrogates the material conditions in which a subject strives to be moral, and the extent to which those conditions may render moral action impossible. He concludes, thus, that there can be 'no ethics…in the administered world.'[50] This is, in short, morality that has degenerated into ideology.

Adorno's position is often interpreted as pessimistic, of essentially ruling out the possibility of a

moral life in modernity. We consider this mistaken, in particular when Adorno is understood as adopting Benjamin's commitment to the re-imagining of the present. Adorno's criticism of moral philosophy was strictly the criticism of its possibility in a specific historical moment, and in particular the unreflective assumption that the conditions in which a human being thought had no bearing on her capacity to act morally. Adorno's insight that this form of thought cannot produce anything new, and certainly cannot alter the status quo, we think, actually contains a critical insight into our collective situation. Such a ruthless and honest appraisal of the dire nature of the present (whether social, economic or political) is arguably the best perspective from which to engage seriously again with the problem of the good life, and what it means for us all. MacAskill's failure is that he has not engaged with this problem at all. Much less, MacAskill assumes that what we owe the future is compatible with capitalism. On the contrary, as Adorno helps show, MacAskill's philosophy is an administrative morality. It takes for granted the nature of history, and its relation to power, and instead tells the atomised subject what to do in that series of relations.

Conclusion

The central issue with MacAskill's utilitarianism is that it leads to the intellectual cul-de sac of positivism. Here is a world in which all thought, all forms of reflection, have been reduced to their purely instrumentalised forms, whereby thought can only be of moral use when it is aligned explicitly with capital and technocratic endeavour. The morality of doing good is always mediated by the structures that already dominate our lives: states, banks, corporations, celebrities, charities, NGOs. The question of the good life is forfeited for what good one can do and just as quickly becomes one of buying into the relations of domination The broader question of what it might mean to think and act ethically in such a historical moment is abandoned in favour of logistical questions. Indeed the act of taking the time to reflect is almost seen as suspicious – thinking looks almost gratuitous, almost a waste of time, when so many people are, and will be, in need. But as the last gasp of positivism, we are left alone; MacAskill leaves us without an ability to think, let alone change, our collective situation.

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[1] *Twitter, Inc. v. Musk*, C. A. 2022-0613-KSJM (Del. Ch. Sep. 22, 2022).

[2] William MacAskill, 'Effective Altruism: Introduction', *Essays in Philosophy*. 18:1 (2017), 2.

[3] James Kent and Michael Lazarus, 'Peter Singer is the Philosopher of the Status Quo', *Jacobin*, 21/10/2022.

[4] William MacAskill, *What We Owe the Future* (London: Oneworld, 2022), 9. Subsequent references, *WF.*

[5] *WF*, 9.

[6] *WF*, 9.

[7] *WF*, 13.

[8] *WF*, 13.

[9] *WF*, 13.

[10] For reasons that seem unrelated to the argument, MacAskill even provides a chart for us to visualise what it might have meant, physically speaking, to inhabit a world alongside the Dire Wolf, or the towering Megatherium (a giant ground sloth).*WF*, 29-30.

[11] *WF*, 31.

[12] *WF*, 31.

[13] *WF*, 40.

[14] *WF*, 40-43.

[15] *WF*, 43.

[16] *WF*, 92.

[17] MacAskill's first book was praised, for example, by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. See https://medium.com/bill-melinda-gates-foundation/the-case-for-putting-your-head-where-your-heart-is-e5523da22f50, accessed 11/8/23/. Elon Musk also expressed his admiration, see https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1554335028313718784, accessed 11/8/23.

[18] *WF*, 63.

[19] Nick Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022), 13-31.

[20] For instance, Thomas Piketty, *A Brief History of Equality* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2022), 55 and H. Reuben Neptune, 'Throwin' Scholarly Shade: Eric Willaims in the New Histories of

Capitalism and Slavery', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 39 (2019).

[21] Nesbitt, *The Price of Slavery*, 15.

[22] *WF*, 282.

[23] Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (London: Verso, 1997), 542. See also Nesbitt's critique of Blackburn, *The Price of Slavery*, 41-51.

[24] Marcus Rediker, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist* (London: Verso, 2017), 7, 95.

[25] Ibid., 116, 133, 137, 141.

[26] *WF*, 167.

[27] *WF*, 168.

[28] https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v45/n11/stephen-mulhall/non-identity-crisis, accessed 15/6/23.

[29] See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 351-79.

[30] See Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 381–90. See also *WF*, 181-4.

[31] *WF* 179, 189.

[32] WF, 181-84.

[33] Derek Parfit, "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life," *Applied Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer, 145–164 (Oxford University Press, 1986), 148.

[34] Christine Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 45.

[35] We struggled to find over thirty references to specifically philosophical sources in the bibliography and where we did – ten references are entries from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,another ten to introductions to Chinese philosophy and six to Parfit.

[36] In a review of the book for the Effective Altruism affiliated "Giving What We Can", Michael Townsend lists a series of things he learnt and further questions he has after coming to grips with MacAskill's argument. Very notably, almost all of them are configured around questions of individual action and ambition. See https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/about-us, accessed 7/8/23.

[37] *WF*, 224.

[38] *WF*, 223.

[39] *WF*, 223.

[40] *WF*, 224.

[41] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Selected Writings: Volume Four, 1938-1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.

[42] Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 391, 394.

[43] *WF*, 19.

[44] 'There's no inevitable arc of progress'. *WF*, 245.

[45] *WF*, 21, 20.

[46] *WF*, 21.

[47] T. W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Oxford, Polity, 2001), 167.

[48] Ibid, 171. These trends 'ceaselessly confront people with demands, without leaving them time to reflect: All right, so what are you going to do about it?'

[49] Ibid, 169.

[50] Ibid, 176.

The War in Ukraine and Putin’s Vlast: a sociological perspective

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

The true causes of the war in Ukraine are part of a larger picture of social transformation throughout Eastern Europe. To see it in its entirety, we need a science-based understanding of the nature of Putin’s rule with some help from sociology – not the kind that is reduced to opinion polls, but the sociology that analyzes the cultures that make a society, i.e. specific social groups and their values.

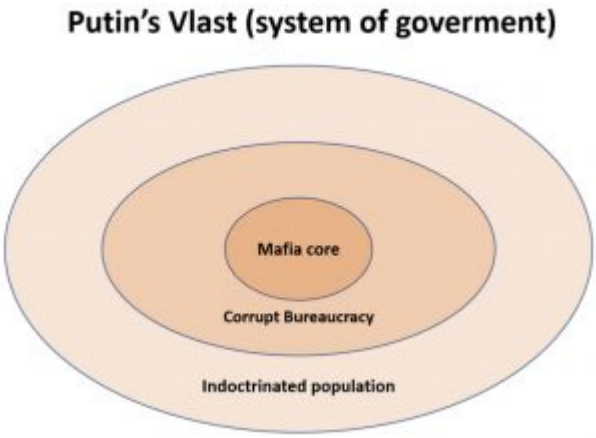
State Capture and Group Culture

There is consensus among Russian opposition politicians, as well as social scientists studying Russia, that the country’s viability and prosperity are linked to a transition to freedom and democracy. This transition began in the 1990s but was interrupted in the 2000s by a state capture by a specific sociocultural group. Why is it not just a social group characterized by income or status, but also a cultural group? This is because it is based on a certain way of life, beliefs, values, and ways of achieving group goals. In the case under consideration, these parameters can be seen as elements of an atavistic, archaic and traditionalist culture that contradict the modern structure of society and parasitize it.

In the very first years after Vladimir Putin came to power, it became obvious that the state-capturing sociocultural group he headed had managed to combine the practices of organized crime and state law enforcement, including the government's monopoly on violence. The resulting system can be defined as predatory and patrimonial.[1] The latter means that Putin's group is guided by the value of the unlimited power of the "pater," the head of the family. In the framework of modern society, this implies the parasitic role of simplified, traditionalist mechanisms of artificial kinship, in other words, mafia.

The task of the mafia state that has developed in Russia has been to establish a father figure, head of the family, the cultural center for the "brothers" (*bratki*),[2] little knights, as the father of the people, whose rule should not be limited by democratic constitutional norms. Simplifying, we can apply the Russian political scientist Grigory Golosov's characterization of Putin's power as a personalist autocracy.[3]

As a result, Russia has developed a system of state power (*vlast*) that can be described as mafia core that co-opts corrupt bureaucracy and pursues the goal of indoctrinating the general population through mass deception in order to reconcile them with the state capture by the mafia and instill the idea of "stability". It can be visualized as follows.



Launching the democratic transition

Not only according to Russian oppositionists, but also from the point of view of objectivist social science, the precondition for a democratic transition in Russia is political demise of Vladimir Putin as the basis of Russian personalist Vlast, or government system. This also means that moving him to any other position within the existing power system—be it a Russian version of Kazakhstan's Yelbasy[4], prime minister or head of parliament—is not an acceptable option for him. There can be no "successor" for Putin, as this destroys the very foundations of the personalist mafia core of the state to which its other parts—from the corrupt bureaucracy to the mechanism of mass indoctrination—are attached.

But what will happen after Putin? The initial phase of almost any scenario of democratic transition, that is, the period immediately after his political disappearance, will include the need for the Russian leadership to respond to the obvious primary expectations of Russians, those of peace and some economic prosperity. A government of "Patruchevs"[5] will not have the necessary resources to continue Putin's foreign policy. Even such a government would have to end the war in Ukraine, which is entirely Putin's enterprise. Even Patrushevs, not to mention Sobyanins-Mishustins,[6] will have to present a program of economic improvement to the people of Russia.

Putin's three scenarios of the war

However, in order to figure out the structure of democratic transition, one has to "get inside the criminal mind," i.e., to make sense of Putin's main war scenarios. Given the cultural determinants of Putin's mafia rule, there can only be three such scenarios—A, B and C. Once started, Putin's war will go on until the end—that is, until Putin ceases to function as the mafia capo di tutti capi. The only question is the form of conducting the war.

The failures of Scenario A (blitzkrieg, offensive on Kiev in the first weeks of the war) and Scenario B (protracted fighting in eastern Ukraine, things like the fixation on Bakhmut) lead to

the relocation of Putin's "endless" war to the territory of Russia itself, i.e. to Scenario C. At the same time, it is important to understand the following:

– Ukraine's victory is a **necessary but not sufficient condition** for Putin's demise. It should be understood that at this moment the resources of Putin's vlast significantly exceed the costs of its admitting defeat on the battlefield and turning NATO into the main enemy "operating on Russian territory".
– Putin's demise is **sufficient, but NOT a necessary condition** for Ukraine's victory. That is, Ukraine can cope with the aggression even if Putin is still in charge of Russia, although his demise guarantees speedy victory for Ukraine.

Unfolding with defeat in Ukraine, but with Putin still in power, Scenario C means a civil war on Russian territory in one form or another. It is important to understand that it is not civil war in the classical sense of "brother against brother" or a war between regions of a large disintegrating country. Its nature lies in the struggle between a modernist (based on political and consumer choice) civil society and a traditionalist (archaic, patrimonial) system of mafia state. That is, Putin's Scenario C will represent the last, and the second, along with the period of 1918-22, acute phase of the Civil War that unfolded in the post-imperial Eastern European space more than a hundred years ago.

Scenario C

Speaking about the only alternative to democratic transition, the outcome of Scenario C is possible as turning Russia into a "besieged fortress" only under the condition of Putin's long-term political survival and finding a comprehensive and, at the same time, acceptable to the free world way of its protection by China. More likely are other outcomes of Scenario C leading to Putin's demise and Russia's subsequent, rather quick setting on the path of democratic transition.

Given the high probability that authoritarian rule in Russia will continue for some time since no occupation by foreign powers is at the moment envisaged, the speed and quality of the initial phase of democratic transition will depend on three main factors:

1. resources of the Russian system of vlast, after it loses Putin as its core;
2. the degree and character of the pressure on the system from the external environment (the free world);
3. the degree and character of the pressure on the system from the internal environment (civil society in Russia and in the diaspora).

Here is an important reservation:

- – Establishment of totalitarianism in Russia is impossible due to the lack of mass ideology and system of ruling party management; this is impossible even if Putin remains in power, so the "North Korea option" can be ruled out.
- – Immediate transition to a personalist system of vlast (government) headed by some

Putin’s successor is impossible, as it requires a very long time to build it.

Not to give in to impression management

For both the Russian movement of resistance to Putinism and, more importantly, for the leaders of the free world, it is crucial to understand that Putin’s behavior is that of a specific cultural agent of the mafia type. We are facing here a “secondary deviant” who does not simply practice deviant behavior as an elementary social offense, but who has interiorized the role of a criminal and uses it as his main sociocultural capital.[7] For a secondary deviant, the key social technology is impression management,[8] which in Putin’s case axiomatically includes lying, bluffing, blackmailing, and use of euphemisms such as “foreign agent” instead of “enemy of the people,” “special military operation” instead of “war,” and so on. Putin’s war in Ukraine in this context is a euphemism for war against his own people.

It is crucial for analyzing Putin’s rule and Putin’s war to understand that, being guided by the desire to indefinitely postpone his political demise in Russia, he launched this war in order to cope with something that is unbearable for his vlast. What is unbearable is the influence on the Russians of the positive example of democratic and economic development of the most important neighbor. For Putin, it is the prospect of Ukraine’s sociocultural modern consumerist success that decides everything here, not the geopolitics of Ukraine’s NATO membership. Within the framework of his terrorist rationality, Putin is by no means ignorant of the insignificance of the threat from NATO, but at the same time he is extremely anxious to sell this threat to his domain as an element of the general mafia impression management.

Therefore, the task of scientific enlightenment of both ordinary Russians and western politicians is to confront Kremlin’s justification of the war in Ukraine as being waged between Russia and NATO or for the purpose of reconquest and development of certain historical lands. To counter the inflated image of Putin as someone who is “great and terrible”, a preeminent geostrategist of our time, one needs to employ simple explanations of his aggression as not at all imperialist or colonialist, the idea that popular interpreters like Timothy Snyder are trying to sell, thus playing into Putin’s hands. For all its destructive character—and because of it—the war has for Putin and his mafia culture primarily the symbolic function of terrorizing primarily the Russian population, i.e., his own mafia domain, by demonstrating what Putin can do to them if the internal threat to his vlast becomes critical. In other words, the external war for Putin is an indirect intimidation tool to be used against the Russians, a euphemistic device within the framework of impression management in order to impose martial law in Russia in a situation where its direct imposition would lead to radically strengthening the public resistance to his eternal rule.

How to strengthen the fronts

The offered perspective should strengthen all the three anti-Putin fronts—on the battlefield in Ukraine, in the political circles of the free world, and among the Russian civil society on both sides of the country’s border. The illusion of military and political “escalation,” including the

imaginary threat of a tactical nuclear attack, must not be succumbed to. Putin's opponents must exercise control over the deviant from a coercive position, which will lead to the final collapse of Putin's Scenario B, but will also hasten the full launch of Scenario C, elements of which have already been launched in one way or another—primarily in the form of growing political repressions in Russia.

It should be made clear that talks about Putin preparing new wars against other than Ukraine neighbors after his defeat in this war are groundless, since he will not have the resources to do so even with hypothetical full financial and economic support from China. On the contrary, Putin is already allocating greater resources to fighting resistance inside Russia, the population of his own domain being his main existential threat, and is preparing to throw all his remaining forces at it after his defeat in Ukraine.

Therefore, the principal sociological recommendation here is as follows: the reasonable position of the Russian anti-Putin resistance is to realize the inevitability of a further unfolding of such a conflict inside Russia, the scale of which may surpass the scale of the war in Ukraine,[9] to accept its role in this conflict and to strengthen its modernist potential to counteract the forces of the past. What can be added to support this conclusion is that the June 2023 mutiny of Evgeniy Prigozhin, the head of the notorious Wagner mercenaries and an important actor within Putin's mafia state, and his elimination in August only confirm the logic of Putin's war transitioning from Scenario B to Scenario C when the chaos with which Putin has tried to manage the unfavorable situation starts to hit him back.

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[1] Magyar, B., Madlovics, B. (2020) The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes, Central European University Press.

[2] Stephenson, S. 2015 Gangs of Russia: From the Streets to the Corridors of Power, Cornell University Press.

[3] See: https://holod.media/2023/02/01/russians-against-democracy

[4] Yelbasy is the specially assigned honorary father-of-the-nation and, in fact, power exerting role assigned to the former Kazakhstan president Nursultan Nazarbayev which he performed until the riots of January 2022.

[5] Nikolai Patrushev has previously served as the director of the Federal Security Service

(FSB, the KGB successor), the chief “silovik”, i.e. law enforcement agent, seen as one of the key members of Putin’s inner circle, the “hawk” of the war and internal repressions.

[6] Sergei Sobyanin and Mikhail Mishustin play the role of economic “technokrats” in Putin’s government as opposed to “siloviki”.

[7] Lemert, E. M. (1951). Primary and secondary deviation. In E. Rubington, & M. S. Weinberg (Eds.), The study of social problems: Seven perspectives (pp. 192-195). New York: Oxford University Press.

[8] Goffman, E. (1959) The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Penguin Books.

[9] See Ilya Yashin’s interview to Der Spiegel where he says that a “bloody disappointment awaits Russia”: https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/kreml-gegner-ilja-jaschin-auf-russland-wartet-eine-blutige-ernuechterung-a-aca59dbe-04d8-44b4-b979-a96bf2b3b800

Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, the Pioneering Bolshevik Theorist of Imperialism, National Liberation and Socialism

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

The first show trial of a Bolshevik

Given his prominence as a high-ranking Bolshevik, Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev is very little known. This is partly because he was cut off early in his career by persecution and ultimate execution in Stalin's purges and his writings suppressed for decades, but also due to distortion and lack of comprehension of his arguments even by many anti-Stalinists. This is a pity, because there is much we can learn from his writings as well as his practice even today.

The son of a progressive Tatar schoolteacher from a poor peasant background and a mother from a much richer Tatar noble family, he learned what he called 'class hatred' when he encountered bullying from her relatives at her father's estate. What attracted him to the Bolsheviks was their opposition to both class and imperialist oppression (Hamziç 2015, 4–5). He joined the Bolshevik Party as a young man of 25 in 1917 and became a member of the

‘Central Muslim Commissariat,’ a new body affiliated to the Narkomnats (The People’s Commissariat for Nationalities, led by Joseph Stalin). Thanks to his talents as an orator and organiser, he soon became its president. Although professing atheism himself, he recommended that instead of combating Islam, the party should ‘de-fanaticise’ and secularise it, believing that the Muslims of Russia, especially the Tatars, would then be able to play a major role in the revolution (Rodinson 2004). The basis for this belief was his own experience in the Kazan Tatar Teachers’ School, which was a centre of the *jadid* movement seeking to modernise the social, cultural and educational practices of Muslims (Guadagnolo 2011, 5–6). Subsequently, working as a teacher and journalist, he was drawn into revolutionary circles and married Rauza Chanysheva, who shared his political views and became a leading figure in the women’s liberation movement (Mukhamedyarov and Sultanbekov 1990, 110).

In addition to being an original thinker, Sultan-Galiev became an important Bolshevik leader, and played a critical role in the civil war:

“Sultan-Galiev was in the front ranks of the Tatar Bolsheviks, he was active in establishing Soviet power in the Volga region, in crushing nationalist rebellions, in organising the defence of Kazan in August 1918 and in liquidating the results of the seizure of Kazan by the White forces. Sultan-Galiev distinguished himself through his organisational talents, his bravery, his gift for propaganda and his ability to win people over in the worst conditions… A simple list of all the responsibilities assumed by Sultan-Galiev shows the level of trust accorded to him by the Party and the Soviet government… altogether he occupied twenty posts…

We have no reliable sources on Sultan-Galiev’s conversations with Lenin, but many matters connected with Sultan-Galiev’s work, such as his appointment to the Narkomnats, were decided with Lenin’s participation. Lenin was well acquainted with Sultan-Galiev’s letters on difficult questions to do with national construction. He also took part in a conversation with Lenin, along with leaders of the Tatar Bolsheviks, on the question of education in the Tatar ASSR.

The period of May-June 1919 is particularly important. He was appointed by the Orgburo of the Central Committee to the Revolutionary Military Soviet (revoensovet) of the Second Army on the Eastern front which was commanded by one of the greatest generals of the civil war, V. I. Shorin. It is known that the situation on the Eastern front in March and April 1919 was critical: the Soviet troops had withdrawn from Izhevsk, Sarapul and many other towns which were under threat of occupation just as Kazan was in August 1918. At this critical moment, along with other outstanding political workers, such as P.K. Shternberg and A.K. Safonov, Sultan-Galiev restored the fighting capabilities of the army and prepared a counter-attack.” (Mukhamedyarov and Sultanbekov 1990, 110–11)

Yet on 4 May 1923 he was arrested, expelled from the party, and subjected to a show trial from June 9–12 in which he was accused of (a) treason and (b) factional activity. A meticulous examination of the records led Stephen Blank (1990, 162–63) to conclude that ‘The evidence is overwhelming that it was on Stalin’s initiative that he was arrested and then tried’; Stalin’s

claim that he had evidence of Sultan-Galiev's treachery in 1920 yet did nothing about it for three years 'suggests that Stalin did not have the means to fabricate the "evidence" of treason till 1923, nor perhaps the power to do so.' In fact, the intercepted letter produced by Stalin to accuse Sultan-Galiev of factional activity *within* the party contradicted the claimed contents of the letter (never released) which purportedly advocated an anti-party conspiracy.

Other Muslim delegates, who also came under attack, averred that the situation in Central Asia was no better than it had been under Tsarism, and that the 'fear of being arrested or shot' prevented them from speaking freely. Leon Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and other members of the Central Committee failed abysmally to defend Sultan-Galiev, who was left with no option but to confess to the crimes he had been accused of and promise good behaviour in the future in order to stay alive. 'Apart from the profound consequences for nationality policy, the outcome and proceedings of this conference strongly suggested that Stalin was abandoning debate with his rivals in favour of destroying them politically, psychologically, and personally' (Blank 1990, 168, 170–72, 175).

Sultan Galiev at Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organization of Oriental Peoples (1919)

Indeed, Sultan-Galiev was destroyed in all these ways by his expulsion from the party and denunciation as a counter-revolutionary. As he wrote in despairing incomprehension, 'The counter-revolutionary label, glued to me, oppressed me even worse because in my heart I considered myself a Communist, a Leninist, a party member, a revolutionary. I am in all parts of my being protesting against it… I considered this a great injustice towards myself and experienced it as the greatest tragedy' (Sultan-Galiev 1923–25). Even as the trial was ongoing, he wrote a powerful self-defence in jail addressed to the Central Control Commission of the Communist Party, with additional copies to Stalin and Trotsky. It was entitled 'Who Am I?' and in it he reasserted his dedication to a worldwide socialist revolution, defended his criticisms of the party's nationalities policy and his own belief that the socialist revolution depended on the liberation of all colonies, and refuted all the accusations against himself, thus contradicting his 'confession' (Guadagnolo 2011, 1, 22–27).

One leader who was absent from this drama was Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. He had been struck down by a severe stroke in December 1922, after which he was housed in the Kremlin under strict instructions from Stalin that only his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, his sister, three or four secretaries and the medical staff would have access to him, and he should be given no information about state and party affairs. When Krupskaya broke these orders, with the doctor's permission, Stalin phoned her and, in her own words, 'piled unworthy abuse and threats' on her (Lewin 1968, 71). The degree of Stalin's surveillance over Lenin gives credence to the claim by German communist trade unionist Heinrich Brandler that by 1921, Lenin's phone was already being tapped (Blank 1990, 163). Despite his partial paralysis, he dictated what came to be called his 'Testament'. In March 1923, Lenin suffered another severe stroke that left him unable to speak and half his body paralysed (Lewin 1968, 103). Bedridden, in April he was unable to attend the Twelfth Party Congress, at which Sultan-Galiev openly rejected Stalin's nationalities policies (Guadagnolo 2011, 18–19). In July, his health began to improve, and by October he was able to wander around Moscow and see visitors, who brought him news and discussed current affairs. At the beginning of 1924 he attended a Christmas party, and between January 17 and 20 spent time reading the report of the Thirteenth Party Congress, but suddenly died on January 21 (Lewin 1968, 175–176). Prior to his death he suffered from severe seizures, suggesting to specialists at a clinicopathological conference focused on historical figures at the University of Maryland that he died not of a stroke but of poisoning (Kolata 2012).

Having worked closely with Lenin and feeling that Lenin would understand and agree with his position on the national question, Sultan-Galiev believed that 'Ilyich would be interested in my business and restore me to the party. I looked forward to his recovery. His death killed this hope in me. Ilyich's loss for me was, therefore, a double blow,' the death of a much-loved comrade as well as any hope of rehabilitation (Sultan-Galiev 1923–25). This testimony was given when he was re-tried in 1928, after which he was sentenced to ten years of hard labour in the Solovki concentration camp (Rodinson 2004). Meanwhile, the charge of '*Sultangalievism*' was used to purge party members from Muslim nationalities who were seen as posing a challenge to Stalin's line (Guadagnolo 2011, 31–32). They might have been replaced by Stalin's appointees from the same nationalities, but this was analogous to Vladimir Putin's replacement of Aslan Mashkadov, elected president of Chechnya, by warlord Ramzan Kadyrov, appointed by himself (Hensman 2018, 66–71). In 1939 Sultan-Galiev was sentenced to death as an enemy of the state and shot in January 1940. His wife and two children suffered the same fate. Only in May 1990, during Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* campaign, did the party finally rehabilitate him (Guadagnolo 2011, 38).

What were the positions that resulted in Sultan-Galiev's arrest, expulsion and execution? Was he right to believe that Lenin would have protected and reinstated him? An examination of their work can give us some clues.

Sultan-Galiev and Lenin on the National and Colonial Question

In the second part of a three-part article published in *Zhizn' Natsional'nostei* (Life of the

Nationalities) 39 (47) in 1919, Sultan-Galiev starts with the commonly-accepted position among Bolsheviks at the time that the Soviet system was the antithesis of the bourgeois-capitalist state and the Russian revolution had to develop into a worldwide revolution or otherwise risk obliteration. Understanding this, the leaders of the October Revolution looked to the West to internationalise their revolution. This is where he differed with them:

“It is true that the West European states, including their ally America, appear to be the countries where all the material and “moral” forces of international imperialism are concentrated, and it would seem that their territories are destined to become the chief battlefield in the war against imperialism. But in no way can we confidently say that there is enough strength in the Western proletariat to overthrow the Western bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie is international and worldwide, and its overthrow demands a concentration of all the revolutionary will and all the revolutionary energy of the entire international proletariat, including the proletariat of the East.

In attacking international imperialism only with the West European proletariat, we leave it full freedom of action and manouver in the East. As long as international imperialism, represented by the Entente, dominates the East, where it is the absolute master of all natural wealth, then so long is it guaranteed of a successful outcome in all its clashes in the economic field with the working masses of the home countries, for it can always “shut their mouths” by satisfying their economic demands.

Our hopeless expectations of revolutionary aid from the West in the course of the last two years of the revolution in Russia eloquently confirm this thesis.” (Sultan-Galiev 1919)

In the third and last part of his article, published in *Zhizn’ Natsional’nostei* 42 (50) in 1919, Sultan-Galiev starts by outlining how the indigenous peoples of the Americas were wiped out and tens of millions of Africans enslaved by West European imperialism, which then ‘turned its attention to the East, with India as its main goal’. He returns to his thesis that ‘the East on the whole is the chief source of nourishment of international capitalism,’ and therefore, ‘Deprived of the East, and cut off from India, Afghanistan, Persia, and its other Asian and African colonies, Western European imperialism will wither and die a natural death’ (Sultan-Galiev 1919). But there is a twist:

“We must never forget that, if on the one hand the East as a whole is completely enslaved by the West, on the other hand its own national bourgeoisie applies a no less heavy “internal” pressure on the laboring masses of the east.

We ought not for a minute forget the fact that the development of the international socialist revolution in the east must in no case limit itself only to the overthrow of the power of Western imperialism, but must go further. After this first stage, a second stage must be reached. This second stage is the complex question of overthrowing the Oriental clerical-feudal bourgeoisie, which pretends to be liberal, but which in reality is brutally despotic and which is capable, for the sake of its own selfish interests, to instantly change its stance toward its former foreign adversaries." (Sultan-Galiev 1919)

He can hardly be accused of being soft on the colonial elites; indeed, with remarkable prescience he warns that 'we are not in the least safe from the possibility that, after the overthrow of Western European imperialism, an Eastern imperialism will emerge' (Sultan-Galiev 1919). Yet he saw the revolution as requiring national liberation for all colonies, including former Tsarist ones, and where the proletariat constituted a minuscule minority of the population and was, moreover, impoverished and uneducated, felt that cadres should be recruited from the middle-class intelligentsia and even the reformist clergy. 'He wanted to make Kazan into a centre for Tartar national culture and… worked towards making Tartar and not Russian the official language of administration' (Rodinson 2004).

During his period in Narkomnats, Sultan-Galiev travelled extensively and gained an intimate knowledge of the diversity of conditions in the Muslim regions. For example, in an article in April 1920, he welcomed the establishment of 'Soviet Azerbaijan with its old and experienced revolutionary proletariat and fortified Communist Party'. By contrast, when he was sent to investigate a crisis among Crimean Tatars in February and March 1921, he was sharply critical of the lack of local Bolsheviks, the exorbitant use of terror, the neglect of important issues of land reform, education and public health. He warned that the glaring disparity between Soviet government officials relaxing in 'Red Resorts' and Crimean Tatars dying in the streets of hunger and disease had made Crimean Tatars view Soviet power as a new form of European imperialism. His article 'How to Conduct Antireligious Propaganda Among Muslims,' published in December 1921, demonstrates a nuanced argument that both the importance of their faith in the everyday lives of Muslims and their demoralisation resulting from defeats by imperialist forces need to be taken into account in conducting such propaganda. He recommended training Bolsheviks in the intricacies of Islam before they undertook such work among Muslims and banning former Orthodox Christian missionaries who had joined the Bolsheviks from participating in it. They should also tailor their message to the religious cultures that were dominant among particular communities: a more secular culture among Tatars, animism and

superstition in Bashkiria, religious dogmatism in Turkestan, Khiva and Bukhara (Guadagnolo 2011, 12–16).

His articles and policies were very much part of a Marxist debate that had begun well before the Russian Revolution. Lenin, starting from a position that favoured centralisation of the party and state and assimilation of non-Russian ethnic groups in the empire into the Russian language and culture, changed his position as a result of debate with Marxists from the Tsarist colonies, the capitulation of Second International leaders to ruling class imperialism in 1914, and his own hatred of racism and 'Great-Russian chauvinism,' a term which he used to mean something like the ethnic Russian equivalent of White supremacism (Blanc 2016). One consequence of this change was his insistence on the right to self-determination of the former Tsarist colonies, up to and including their right to secede from any union with Russia. There was strong opposition to this position within the party, but Lenin's position prevailed, with full independence granted to Poland, Finland and the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the formation of fifteen union republics with the right to secede, and dozens of autonomous republics and regions.

"Within this constitutional framework, for most of the 1920s the Soviets pursued a range of policies aimed at promoting the national, economic, and cultural advancement of the non-Russians: priority to the local language, a massive increase in native language schools, development of national cultures, and staffing the Soviet administration as far as possible with local nationals. Collectively, these policies were known as *korenizatsiya,* or 'rooting.' Although widely opposed by local Russian (and some non-Russian) communists, these policies were generally successful in establishing local national leaderships and strengthening national identities associated with particular territories that formed the basis for what later became the post-Soviet independent states." (Smith 2004)

Stalin was at the opposite extreme, intent on moving towards total centralisation and an aggressive Russifier despite being of Georgian origin himself (Lebedev 2023). When Lenin, recuperating from a stroke, got news that one of Stalin's collaborators had resorted to physical violence against a Georgian party member who objected to centralisation, he was horrified (Lewin 1968, 68–69). At the end of December 1922, he dictated the following notes:

"It is said that a united apparatus was needed… [T]he apparatus we call ours is, in fact, still quite alien to us; it is a bourgeois and tsarist hotch-potch… It is quite natural that in such circumstances the 'freedom to secede from the union' by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is…

Here we have an important question of principle: how is internationalism to be understood? …

In my writings on the national question I have already said that an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made

between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation… [W]e, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it…

And I think that in the present instance, as far as the Georgian nation is concerned, we have a typical case in which a genuinely proletarian attitude makes profound caution, thoughtfulness and a readiness to compromise a matter of necessity for us. The Georgian [Stalin] who is neglectful of this aspect of the question, or who carelessly flings about accusations of 'nationalist-socialism' (whereas he himself is a real and true 'nationalist-socialist', and even a vulgar Great-Russian bully), violates, in substance, the interests of proletarian class solidarity, for nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice…

It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities. The need to rally against the imperialists of the West, who are defending the capitalist world, is one thing. There can be no doubt about that and it would be superfluous for me to speak about my unconditional approval of it. It is another thing when we ourselves lapse… into imperialist attitudes towards oppressed nationalities, thus undermining all our principled sincerity, all our principled defence of the struggle against imperialism. But the morrow of world history will be a day when the awakening peoples oppressed by imperialism are finally aroused and the decisive long and hard struggle for their liberation begins." (Lenin 1922)

Lenin's own authoritarianism undoubtedly played a role in enabling Stalin's rise to power (Blank 1990), but they were implacably opposed to each other on the issues of national liberation of Russia's colonies and the rights of ethnic minorities. Sultan-Galiev had good reason to believe that Lenin would have protected him – and, indeed, all the other Bolsheviks who supported what was then called 'national self-determination' – from expulsion and persecution. Lenin's illness and death allowed Stalin to reverse his policies on the national and colonial question. 'Great-Russian chauvinism' was redefined as 'internationalism,' support for self-determination as counter-revolutionary 'nationalist socialism', and Bolsheviks who argued for the latter were liquidated. Subsequently, whole peoples – for example the Ukrainian and Muslim nations – were subjected to what Raphael Lemkin (1953) called 'genocide' for failing to accept ethnic Russian supremacism, while the secret protocols of Stalin's pact with Hitler in 1939 allowed him to re-colonise part of Poland and the Baltic republics.

A forerunner of underdevelopment theory and the Non-Aligned Movement

After his show-trial, Sultan-Galiev was released but kept under constant surveillance. He knew his writings and activities therefore had to be clandestine. This whole experience led him to reconsider his core beliefs:

“Communism, according to my analysis and a new understanding, was pictured to me as a new and progressive form of European nationalism…, meaning the policy of consolidation and unification of the material and cultural forces of the metropolitan countries under the aegis of the proletariat… According to my theory of imperialism, imperialism is inherent in capitalism in general, regardless of the stage of its development… From my formulation, therefore, there was a possibility in the theory and practice of the existence of socialist or communist imperialism, since at this stage of its development international capital (which must grow from a revolution into socialism) represents a system of colonial management.

I here ask you not to confuse my concept with the battered and rotten lampoon of Kautsky and the dirty lies of the imperialist bourgeoisie about the ‘red imperialism of the Soviets.’ From my same theses, you will see that I am an irreconcilable enemy both of the world bourgeoisie and Menshevism.” (Sultan-Galiev 1923–25)

His formulation, which assumed that Russia and the Comintern remained proletarian and communist, was certainly confused, but so was Trotsky’s characterisation of Soviet Russia as a ‘degenerated workers’ state’. What is more significant is that his analysis was one of the earliest from the left that designated Soviet Russia as capitalist and imperialist. Raya Dunayevskaya (1941) and C.L.R. James (1986[1950], 6–11) came to the same conclusion on the basis of a more rigorous Marxist analysis, while of course rejecting the notion that Soviet Russia was in any sense proletarian, socialist or communist.

Sultan-Galiev’s unfinished draft document divides the world into two camps: 20–25% of the world’s population constituting the colonisers and imperialists, and the rest constituting the colonised, including the aboriginal peoples of the Americas and Australia. He characterises the relation of ‘the peoples of the West (metropolitan countries) to the peoples of the colonies and semi-colonies’ as one of ‘slave-holding’. By this point one gets the impression, strengthened later, that ‘the West’ includes Russia. He doesn’t deny class oppression in the metropolitan countries but says that ‘the people of the West extended their system of intra-national slavery (if serfdom in the epoch of feudalism was a form of slave-owning economy, then class oppression in the era of capitalism is also slave-owning – the exploitation of man by man, but only in another, reformed form) entirely to their colonies – …thus giving an international character to it and transformed it into an “international” system of slavery.’ He continues,

“In the hands of the metropolitan countries with some 300-350 million people has accumulated all the main means of production (factory industry), means of circulation (financial capital and its apparatus), ways and means of transportation and communication (sea routes, railway lines, air messages, telegraph and radiograph); as well as sources of raw materials (oil, coal, ore, animals and plant products) and markets for industrial products. In this respect, the West seems to be a giant octopus, embracing with its tentacles four-fifths of humanity and sucking from it all its vital juices. To this we must add that the octopus is not an ordinary octopus from under the waters of the ocean, but an octopus-armadillo… armed with the latest military art and military “inventions” of the West…”

However, he continues, colonisation is not simply an extension of monopoly capitalism to the colonies and semi-colonies but something much worse: a deliberate 'delay of the development of the domestic productive forces of the latter,' 'suppression of the growth of their material culture,' 'preservation of the agrarian, purely peasant character of these countries,' and 'the absence or underdevelopment of national industry'. All this is aimed at securing sources of cheap raw materials and captive markets for the industry of the metropolitan countries and is an inherently conflict-ridden process, requiring the brutal suppression of independence movements in the colonies as well as competitive wars between metropolitan countries. He is scathing about the irrational and wasteful nature of this world economy:

For example, some wool or leather raw materials from Tibet, India or Afghanistan should get to the UK, turn into cloth, shoes or other goods and then travel back to their "homeland." Or, for example, Turkestan or Transcaucasian cotton (by the way, together with the Baku oil) must first make a trip to the country of the "civilized" – somewhere in Moscow or Ivanovo-Voznesensk and, turning into a manufactory or something else, to do the opposite (secondary) journey to the same Turkestan or Transcaucasia, and sometimes further – to Persia, Afghanistan, etc…

The waste of mass human energy for the constant and regular "protection" of the existing order of things and the structure it requires, in other words, the existing irrationality in the organization of the world economy and the relevance of this social negligence (injustice)… expresses itself in the rabid militarism of the West, in the monstrous growth of its land, sea, and air armaments and the corps of internal and external guards. The peoples of the West are protected not only from the oppressed peoples of the colonies and semi-colonies and from all sorts of "yellow," "black" and other "dangers" and "panisms," but also "from each other."

Here we get confirmation that Russia is seen as part of 'the West' or 'the metropolitan countries,' its colonies no different from Tibet, India or Afghanistan. This is borne out as he proceeds:

We will not dwell in more detail on the movement of Egypt, Morocco and other African or Asian colonies of the West, because these are well known in their basic features. Here we will highlight the movement of the colonial peoples of Russia. We note that the liberation movement in the colonies of Russia (Turkestan, the Caucasus, Ukraine, the Crimea, Belarus, the Turkic-Finnish and Mongolian peoples) is evident. If the defeat of tsarist Russia by Japan in 1904, which caused the revolution of 1905, contributed to the awakening of national self-consciousness of the colonial, oppressed peoples of this country, its defeat on the Western and Caucasian fronts in the world war that caused the revolution of 1917 only deepened the process of the liberation movements of these peoples. The facts of the separation of Poland, Finland and the small Baltic states from Russia; the facts of the emergence of the Tatar, Bashkir, Kirghiz, Central Asian, Transcaucasian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian and other republics, as well as a dozen autonomous national regions, systematically fighting for the expansion of sovereignty rights, eloquently confirm this position…

By establishing the USSR, the pan-Russians would like to restore, in fact, a single, indivisible Russia, the hegemony of the Great Russians over other peoples…

The former Russia, which was restored under the present form of the USSR, will not last long. It is transitory and temporary…

All this is remarkably prophetic, prefiguring the emergence of theories of underdevelopment and neo-colonialism as well as the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. It is also innovative, and we can learn from it even today. Instead of the First, Second and Third Worlds, where the Second World (the Soviet Union) encompasses both the imperial metropolis and its colonies; instead of the 'Global South,' which excludes Russian colonies; there is a simple two-fold division between imperialist countries and colonies.

The practical part of Sultan-Galiev's theses counterposed the national liberation of colonies to the Bolshevik formula of self-determination and counterposed an 'International of the Colonial Peoples' to the Communist International. His comrade Yunus Validov, who was expelled from the party, as well as other comrades 'questioned the correctness of the basic slogan of "colonial dictatorship over the metropole,"' which indeed conflicts even with Sultan-Galiev's own observations on authoritarianism in the colonies and their economic backwardness as a result of underdevelopment. During intensive discussions between Validov and Sultan-Galiev, they decided that the social base of their International would be workers, peasants and the petty bourgeoisie, and a tactical alliance with the progressive section of the national industrial bourgeoisie. Their headquarters would be in one of the Eastern countries. Validov would contact Sun Yat-sen in China and the independence movement in India, Sultan-Galiev himself would organise a small but strong nucleus within the USSR. The death of Validov put an end to these plans, but Sultan-Galiev continued to puzzle over the conundrum of the relationship of national liberation to communism, showing that he had not abandoned the goal of a communist society.

Decades later, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) formed something similar to an 'International of Colonial Peoples'. The first summit of the NAM was convened in Belgrade by Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sukarno of Indonesia and Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia in 1961. The leading role played by Tito, who had resisted Stalin's efforts to dominate Yugoslavia, indicated that in principle the NAM was open to Central and East European countries too. Opposed to alliances with either of the imperialist blocs and all forms of colonialism and imperialism, the third NAM summit in Lusaka reaffirmed support for the 'national independence and full sovereignty of all nations on a basis of equality,' as well as disarmament and world peace. It explained that the policy of non-alignment was 'the product of the world anti-colonial revolution and of the emergence of a large number of newly-liberated countries'. Pledging 'their utmost possible moral, political and material support to national liberation movements,' the conference condemned Western support to apartheid South Africa, expressed solidarity with the people of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau in their struggle against Portugal, and full support to the heroic struggle of the people of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos for freedom and independence while condemning the invasion of

Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union (Resolutions of the Third Conference of Non-Aligned States 1970).

Conclusion

The persecution and execution of Sultan-Galiev was a disaster for himself and his family, but it was also an enormous loss to socialists everywhere. Even in his bitterness and disillusionment post-1923, he remained a visionary, prefiguring theories of underdevelopment and neocolonialism and the foundation of the NAM. He even went beyond them in recognising the colonial relationship between Soviet Russia and the former Tsarist colonies, which was invisible to most anti-imperialists until after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991; indeed, to this day there are socialists who fail to acknowledge this relationship. Had his writings been more widely accessible, for example, there would have been immediate recognition that the Russian invasion of Ukraine constituted an attack on a former colony by an imperial power.

His earlier writings and activities too are in need of popularisation, including his insistence that a world socialist revolution cannot be achieved unless the working people of colonies and semi-colonies participate actively in it. He was tackling a question which no one, from Marx and Engels onwards, had answered satisfactorily: what should socialists be doing in a colony where only a small minority of working people are proletarians? If a socialist revolution can be made only by the whole proletariat when it constitutes the vast majority of working people, as Marx and Engels believed, what kind of revolution is possible in these countries? It is possible that if Sultan-Galiev and his like-minded comrades had remained in the party and been free to put forward their views for debate instead of being silenced and slaughtered, they might have moved towards advocating a revolution against imperialism and pre-capitalist elites accompanied by the establishment of a democratic republic (‘the last form of the bourgeois state’ in which ‘the class struggle has to be fought out to a conclusion’ according to Marx (1875)), in which the working class, as it emerged, would have the freedom to organise and fight against capitalist as well as other forms of oppression.

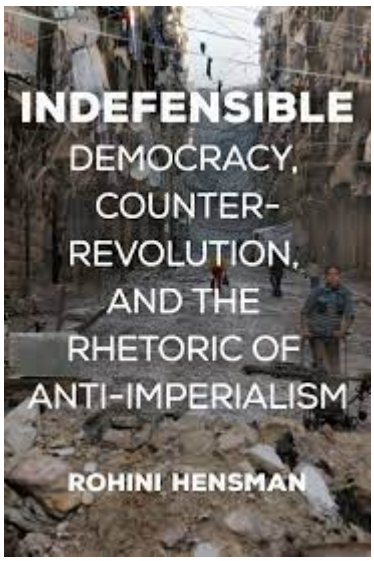
His insights on strategies to win over a population deeply immersed in a religious culture by combating fundamentalist clerics and other leaders while supporting those propagating secular and democratic interpretations of the religion are also very relevant. He was tackling a problem that plagues us even today: how to fight against Muslim fundamentalism and political Islamism while also combating anti-Muslim bigotry. His attention was concentrated on Islam, but around the world we see regressive, fundamentalist versions of all religions gaining strength and engaging in brutal oppression of religious minorities (including atheists and agnostics), women and girls, and LGBT+ people, and his strategies make sense in combating them all. Taken as a whole, his work was, as Hamziç (2015, 11) observes, marked by its ‘*avant-garde* awareness of religious, cultural and racial connotations of class struggle in colonial and post-colonial contexts,’ which would today be identified as intersectionality.

1923 marked a watershed in Russian history. It has been established that the stamping out of *Sultangalievism* was organised by Stalin, but he couldn’t have succeeded without the

collusion of almost all the top leaders of the party. The role played by Trotsky was especially disturbing. Lenin had entrusted him with the task of combating Stalin in the Georgian affair (Lewin 1968, 99), so he knew that in any clash between the nationalism of oppressed nations and the nationalism of an oppressor nation, Lenin would side with the former. Sultan-Galiev had sent him an extra copy of 'Who am I?' in which he refuted all the charges against himself. And he would have known that at the Twelfth Party Congress Sultan-Galiev was arguing not for the break-up of the union but for more equal relationships between Russia and its former colonies. He should have realised that Sultan-Galiev was no counter-revolutionary, opposed his expulsion and persuaded the rest of the Central Committee to do so as well. The fact that he did not puts a question mark over his understanding of imperialism and national liberation. Debating this issue with Sultan-Galiev within the party would undoubtedly have been more fruitful than expelling and silencing him.

Even after Sultan-Galiev was cleared of all charges and rehabilitated under Gorbachev, he has continued to be sidelined. A hundred years after he was subjected to a fate he experienced as the utmost cruelty, very little material by or about him is widely available. Much of what is available is distorted by Stalin's advocates and apologists, or by Cold Warriors from the other side of the iron fence who use Sultan-Galiev for their own purposes. A well-researched biography and comprehensive collection of his works in translation would be invaluable aids to making the most of his legacy.

Rohini Hensman is a writer, independent scholar and activist who comes from Sri Lanka and is based in India. She works on workers' rights, feminism, minority rights, globalization and democracy movements, and has been published extensively on these issues. Her most recent books are Workers, Unions, and Global Capitalism: lessons from India *and* Indefensible: Democracy, Counter-Revolution, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism*.*



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On Ken Kelman and His Theory of Cinema

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

The playwright and film theorist, Ken Kelman, was a contributor to Logos*. His longtime friend, P. Adams Sitney, has prepared an edited collection of Kelman's writings and unpublished lectures, which will be released by Anthology Film Archives. In memory of Kelman, below is Sitney's introduction to the forthcoming collection. We are also publishing an excerpt from Kelman's lectures. We have selected his lecture on Kenneth Anger, Isidore Isou, and Christopher Maclaine in honor of Kenneth's Anger's passing.*

Ken Kelman died in late spring 2017. At the time he was still writing plays but he probably had not written on cinema for at least ten years. In fact, as far as I know, the only new film he had seen in the 21st Century was Jerome Hiler's *Words of Mercury* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in March 2012. I know that only because I urged him to attend the screening with me. It was the last time I saw him, although we spoke on the telephone a few times after that.

Kelman was a hoarder. His apartment was overflowing with Tibetan art, and boxes of manuscripts of plays, the few unpublished novels he wrote, lots of prose, perhaps recordings of his lectures, and probably even gold coins.

We met in 1960 or perhaps 1959 in New Haven, when I was attending highschool and he was at the Yale Drama School studying playwriting under John Gassner. I had founded The New Haven Film Society in order to see classic films, mostly silent. In that period before videotapes, cassettes, or dvds it was nearly impossible to see such film outside of New York City (and even there it was supremely difficult). The Yale Film Society showed old films in their weekly screenings, but never silent ones. They hardly deviated from what was then the dominant taste of students: every year they showed *Casablanca* and *From Here to Eternity*.

(L to R) Ken Kelman, James Broughton, P. Adams Sitney, Jonas Mekas, and Peter Kubelka.

Kelman was a regular patron of the New Haven Film Society. He was very easily recognizable. He stood out, perpetually wearing a dark trench-coat, walking with the slightest stoop, apparently oblivious to everything around him. When I would encounter him on the streets near the university, I always walked and talked with him. There was no way to get in touch with him otherwise. I must have assumed he was gay, because he always came to the film society accompanied by a painter from the Yale Art School whose mannerisms suggested homosexuality. I was wrong. Kelman was a heterosexual, celibate as long as I knew him except for two very brief affairs with young women. He had been at the Harvard Law School and dropped out, and even in the army — from which he was given a general discharge as "untrainable."

He knew more about cinema than anyone I had met at that time. From him I learned about the work of Robert Bresson and Carl Dreyer's sound films. (I had already made a trip to New York to see *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* when the New Yorker theater gave a rare, one-night screening of it.) He taught me to appreciate Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and the charisma of Louise Brooks, but I could never share his later enthusiasm for such soft-core cult films as Olga's *House of Shame* (1964). In turn, I persuaded him of the glories of the American avant-garde cinema.

Kelman wrote very quickly and beautifully. At the New Haven Film Society, I had started a mimeographed journal, *Filmwise*. It grew out of the notes we handed out to the audience. The first issue as a full-fledged journal was completely devoted to the work of Stan Brakhage. After that each issue was centered on one or two filmmakers: Deren, Markopoulos, Maas and Menken. I asked Kelman if he might write something on *Ritual in Transfigured Time* for the second issue. After projecting the film for him a half-dozen or so times, he quickly wrote a brilliant essay, "Widow into Bride." He obliged again for the Maas-Menken issue (our last).

In the fall of 1963 I took a leave from college to prepare the first International Exposition of the New American Cinema to tour European cities. I was living in New York, assisting Jonas Mekas in editing *Film Culture*. Kelman attended screenings with me several days each week. His remarkable insights and lighting speed of writing was a great asset to us. Just one day after the first screenings of Markopoulos's *Twice A Man*, Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, and Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, Kelman delivered finished texts to the *Film Culture* office. He also wrote most of the accolades for the *Film Culture* annual awards in the late Sixties and early Seventies.

He was wonderfully articulate but weird. In New Haven, if I wanted to stop in a luncheonette for coffee or a burger, he would eat or drink nothing. He said he was trying to live on an exclusive diet of Kellogg's Special K cereal, so that after leaving the Drama School he could

live cheaply in New York City without working, or working only minimally. In actuality, he moved into his parents' apartment, outlived both of them, and died there some fifty years later. The only regular job I knew him to take was a year teaching film history at Bard College (1971-1972, I think), to replace me when I resigned.

Kelman was notoriously frugal, a comical skinflint. To get him to accept dinner invitations in my home, I had to provide him with two bus tokens for his trips crosstown from his parents' apartment of East 83^{4d} St. to mine, then on West 88th. At the same time, he was stupendously generous. If one asked to borrow thousands of dollars from him, would groan first, then bring the cash the next day. He never asked for a receipt. Nor did he mention the loan – sometimes for years –before it was repaid. I suspect several such debts went unhonored when he died.

When he did come to dinner, at my house or that of the architect Raimund Abraham, or less frequently at Jonas Mekas's loft, he carried an astonishing array of pills that he swallowed before eating. He would never eat anything hot, just has he would never touch a person, even to shake hands. His familiarity with changing health fads was impressive; he subscribed to several. When Daniel Pinkwater (to whom I introduced Kelman fifty years ago: they became fast friends) informed me of his death, he attributed it to malnutrition. Apparently, he believed his intake of pills was all he needed.

He saw films at the Museum of Modern Art, the Filmmakers' Cinematheque, and at private screenings when he was invited, but rarely, if ever, in conventional theaters, where he would have to purchase a ticket. He did watch old movies on television when they followed a basketball game. That was his preferred sport, but he loved games and puzzles of all sorts. To play "Scrabble" with him would have been a massive humiliation, if it were not so amusing to see how he accumulated astronomical scores, using up all of his letters several times in each game, and rarely failing to place a "q" or an "x" on the triple score square. The only time I ever saw him display intense emotion occurred when he was furious over what he took to be a violation of the rules of "Monopoly."

He did crossword puzzles faster than I could write, bragging that he could do the Sunday New York Times crossword entirely between any two stops on the Lexington IRT subway. He even splurged to enter a national crossword puzzle contest, convinced he would win the big financial prize, only to be frustrated when he learned that he alone of the top twenty contestants wasn't a professional crossword editor or author. Soon after I met him, he had been just as sure he would garnish a fortune from the "Famous Faces" contest of one of the New York tabloid newspapers. He was forever entering such competitions, never winning them.

All his adult life Kelman was primarily a dramatist. After he left The Yale Drama School he would write a play a year; longhand first, then type it out. In his later years he wrote plays less frequently. His enthusiasm was always unbounded for his most recent work. I believe he was convinced he was the greastest living playwright. In 1968, the year of his lecture series, "Exercises in Film History," at the Film-Makers Cinematheque on 80 Wooster St., he also acted in the first of Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater productions, "Angelface."

Foreman, who had been at the Yale Drama School with Kelman, also used the Film-Makers Cinematheque space to launch his theater. He was the only American contemporary in the theater I ever heard him praise.

Near his death, Kelman felt his fantasy of a Broadway production was within reach: his father had bequeathed a couple of rundown apartment buildings on Long Island to him and his sister; she was negotiating their sale the last time we spoke, some months before his sudden death. With his share of the sale, he planned to mount a production of his play, *Four Sisters*, on Broadway. He was not concerned that it might close after a night or two: for him, the expense of two or three million dollars would be worth it.

In recent years, I often received inquiries from people who did not know Kelman about why he was on the selection committee of the "Essential Cinema" for Anthology Film Archives when it began in 1970. Although he ceased going to films and wrote nothing about cinema in the decades prior to his demise, in 1968 he was a prominent figure at the Filmmakers Cinematheque. Jonas Mekas, its director, asked him to offer a series of lectures on the history of cinema. They agreed upon a full year's sequence—fifty-two Thursday night screenings followed by an analytical and historical lecture every Monday evening, to be entitled "Exercises in Film History." Consequently, when the selection committee of Anthology Film Archives was formed two years later, Kelman was the best informed and most articulate film historian of the group. Already, at that time, he identified himself as an "ex-film critic."

Advertisement for Ken Kelman's lectures at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque

The scope of his knowledge of cinema and the depth of his insight was astounding. His role at Anthology Film Archives demonstrated that, even for those who had not heard his lectures. On the Selection Committee for the "Essential Cinema" he was the most articulate and least polemical member. After fifty years, I have come to realize that he was almost always right about his inclusions and exclusions. The selection process for films to be included in the "Essential Cinema" collection had been conceived as on-going and perpetual. But a severe financial crisis terminated that process around 1972. The theater had to move, first to 80 Wooster St, the home of the former Filmmakers' Cinematheque, and many years later, to the Courthouse at Second Avenue and Second Street. Likewise, the published anthology of essays on films in that collection, *The Essential Cinema*, was intended to be issued annually. That too had to be terminated when the promised funding was withdrawn. It was no accident that the essays by Kelman dominated that initial volume; he wrote on von Stroheim's *Greed*, Buñuel first three films, all four films of Jean Vigo, Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*, Bresson's *Pickpocket*, Levitt, Loeb and Agee's *In the Street*, Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night*, and Bruce Conner's *Report*. Those filmmakers, and most of those films, had been among those screened (or were initially scheduled to be screened) in his "Exercises in Film History."

Unfortunately, I could not hear most of the lectures he gave at the Filmmakers Cinematheque. I had left for Europe in charge of the Third International Exhibition of the New American Cinema the day after I graduated from Yale, in June of that year. I did not return until late July, 1968 just before the New York City licensing office closed down the 80 Wooster St. theater. Jonas Mekas arranged to move Kelman's lectures, and some other screenings, to the Washington Square Methodist Church. When that venue ceased to be available, the series was permanently suspended. I can vividly recall attending one lecture only [no. 40] – On Herbert Vesely's *Nicht Mehr Fliehen* and Peter Kubelka's *Mosaik im Vertrauen*. But my voice during the question period at the end of other lectures that summer proves that I attended most of those he gave once I returned to the United States. After lecture 40, I made a trip to Colorado and California. Yet by then the sequence was broken, and several lectures cancelled. There were no more advertisements for the series in the *Village Voice* after September 9, 1968 [lecture 39]. I believe lecture 40 was held, illegally in the building at 80 Wooster St. It was probably the last.

I have transcribed and included all the lectures that were saved on tape at Anthology Film Archives. I was surprised to find that many of them were repetitions of lectures I missed, restaged just for me. Since those were overwhelmingly Kelman's talks on avantgarde films, I must have selected which talks, or parts of talks, he was to repeat. My garrulous questions and interventions on recordings of those lectures embarrass me. Yet they also demonstrate my thinking, and the importance of Kelman as an interlocutor, during the early stages of the formation of my *Visionary Film*. In fact, they remind me that Kelman was the primary influence on the historical schemata of that book. As I wrote it, I was constantly arguing with him in my mind or confirming his insights.

The survival of a few audio tapes from the start of the series and from the end, complete with questions from the audience, suggest that more of them may have been recorded. The missing tapes might have been in Kelman's apartment when he died. All my efforts to contact his sister about the fate of his papers and possessions has failed, despite repeated phone messages and letters sent to her over three years. Kelman told me, repeatedly in the early 70s, that a woman [probably Joanna Gunderson of Red Dust Press] who attended some or all of the lectures wanted to published them. The few professional transcripts that remained in the files of Anthology Film Archives may have been the only ones she actually commissioned, but I find that unlikely. It is certain that Kelman never got around to editing them. Perhaps the publishing project fell through before he had a chance to start the labor. There is no mention of Kelman or of the lectures in her archives at the University of Indiana.

Kelman always lectured without a prepared text, depending on a fresh screening of the film to trigger his ideas. He was brutally honest about his ignorance of foreign languages, and repeatedly acknowledged aspects of the films he did not comprehend. Yet, he was convinced that in the act of discussing them he would discover their fundamental coherences. Thus, questions from the audience about specific images elicited new interpretations as often as confessions of bafflement. In lecturing he was exhibiting acts of discovery and demonstrating the workings of his acute sensibility. Among the impressive aspects of that sensibility was how

he could situate all the films he showed in an historical tradition. He distinguished covert influences and formal allegiances between films with great conviction. Both before giving "Exercises in Film History" and after it he wrote synoptic aesthetic speculations on the history of cinema: "Classic Plastics and Total Techtonics" and "Cinema as Poetry" were among the most important of these in the early period; and "Animal Cinema" and "Megafilm and Metafilm" afterwards. Perhaps, even more startling was his ability to articulate convincingly the bases of those linkages. Who but Kelman would have noticed the affinity of Kubelka's *Mosaik im Vetrauen* to Ruttmann's *Berlin*? or Isou's *Traité de bave et d'éternité* to Cocteau's *Le sang d'un poëte*?

An evolving theory of the essence of cinema subtends all of his speculations on film history. Its most sophisticated articulation can be found in "Animal Cinema" perhaps his last writing on film. The static images of the individual frames – often of people no longer living — are "raised from the dead" by the rapidly flickering light of the projector. The concept of "Life" resonates throughout his writings on film. I do not know if he ever read all the way through Siegfried Kracauer's *A Theory of Film* [1960]. I am convinced he perused it, at least. To a remarkable degree he shared its thesis that the primary function of cinema has been the representation of reality. In this respect, Kracauer leaned heavily on Georg Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie*. I am equally convinced Kelman knew nothing of Simmel. He didn't read philosophy, as far as I could tell. In fact, I believe he did most of his serious reading before I met him. Melville and Büchner remained his primary touchstones his whole life. He knew Greek tragedy and Shakespeare thoroughly, and I recall him extolling Tolstoy as a dramatist. But the only book I heard him praise while he was reading it was Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past.* After consuming the first two volumes with enormous enthusiasm, he bogged down in *Guermantes Way.* He never got further in it.

Apparently, he came by his affinity to Kracauer from his intense scrutiny of most of the same films that the German-American social theorist studied, rather than stimulated by Kracauer's own insights. Yet the differences of their orientations are more significant than their over-lappings. Kelman's passion for cinema was tied to his antirational and pessimistic, or rather tragical, view of existence. The realism he continually noted in the essence of cinema was always "magical." "Life" revealed itself in tis illusions. Eschewing the sociological perspective that made Kracauer apprehensive of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and horrified by *The Triumph of the Will*, Kelman praised the former as a masterpiece of cinematic subjectivity, and the latter as the cinema's ultimate "transfiguration" of matter into spirit. The spectre of death is explicit in the former, and implicit, but even more palpable in the latter through the historical fate it helped set in motion.

Kelman came to cinema with the tragic conviction that Life is most vivid (or in his terms, "intense") in the face of Death. A year or so before embarking on "Exercises in Film History," he sent a letter to the actress Louise Brooks [Feb 12, 1966], seeking material for a novel he had begun to be called *The Autobiography of Death: Fantasia on Louise Brooks* or *Meditation on Louis Brooks*. In that letter he confessed that after re-seeing one of her silent films: "… the beauties of the past deluged me. I was obsessed with time, mortality, change."

After the 1989 production of his play *Dead Still*, he composed a polemical abecedarium [unpublished] about his theater. Under "L" we find:

LIFE 1: I do not practice animation art. The so-called life (characters) of most drama is cartoons. No matter how lifelike, complex, humanly interesting, they are precisely animated. If someone on the stage just yells at us, we react with utmost intensity. It is certainly felt as life, though we know nothing of the shouter's internal process. Why must we be aware of all the machinery at work? Is it so exquisite? So credible? The shout is crude life, it lacks the complexity and elaboration possible in a nicely detailed cartoon. I prefer it, not on the grounds of verisimilitude but of veracity.

LIFE 2: The wages of life is death. The price is right.

(More than anyone else I've ever known, Kelman would have profoundly appreciated the irony of my probing his concept of Life, *after he died*.)

The bias toward Realism in the "Exercises in Film History" and in his other writings and lectures on film is merely apparent, and superficial. Kelman always extolled the cinema for its ways of representing "Life." The innovations in technique and perspective that he repeatedly made the center of his arguments were always methods of intensifying the Life he recognized in the films he discussed, fantasies as well as documentaries, avant-garde film poems as well as naturalist narratives. Even when he erred in his interpretations – as I believe he did in his discussion of *Menilmontant* – his keen observation of the dimensions of Life the filmmaker sought to capture made his analyses invaluable. The "Life" Kelman found at the cores of great cinema was a matter of the infusion of Spirit into the "dead' material of film frames. He charted the variations on Spirit as they were manifested in the films he loved: as breath, wind, inspiration. Yahweh, Frankenstein, and Jesus were central emblems of the film-maker for him.

Yet he subscribed to no religion. His family was Jewish, but not practicing. Once he told me he was not even circumcised, and that his father wasn't either. When I asked how this came about, since it was virtually unheard of among Jews of his generation not to circumcise boys; he told me he didn't know and that was not the sort of thing one could ask about in his family. In the Sixties he spoke frequently of the enthusiasm for the Christian ideas — Transfiguration, Resurrection, Pre-Ordained Fate – he had acquired from his reading of Tolstoy and the New Testament, and most of all, I suppose, from the films of Dreyer and Bresson. He also admitted being impressed by the claim of the Indian spiritual leader Meher Baba [1894-1969] that he was God or the Avatar. In later, years he seldom spoke of Christianity, but of Buddhism, especially in its Tibetan variety. He amassed a large and valuable collection of Tibetan art and ritual objects in his last decades.

Sometime after the founding of Anthology Film Archives, probably in the 1970s, Kelman gave at least two talks based on films in the Essential Cinema collection. The earlier of the two was on Carl Th. Dreyer's *Gertrud*, the other he called "Megafilm/Metafilm:" it was, in all likelihood, a distillation of the "Exercises in Film History." There is also a You-Tube recording of a lecture

he gave on *Ordet* and *Gertrud* at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. Running through all of his lectures there is an appreciation of the insight of the great filmmakers into hitherto unexplored, or under-explored, potentials latent in the transfigural, life-giving art form.

The enormous value of these lectures derives from five aspects of Kelman's expositions: the clarity with which he selects and analyzes significant details, the originality of his insights (born of a nearly total indifference to previous critical and theoretical literature), his implicit view of cinema as the culmination of an ineluctable human aspiration to reproduce the image of Life and to conquer Death, his insistence on uniting realistic and magical tendencies (or rather, that the illusion of reality is the highest achievement of magic), and the magisterial authority with which he isolates the individual achievement of each film artist in appreciating and molding what he imagines that artist understands to be an essential power of cinema.

P. Adams Sitney wrote Visionary Film*;* Modernist Montage*;* Vital Crises in Italian Cinema*;* Eyes Upside Down*;* The Cinema of Poetry*;* Marvelous Names*;* Brakhage, Straub-Huillet, and Deleuze*; and* Incongruous Pairings *[the last two still unpublished]; he edited five books in addition to Kelman's lectures and writings. He served time – half a century –in academia, teaching at NYU, Cooper Union, Bard College, The School of Visual Arts, and at Princeton University. He has been retired for eight years.*

On Kenneth Anger, Christopher MacLane, and Isidore Isou

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

The following is excerpted from a forthcoming collection of Ken Kelman's writings and lectures on film. The volume is edited by his longtime friend, P. Adams Sitney, and will be published by Anthology Film Archives. Logos *has also published Sitney's introduction to the volume in this issue. We have selected the following lecture by Kelman because it engages the work of the late Kenneth Anger. Anger passed away this year.*

Lecture 37: *The End*, *Eaux d'artifice* and *Venom and Eternity*

[*There seem to be no records of what Kelman said in Lectures 33-36. In 33* In the Street *[1948] was among the documentary films he showed and discussed. He wrote about it in* The Essential Cinema*, but nothing remains of his observations on* The Quiet One *[195],* On the Edge *[1948], and* The Lead Shoes *[1949] –all from 33 –,* Le journal d'un cure de compagne *[1951]—Lecture 34–,* Rashomon *[1950] — lecture 35 –, and* Loony Tom, The Happy Lover *[1951], or* Bells of Altlantis *[1952 – Lecture 36, although the discussion of* The End *[1953], from that lecture has been reconstructed. In the reconstruction, he discusses* The End *as if he had already spoken on* Venom and Eternity *[1951]. Therefore, I have placed it at the end of this transcription.*]

Eaux d'Artifice

The American avant-garde once was Griffith, then was Maya Deren, Sidney Peterson, and then Stan Brakhage; it has never been distinguished by claims of originality as such (unlike *Venom and Eternity*). Nor has it been defined in any way by its particular novelty or anti-traditional attitude. The posture and the stance – the whole gesture – of the Soviet film also made very little of the idea of doing things that were just new and surprising, either formally or otherwise. These things were just incidental. But the Paris avant-garde of the Twenties was … distinctive because, by definition, it was iconoclastic both in form and in content. Dada and Surrealism fell into this category. There were formal and challenges to the social taboos or traditions of the time, appearing in films as far removed as the farcical *Entr'acte*, on the one hand, and the neo-Freudian *Seashell and the Clergyman*, on the other. This was an established tradition in the Parisian – which is to say, the European – avant-garde… After a lapse from the end of silent film, well marked by *An Andalusian Dog* and *The Blood of a Poet,* (circa 1930), there was Vigo[1] and not much else until Cocteau's commercial films and *Venom and Eternity*. Those films that fall between Vigo and such isolated things such as Jean Genet's *Un chant d'amour* [1950[2] are radically marked by their iconoclasm. They do shock the most sacred traditions and customs of the society.

From Kenneth Anger's Eaux d'Artifice

I deliberately paired *Eaux d'artifice* with *Venom and Eternity* because they were both made the same year[3], and because there is such a contrast between the qualities of the two films. I thought it would be nice to put such a beautifully composed film beside the film that is so consciously disorganized and rough-hewn. *Eaux d'artifice* [comes from] a peculiar period of the old New American cinema: as far as I can tell, there was a strange sort of marking time in the early 1950s; it was the period between the original explosion of the work of Deren and Peterson, an impetus that went on through the early work of Markopoulos and Anger and [that lapsed into] the rather decorative films – a particularly good example of this would be James Broughton's *Loony Tom, The Happy Lover*; Curtis Harrington too followed this direction making a film in Venice[4], when Anger made *Eaux d'artifice* in Tivoli – shortly before a new [direction] was to start. If one were to pick a moment for that, it would be with Brakhage's *Desistfilm* [1954]. Previously the very intense psychodrama had been *the thing* of the time….

Eaux d'artifice is essentially a monochromatic film. It is extraordinarily beautiful in all phases of its execution. It is "about" a woman, dressed in 19th Century fancy fashion,[5] who turns out of a fountain at the beginning of the film, just as she turns into one at the end. Throughout the film she wanders among fountains, sometimes dissolving into one. There are a series of hints that she is one with the waters; she is a motif just like the water itself… At the end of the film she definitively turns into a fountain before our eyes, but that at the beginning, her turning out of a fountain is unclear.

The title – meaning "water works" – plays in the title of Anger's *Fireworks*, his first released film. "Artifice" works two ways: the waters themselves [of the Villa Este in Tivoli] are fantastic in reality. Anger goes a step further, adding his own peculiar magic to them by including the woman turning into fountains. It is actually a kind of documentary. It is an intensely romantic film, showing the fountains with great love. The figure of the woman as the water is a statement of what is supposed to happen in the film; we are supposed to sense and understand this landscape in the most immediate and direct terms; we are really supposed to become one with it. The woman who becomes a fountain hints at the way to react to this [film].

It is a direct extension of *Fireworks*, and an anticipation of what Anger gets into later, because the objects of the physical world are extraordinarily important and emphatic to him. More and more in his works, love is conferred upon objects – certainly in *Fireworks, Inauguration of a Pleasure Dome*, and *Scorpio Rising* — love; in fact, at the core and center of Anger's films as fetishes. That fetishistic passion may make for a somewhat uneasy attitude toward living with those things; e.g. out of the tremendous, total love of the fountains, the woman in *Eaux d'artifice* becomes a fountain; but there is no humanity to her. This tendency exists in Anger's films, perhaps least of all in *Fireworks*. In film after film, these wonderful scintillating objects receive the prime attention of the characters and [of] the filmmaker. On the other hand, we

find the characters themselves becoming glossy, seductive, wonderful objects. That is not the whole story.

*Fireworks***[6]**, too, is a very romantic film, about the fantasies of a masochistic young man who is in the habit of picking up sailors. The images are of ecstasy. The film begins with a burning flower[7] reflected in rippling water. It builds to the famous climax that gives it its title: the sailor opens his fly to show a roman candle going off. That outrageous and flamboyant statement is outdone in the next image of a large Christmas tree, aflame, carried in in a more or less phallic way. It is really a celebration in this ecstatic film.

Eaux d'artifice is an extension of *Fireworks*: it is one tremendous burst of water after another; the union is complete; there is nothing but beautiful spurts and cascades and ripples. Occasionally, the little figure of humanity blends completely into this monochrome landscape. As a complete statement of ecstatic union, she is always becoming these fountains until, at the end, there is the definitive statement that she really has made it as a fountain. It is a good film on which to argue the romantic basis of Anger's cinema.

There is a Gothic element here from the psychodramas of a character wandering through some place, a house or a landscape, in order to realize his true nature. In a way, this is a parody of psychodrama [insofar as] there is no psychological impact to this film. It doesn't quite occur purely in the physical world because of its magical nature. At times the woman seems to be a sort of Cinderella hurrying before the coach turns into a pumpkin, but I do not know what her attitude is. Sometimes she hurries before turning into a fountain, or in time for her to turn into one; but sometimes she seems quite serene, moving in a majestic and stately way. There is no progression in her attitude. My own impression is that she moves in terms of the picture and the music, rather than out of any psychological motivation.

From Eaux d'Artifice

Her costume is supposed to be of the period of the gardens; it is deliberately calculated to resemble in its totality a fountain, with its base and topped with a feather that is the water (and finally does become that). Those are the basic reasons that she wears what she does. I tend to consider her as a decorative element, not a psychological entity.

The archetypal imagery is sexual. Water rippling softly over things and jetting up into the air becomes a sexually associative image, no matter what. It has gone beyond the orgasmic climax of *Fireworks*.

Jonas Mekas: She walks into the fountain in some kind of fantastic place. She lives there. She is the fairy of the place. She goes in, in in into the fountain in an aspect of a fairytale.

KK: At any rate, there is a magical proportion in this subliminal fairytale. Like all fairytales it is

a little spooky.

The romantic music in Anger's films could accompany a Hollywood film on the same subject.

Is the woman played by a dwarf?

Sitney: there are two theories. I heard, in Paris, that she is portrayed by a male. I have also heard, with absolute insistence, that she is a female dwarf. It is said that Anger was so disappointed by the size of the Tivoli fountains that he introduced himself to a dwarf he saw on a bus in Rome in order to recruit her, or him, for the film.

Do you really feel that *Eaux d'artifice* occurs in an artistic lull? It seems to me to exemplify what you have called "Total Tectonics," remarkably ahead of its time, with its parallel in Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night*.

KK: It is true that *Eaux d'artifice* is a totally subjective representation of the Real World, an interesting transfiguration of that world. It is never rendered in the psychological terms of the character [or the filmmaker]. Crucially, the contexts of the two films distinguishes the great difference between it and Brakhage's *Anticipation of the Night*, where the images do occur on a level of Reality; that is, other than the images taken by themselves; its framework is a man's nightmare odyssey– his thoughts before dying. I don't believe that there is any possible psychological interpretation of *Eaux d'artifice*; it manifests only an ecstatic attitude toward water—an unmitigated ecstasy unshaded [by] any psychological thing.

Ralph Steiner's *H2O* is a clear precedent for *Eaux d'artifice*. … It isn't nearly as beautiful a film; nor is it charged with the [same] love of water. …It has the same subject and shares the idea of making a total plastic enterprise with just shots of water; it is a much more literal thing. Anger's film is closer to that than *to Anticipation of the Night*.

Venom and Eternity

As I remarked [previously] when the film did not show up and we showed the trailer instead, the gestural nature of the French avant-garde had to do with novelty. It is clearer in the film itself than in the trailer. Perhaps the most telling of the remarks by Isou (or by Daniel [Gélin], his mouthpiece and identity), that run through the film would be that what is new is what counts in art; what is new cannot be criticized; and what is new is good and, by definition, what the artist wants to do. He establishes certain corollaries to this: what is old is uninteresting and bad; so, what is new will consist of a breaking down of the old. Here some interesting things begin to happen. For one thing, the film works: its dynamic [consists] of a constant interrelation of the filmmaker with the vision of [a] theory of film that he has, and with the very film that we are seeing. There is a continual consciousness that [its] form is a direct function of a personality. They cannot be separated. There is also an allusive quality of a biographical (or autobiographical) order throughout the film: as the film progresses, we get a sort of portrait of the filmmaker. It is not an orderly portrait, nor is it a factual portrait, but it [offers] a rather full sense of his personality.

From Venom and Eternity

In first part, we find him distinctly as a visionary. We hear his theories and understand that he is something of an agitator and avant-garde character. In the second part, we get more of his personal life, and we understand through the story – an apparently autobiographical, literary work of his – something of the drives in his own life that lead him in this artistic direction. Chiefly, we understand him as a continually dissatisfied man, possessed of a vision that denies values because of he has none; who treats women, in his personal life, more or less as he treats images in the very film that we are watching. All of this makes the film an extremely direct personal statement.

The first episode is possibly the strongest and most crucial. In it we see the filmmaker in the guise of the prophetic visionary possessed of a new way of seeing who walks the streets, alien to all around him because he sees further than they do. The film, as a whole and especially the first episode, is permeated with shots of Isou [(or his representative)] who is crucially portrayed as a totally dissatisfied and restless being. When he holds still for the camera, he rocks back and forth. Aside from that he is in continual motion, always walking, always pacing but never with any direction. His directions always contradict each other, as the things he says in the film do. His most consistent aim (aside from the general one of revolutionizing cinema) appears to be the tearing apart of the visual image from the spoken one, or the word, or the narrative and dialogue, on the one hand; and the subordination of the image to the soundtrack, on the other hand. This latter aspect of the rupture between sound and image is not consistent; he occasionally contradicts it by indicating that he really believers that the soundtrack should be a background to the image.

There is even a strange, playful contraction of his basic idea that the soundtrack and the image should be disjunctive, because at times they coordinate in strange ways. This is especially true in the first episode, when he refers to seeing only the reflection of a woman in the window of a train in the chaplain scene: his parallel image visually is of people reflected in a store window. Just before that, when he speaks of the Odessa Steps sequence and its baby carriage in *Potemkin*, we see a woman with a baby carriage passing in the background. Even if they were taken accidentally. these strange shots are not really adventitious,because they are edited in this order. Later, towards the end of the film, one of the stranger of these correspondences occurs, when the narrator tells us that he left Eve (and she says something to the effect of “curses on you”), we suddenly see a dagger image scratched onto the film. This seems to me to be quite consistent with the stance and gesture of Isou throughout: he will not allow even his basic theory to go unchallenged or uncancelled.

This vision is anarchic or nihilistic. In his absolute restlessness, he will not allow anything to proceed in a pure or consistent way. He does fulfill his major promises: to separate the visual from the auditory image, in terms of meaning at any rate; to create a more or less coherent and interesting narrative on the soundtrack. The soundtrack does ramble but it has fixed points:

theory in the first section and story in the second. Like the story, [he proposes] a shaggy-dog theory in its progression. The story continually returns to Eve in its overall framework; in its center, Denise is its frame of reference. We learn a little more about his personal proclivities in the process, [and] of this literary work of Isou's. He admires the Marquis de Sade for personal rather than theoretical reasons; he seems to be fascinated by physical deformity. From what I have read, deformity does not seem a prominent feature of de Sade's writings (although Isou claims it is); It seems much stronger in Isou than Sade, especially in the episode of the hunchback girl for whom he takes on considerable morbid interest.

The film is a strange blend; where the ostensible progression, form, and content is the presentation of a new theory of cinema and the illustration of it. This is charged, and only takes on any interest or dynamic quality at all in relationship to Isou's own personality and drives. It is also a very defensive film; there are continual claims that it is only a first step, that it was cut down great deal from its original length; that it is only a kind of destruction in order to build anew. In the end, he says it is essentially a promise. Of course, promises are easy to make. Isou did not go on to make other films, as far as I know[8]. This stands as his cinematic statement.

Another strange aspect of the film has to do with the defense mechanism Isou sets up, continual photographing shots, or including shots, of celebrities, about half of which are of Isou talking to [Jean] Cocteau, and [Armand] Salacrou and other cultural figures. Of course, he has shots of movie stars — Danièle Delorme, [Jean-Louis] Barrault, – especially in the second section. Occasionally he will just cancel out the impact of such shots with his own anarchistic touch; that is to say, to scratch out or blot out himself [or the celebrity]. I think in the case of Cocteau, he is courteous enough to scratch himself, but in the case of Salacrou, he blots him out entirely; perhaps because Salacrou is distinctly a figure of the old theater. The scratching on the film [or what Isou called 'chiseling'] is an interesting part and perhaps its most original single, purely technical touch. It is an anarchistic gesture *par excellence* – a very novel gesture in cinema – that occurs most often in the second section of the film. It is most creative and fancy during the black section when Lettrist poetry is heard (which rather amusingly has subtitles).

Scratching in film on purpose is extremely rare. It doesn't really start to come in to filmmaking until 1953 or so with Brakhage's *Reflections on Black*.[9] It takes quite a while longer than that for it to become a more or less recognized idiom even in Underground cinema. The only instance I can think of where it happens before Isou's film is strangely enough in Cocteau's *The Blood of a Poet* when, in the poet's second suicide (I think), the little star – one of Cocteau's prime emblems – appears as the wound in the poet's temple; it is scratched on the film to dance, as a scratch on film will. I'm sure Isou knew about this: perhaps it is one of the reasons he was so fond of Cocteau as an innovator. The scratching in *Venom and Eternity* is part of a unique and original consciousness of film. One becomes conscious of the existence of the single frames of the film, moving through the projector at a certain speed and cast on the screen by the light, because the jerky transitions from frame to frame as the image of a star, a dagger, or just a line dances; we sense that it dances because the frame themselves are changing. Its unsynchronized existence – the rough correspondence of one scratch to the next – is reflected

on the screen in terms of a jagged, jerky dance of the image from side to side. This can be felt quite strongly in *Venom and Eternity*, as [does] the texture of film in many of the shots. As I mentioned, [there] are many clumsy camera movements or grainy shots, or washed out shots, where the imperfections with which the medium is handled calls attention to mechanical origin of the image itself. That is one of the things that Isou is calling for: a destruction of the old completion and perfection of a certain kind of film. It is one more of his anarchic probes into the nature of the medium.

There isn't much stock footage in the film although he claims there is. The airplane on the water and the Chinese coolies look like stock footage. Stock footage available in France in 1951 would not have been as grainy, as overexposed, as superimposed, and especially as ugly and anarchic in terms of moving camera.

There is an odd tension between his anarchistic pose and his obvious want of recognition; all of which is keyed by his early admission that there are only thirty people, at most, in the Lettrist movement; and then [there are] quotations from notable personages, including Keynes, to the effect the one can never have more than twenty-five people at the start of a great movement. At this point, I would like to come back to the very original relation of the filmmaker to his work. It is really the most direct statement of a filmmaker's ideas and personality made in film up to this point. Among other things, this represents the first time a filmmaker consistently addresses the audience as himself throughout a film. The combination of this directness with a very direct assault on the very medium of expression itself constitutes a brutal and powerful vision. Perhaps in the end it is a very ultimate vision, as Isou apparently did not suspect at the time, but –- apparently again—did come to believe.

[*In response to several audience questions Kelman continued*]: I take Isou at his claim that he is the prime Lettrist. Within the film, Lettrism is adequately defined as poetry existing purely for its sound, apart from any kind of meaning or imagery. That implies it is exists completely apart from words, as words are understood. Clearly, he is interested in doing the same kind of thing with film. He shows the books he had written because of his unquestionable desire for recognition. It is part of a defense mechanism, asserting 'here are things that I've done; I've done other things that have received much attention, but here you can learn about them.' As he lifts one book after the other, one has a sense of the ironic gesture of unveiling objects that are all the same – just books. Isou wanted to make [his] film as new as possible, out of no tradition, and therefore as creative as possible. This is no longer easy to make any film that even manages to be an original gesture in the history of the medium. It is the only film in this series that ostensibly means to break with tradition.

The film has its own documentation about its beginning; so we know its original impact. As far as I can tell from what I have seen of films of the Fifties, Godard would be most clearly related to Isou. One assumes that Godard was familiar with the film, but I do not know. Obviously and nakedly, the idea of a scene constructed from the tension between the soundtrack and the image (with the image treated in a rather casual way, while the soundtrack proceeds with a very developed literary story having nothing to do with the image) recurs time and time again

in Godard's films, primarily in his early films –very markedly in *Breathless* [1960][10]. Such tension exists in Godard's work more generally. It is difficult to say whether the jump cutting of *Breathless* or its casual camera movements can be attributed to the influence of Isou. It is related to the *sensibility* of Isou. Basically, Godard fragments a narrative and reconstructs it in a disjunctive way to disrupt the causal flow of images. Of course, this does not go nearly as far as Isou [takes it]. Godard does not function in this revolutionary way as directly or extremely as Isou. There is a process going on in *Venom and Eternity* that has nothing to do with Story. There is play with the Idea of Narrative. Godard plays with particular narratives that are denied from time to time. Isou denies it from the start. Even though a character, such as Belmondo at the beginning if *Breathless*, may directly address the camera, Godard immediately takes us back to the third-person convention. Without a direct confrontation with the filmmaker, we are back in a narrative framework.

The End

It is curious that *The End* [1953] should be made in the same years a *Venom and Eternity*, another, and very different kind of landmark in elliptical film. It also intentionally attempts to disassociate the soundtrack from the images on the screen. By the way, this is another way that the film relates to *Venom and Eternity*: it uses, for the first time as far as I know, rather long sections of pure darkness on film, where we are simply asked to listen while looking at nothing. This is one other aspect of the disruption of sound from image in *Venom and Eternity*.

From The End

Perhaps the opposite is happening in the contradictions and tension between the soundtrack and the visual structure in the process of *The End*. That method, in the visual aspect of the film, that asks us to supply what is missing in terms of the causality (or really not the causality but the *meaning* of events), or the psychology behind seemingly meaningless events, or the cosmology, or whatever is needed to explain things happening the way they do – whatever realization is necessary to bring back the images from nihilistic chaos. It is as if the filmmaker were not willing to go as far as possible with this method, or even as promised, because the soundtrack constantly fills in what is missing. It tends to cancel the form promised in the visual part of the film. The episode that most epitomizes this is the one where the soundtrack promises us that we will have to realize what has happened given only a few fragments and key images of a sequence of events, as we might be given a few strokes in a Zen painting. But in fact, though we are given just those few strokes in the picture part, we have all the other possibilities filled in for us insistently on the soundtrack. … It is done most fruitlessly, most jarringly, in the sections of black since here it becomes something else. I feel primarily that this black is the most direct imaging of the emptiness, that void, that nihilistic quality implicit in the imagery of the film as a whole. It is also a visual silence where there is a chance to consider what the film might be about, to come to some kind of realization in this blackness. But we are

never permitted to this either, because this void is immediately filled by words that interpret for us, anticipate things for us, reflect on things or us.

I continue to find a very disturbing thing about this film, apart from disturbances that I think are conscious: this strange cancellation of the very original and striking method of the visual part of the film by what is, in effect, a conventional and even somewhat banal soundtrack. I can find no basis for sensing a really conscious purpose involved here, or anything that is genuinely ironical, or contrapuntal.

I should mention my fondness for image of the arm with the prominent pulsing veins that occurs throughout. It takes on so many different connotations in terms of the surrounding imagery — sometimes of vulnerability, sometimes of strength, sometimes of Life force, sometimes of a morbid disease. It is an interesting image in its terseness and its suggestion in one stroke, as it were. It is also really one of the ultimate statements in film of the old classical editing principle, made famous in the experiments of Kuleshov, where the same images would be shown up in different contexts, and we would have different emotional reactions to them. This has hardly been done in film.

There are many images that function as those motifs in film. I think that it is rooted in the particular conception of *The End*, as I described it. This is another way the montage principle [operates]; it has to do with how the mind works with images that are related, or unrelated, in varying ways. In the history of film there was never much leeway given to the mind to deal with these images; they were always organized – if not simply in terms of the causality of realism, or in terms of a story – in terms of a specific theme or idea, in the kind of ideological montage we get in Eisenstein. The closest that we come to the dissociative imagery of *The End* would be in Surrealism. The point is that *this* is not Surrealism, which is essentially a chaotic and anarchic form; this is something else, because it asks for an understanding Surrealism does not ask for.

From The End

[*The End*] is really a thematic film. In ranging over the whole history of the cinema for precedents and associations, I am thinking of Dovzhenko all the time. He is also an episodic filmmaker but, notably, what he does *not* do is repeat episodes or bits of episodes in other episodes; he has a kind of chronological approach. … There have been films before [*The End*] where images have been repeated throughout (such as in Maya Deren's work) but they have always been tied to some particular incident that may have been varied or repeated. But here they have been scrambled throughout the film. … The "end" as expressed in the [atomic] explosion is the action common to all the episodes of the film. It begins as *The Dead of Night* [1945]***[11]*** ends with a montage, recapitulating all the previous episodes, that pulls the film together.

Sitney: The most complex form of this principle would be Gregory Markopoulos's *The Iliac Passion* [1967].

Kelman: That was made after 1960, so I would prefer not to discuss it. It is much easier to consider in Markopoulos' films because of his structural concerns. One can understand it so clearly there. MacLaine's films never seem to be to be architectural in the sense of the unity that comes through. The use of the same images in totally different context (or as in this case, roughly speaking [different] stories) is an originality and an innovation, in this case, just as the elliptical process of the film sets precedents for Markopoulos and anticipates Brakhage…

[tape ends]

[1] Kelman wrote on all four of Jean Vigo's films in *The Essential Cinema*.

[2] See "Imagenations".

[3] *Eaux d'artifice* was made in 1953, two years after *Traité de bave et d'éternité* (1951).

[4] Curtis Harrington made *The Assignation* [1952] in Venice.

[5] Baroque costuming may be more accurate.

[6] Kelman would have offered more complete analysis of *Fireworks* on July 15, in the missing Lecture 31.

[7] It seems to be a torch rather than a flower.

[8] Isou's collaborator, the Lettrist painter, Maurice Lemaître, however, did go on to have a full career as a filmmaker.

[9] *Reflections on Black* was made in 1955. Brakhage first scratched the titles of *Desistfilm* in 1954. That same year Lawrence Jordan scratched the text of a poem by Philip Lamantia onto his film *Man is in Pain*. Brakhage worked for the American distributor of *Venom and Eternity,* Raymond Rohauer. He (and Jordan) may have seen the film as early as 1953 with at Art in Cinema in San Francisco or directly through Rohauer. *Blue Moses*(1962) may be a direct descendant of *Venom and Eternity.*

[10] Godard's *Breathless* was scheduled to be sh0wn and discussed in the cancelled Lecture 47.

[11] *Dead of Night* (along with *Meshes of the Afternoon*) was a subject of Kelman's lost (July 1, 1968) Lecture 29.

Art: The Covid Series

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

The major American animator, director, artist, and longtime friend of *Logos*, Ralph Bakshi, has recently produced a series of painting inspired by his bouts with Covid.

Of the experience, Bakshi writes:

“When painting a still life or a landscape, you get many different feelings as the painting moves on. With the covid paints, no feeling changed… ever. Not once.”

Bakshi is also contributing to efforts to provide relief and assistance to victims of the Maui fires. You can learn more by visiting his website.

“I Have Covid 1” by Ralph Bakshi

2020 Covid by Ralph Bakshi

Covid Warrior by Ralph Bakshi

I Have Covid 2 by Ralph Bakshi

For over five decades, Ralph Bakshi has been a pioneering figure in American animation. His many films include: Fritz the Cat, Heavy Traffic, Wizards, The Lord of the Rings, American Pop, *and* Cool World. *You can learn more about Bakshi and his current work at his website.*

Review Essay: Magda Teter's Christian Supremacy: Reckoning with the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

The Black Lives Matter movement, which began in 2013 to protest anti-Black racism, especially the killing of Blacks at the hands of the police, was arguably the largest protest movement in the history of the United States. It created a tectonic shift in the understanding of the systemic character of racism in American society and has generated chasms in the political landscape, shaping the politics of segments on the left and reactions by the right. It is a major fault line exacerbated by Donald Trump that is consuming the contemporary political moment.

It is against this background that historian Magda Teter has written *Christian Supremacy*, subtitled *Reckoning With the Roots of Antisemitism and Racism.* It is a monumental treatise, rigorously researched and annotated, that illuminates our current condition by placing its origins in the broadest possible historical context.

Magda Teter is an unusual scholar. Born and raised in Poland, she is an expert on Jewish history and Jewish-Christian relations. She is not Jewish herself, but taught at Wesleyan for more than a decade and is currently the chair in Judaic studies at Fordham University. Her written corpus reveals an extraordinary number of scholarly articles and half a dozen texts. The current volume, published this year by Princeton University Press, well exemplifies her prodigious scholarship. This is a relevant and important book, and though replete with detailed information and citations supporting her thesis, remains eminently readable.

Teter's thesis is compelling and persuasively argued. Anti-Black prejudice and discrimination, as well as the recrudescence of white supremacy, did not originate with the American experience. Its roots run very deep. Its beginnings can be found in Christian antisemitism, traced back to St. Augustine and even further to the writing of St. Paul. In briefest terms, her premise is as follows:

"…the ideology espoused by white supremacists in the US and in Europe is rooted in Christian ideas of social and religious hierarchy. These ideas developed, gradually, first in the Mediterranean and Europe in respect to Jews and in respect to people of color in European

colonies and the US, before returning transformed back into Europe. That vision of social hierarchy is built on the foundations of early Christian supersessionist theology that negated Judaism as it claimed to 'replace' it and sometimes called replacement theology or replacement theory. Ancient and medieval Christians developed a sense of superiority over Jews, whom they saw as carnal and inferior, and rejected by God…For Christians, Jews became necessary 'contrast figures' created and used to validate Christian' claims of theological replacement and superiority."

"…Christian supremacy predated white supremacy and has left its mark on the legal and mental structures that continue to reverberate in what is now commonly called white supremacy."

"…the modern rejection of equality of both Jews and Black people in the West is the legacy of Christian supersessionism."

It is a mainstay of Teter's thesis to highlight what she claims is frequently omitted by historians, namely how norms of Christian superiority at the expense of the subordination and humiliation of Jews were strengthened by their reification and codification into law.

Teter notes that the biblical phrase cited in Genesis, repeated in the book of Romans, "an elder shall serve a younger," and augmented by the authority of St. Augustine, became the paradigm for Christian dominance and the entrenched subjugation of Jews. It is well known that Augustine spoke about the needed survival of the Jews in order for them to bear witness to the superiority of Christianity. Teter's takeaway from Augustine's views lies in his persistent emphasis on Jewish inferiority and the establishment of an ideal Christian-Jewish hierarchy. She notes that this Augustinian hierarchy was not merely theological. It was embedded in the social and political reality of the times and became an influential basis for enduring Christian supremacy that, in the early modern period, was transferred to white Europeans in their relations to Blacks.

Inclusive in the transition from Christian structural antisemitism throughout the Middle Ages to the emergence of Black enslavement by Europeans in the era of colonization was the linkage fostered by Islam. Slavery was absent in Europe, except under Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula and was greatly predated by Islam. "Iberian history," she notes, "is…key to understanding the legal cultural, economic foundations that would help establish slavery in the Americas." Quoting the historian Timothy Lockley, there is "a clear lineage of negative racial imagery from Arabic (Iberian) to English thought." Teter further states, "The connection between slavery and Black Africans was first made in Islamic thought, when Muslims conquered parts of Africa and amassed dark-skinned captives, by reinterpreting the curse of Ham as both the curse of slavery and Blackness." The British went on to imitate the systems of

enslavement in their colonies that had earlier been put in place by the Spanish and Portuguese.

As Europeans began their colonial expansion across the Atlantic, they firmly developed their sense of religious and political superiority, a superiority which had long been established through their convictions regarding the inferiority of Jews. What emerged was the slow evolution of the identification of Christianity with whiteness. That evolution was at first hampered because Catholicism held to the doctrine of universal conversion. One could become Christian through baptism regardless of color. By contrast, in Protestant colonies, English, Dutch, and Danish, slave owners prevented Black conversion or allowed free Blacks to convert. But in time, as Teter notes, “Christianity, freedom and whiteness came together.”

In recent decades, the Enlightenment has become a subject for critics who view it as responsible for the evils of colonization, slavery, and genocide. In my view, despite the personal racist sentiments held by Enlightenment luminaries, the critique is generally misplaced. To her credit, Teter treads lightly in taking the Enlightenment to task, though she notes that it was eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, with its interest in taxonomy, that developed a scientific classification of the races that aided in solidifying racial hierarchy.

The modern period saw the emergence of democracies, and with it came the ideas of equality and citizenship. The question of who counts as a citizen, therefore, became a contentious, long-lasting issue both in Europe and in the United States. In Europe, the status of Jews, the “Jewish question,” was front and center. In the United States, the subjugated status of Blacks was enduring and not legally settled until the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The French Revolution created The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen. But the two were not the same; which rights accrued to “man,” and which to “citizen” was contested, and analogous arguments persisted in the United States pertaining to Blacks through much of the nineteenth century.

Abbe´ Sieyes, a major theoretician of the French Revolution, maintained that all persons have passive, natural rights, such as protection of their person and property. But not all should have an active right to participate in governmental affairs, and those, including women, children, and foreigners, should be excluded from citizenship. Jews, who throughout the Middle Ages were construed to be an alien nation within Christian lands, were the consummate foreigners. The French Declaration banned discrimination on grounds of religious belief, and so Huguenots and other Christians were admitted as citizens. Jews remained banned as a foreign national group. Christians of every denomination could assimilate, but Jews presented a unique problem. After much debate, Jews were eventually granted active citizenship in France, but the question of their rights and citizenship spread to other parts of Europe.

These debates continued in Holland, Germany, and Great Britain. Often at stake was the notion that if Jews were granted equality, such would endow them with excessive power, leading to Jewish hegemony over Christians. Such reasoning reflected the depth of the theologically grounded notion that Judaism, by rejecting Christ, was an eternally inferior religion and needed to be confined to a subordinated status. This false identity of equality with mastery also found its analog in white supremacist initiatives to deny Blacks equal rights in America later in the century.

It was not until 1869, and the unification of Germany, that Jews attained full German citizenship. But this achievement was quickly followed, as such advances often are, by an immediate backlash, in this case with the emergence of political antisemitism.

Teter elaborates a pivotal discussion on the contested legal status of free Blacks in the United States. Neither enslaved nor white, their presence placed in high relief the issue of color in a way in which slavery itself did not. In principle, one could oppose slavery on the grounds of justice or economic pragmatism without referencing skin color. Nothing raised this issue to a higher pitch than when the people of Haiti, in 1804, overthrew their French colonial masters. In a historic irony, we may conclude that the Haitian struggle for freedom was inspired in great measure by the principles of the French Declaration. The Western Hemisphere now contained two newly independent nations, one sustained in great measure by slavery, the other without slavery under Black sovereignty.

As Jill Lepore noted in her history of America, *These Truths,* slave rebellions in the colonies were frequent, but nothing placed fear in the hearts of slave owners as did the Haitian revolution. When America was founded, the concept of citizenship was new, and, as noted, not clearly defined until a century later. Full citizenship was tied to being white, and,as a result, free Blacks were subjected to humiliating distinctions, as Teter notes, with regard to the ownership of property and guns, and to giving testimonies in court.

Teter explicates in great detail the debates and ensuing laws relating to race, religion, and citizenship as those presented to deny Blacks equality in nineteenth-century America. She notes,

“The 1820 debate over the admission of Missouri into the Union put on display clashing visions of what the United States is and who belongs, while regional court cases and religious debates, in a slow-moving backlash against the ideals enshrined in the US Constitution against established religion, began to clarify a sense of dominant religious identity. Both Jews and people of color challenged, in different ways, American white Protestant hegemony in what was beginning to shape as a white Christian republic.” Teter concludes that the issue regarding the admission of Missouri as a slave state was not pivotal in that the admission of Maine provided a

compromise. It was rather the heated debate that resulted from an article of the Missouri constitution that would ban the residency of free blacks in the state, a provision that ostensibly violated the US Constitution. It also suggested that Blacks who could freely reside in some states could not in others.

The inequality of Blacks can be readily illustrated by the reasoning employed in major Supreme Court decisions, one prior to the Civil War, the Dred Scott decision of 1857, and those that were argued in the backlash of the post-Civil War Amendments to the Constitution.

Dred Scott was born into slavery in Missouri and was taken to Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, both free jurisdictions, and then brought back to Missouri, where he was again enslaved. Dred Scott sued to assert his status as a free citizen under the Constitution. By a 7-2 majority, the Supreme Court denied his appeal, in what was arguably the worst ruling in the history of the Court. Teter provides an extensive elaboration of the case, quoting at length from the prevailing decision of Justice Roger Taney. Taney invoked what today would be deemed an originalist argument, claiming that at the time of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence and passage of the Constitution, Black people were not considered to be citizens. Taney's unabashed racism would, by today's standards be cringe-worthy. With regard to Blacks, he wrote:

"…(they are) beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

"…they (i.e.Blacks) at that time considered as a subordinate, and inferior class of beings who had been subjected by the dominant race, and whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them." "…this opinion was at the time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the 'the white race.'" "…a perpetual and impassable barrier was intended to be erected between the white race and the one which they had reduced to slavery, and governed as subjects with absolute and despotic power and which they looked upon as so far below them in the scale of created beings."

The reference to a "perpetual and impassible barrier" speaks to the depth of Taney's racism. It may strike us as astounding, but it was validated by the science of the times and, we may conclude, was the prevailing view of Americans in that era.

There were those who argued that the United States was founded as a white republic and such was the meaning of "We the people." Questions emerged as to whether the United States was

an Anglo-Saxon Protestant civilization struggling to preserve its purity against the incursion of Blacks and foreign hordes. Or, was America meant to be diverse with regard to race, religion, and ethnicity? As Teter observes, the former reflected “a kind of Protestant nativism grounded in a package of Christianity and whiteness that began to crystallize in the early decades of the nineteenth century. And though in the earliest iterations Christianity may not have been explicit, it became increasingly so from the 1820s onward.”

The arguments in America concerning the place of Blacks paralleled arguments in Europe in regard to Jews. Many argumanrs when related to matters of principle (conceptual and legal) appear hairsplitting. Yet, as Teter points out, they reflected the prevailing attitudes of the time. Many who argued for a status less than equal for Blacks and Jews explicitly made reference to feelings of belonging with their own, degrees of discomfort with others, and conclusions that people who are different, as Blacks and Jews are from whites, and Christians simply could not live together as equals. Many validated this inequality in religious terms. Opposition to slavery was increasingly cast by proslavery Christians as anti-Christian. The backlash against the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments was enormous. And, as Teter concludes, borrowing from the historian Luke Harlow, “The racist religion of the antebellum period became ‘racial unity’ that paved the way for the emergence of a white Democratic political bloc.”

Intimidation, violence, terror, and the gradual disenfranchisement of Black voting rights established by Reconstruction, became the hallmarks of the Jim Crow era. As we painfully know, those phenomena, at times relatively latent and at others painfully manifest, have not disappeared, rather they have dramatically reemerged in our current political moment.

The 1870s saw several civil rights cases that promoted the unqualified equality of Blacks and intended to put substance behind the post-Civil War amendments. These cases were declared unconstitutional on the dubious distinction that segregation in private, but not state, settings, was legal. A major milestone was the *Plessy V. Ferguson* case of 1896. Homer Plessey, a one-eighth African-American, was denied a first-class railroad ticket. His defense rested on the argument that such segregation violated the equal protection of the Fourteenth Amendment as well as the Thirteenth in that it perpetuated the “essential features of slavery.” The court’s majority held that while the Amendments may have abolished political inequality, they did not intend to abolish distinctions based on color or to enforce social equality. Legal equality, in short, did not mean social acceptance.

There was pushback. Teter elaborates in detail the arguments of the sole dissenting justice in *Plessey,* John Marshall Harlan. He noted that the Thirteenth Amendment did not merely strike down slavery but “…prevents any burdens or disabilities that constitute badges of slavery or servitude.” He noted that “there is in this country no superior, dominant ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our Constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates among classes of citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the

law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful." Harlan's was an expression of American ideals that, with minimal reflection, should be understood as self-evident. Harlan grasped how structural racism was factored into law. He was ahead of his time in that it was not until *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954 that the law began to align with Harlan's dissent.

The 1870s marked the decade in which political antisemitism emerged with a renewed force both in Europe and the United States. As mentioned, Jews had attained citizenship in France in the aftermath of the Revolution and were accepted as citizens in Germany in 1869. By then, the number of Jews in Germany exceeded half a million, but in France, the population was less than one percent. Yet when the lid of legal antisemitism was removed, Jews moved rapidly into positions of prominence in the professions, commerce, finance, and the press, and held positions in government. Though many German Jews were highly assimilated, and intermarriage was common (they frequently identified themselves as "Germans of the Mosaic persuasion"), their status as ostensible outsiders deepened feelings of contempt. Their stepping out of their theologically sanctioned position as subjugated people in the Christian society, revived stereotypes. Their social climbing and success were seen as marks of insolence and ill-gained power. Jews were condemned as being "carnal" and "materialist." The attainment of equality was felt as usurpation and, as Teter notes "encroachment on the rights of others." German nationalism, which later was transmogrified by the Nazis into the ideology of "blood and soil," stood in opposition to the ideals of liberalism, pluralism and cosmopolitanism, which the prominence of Jews represented. In France, antisemitism culminated in the infamous Dreyfus Affair, in which a French Jewish officer was falsely accused and convicted of treason. The affair extended for twelve years and was indicative of antisemitism's wide acceptance.

The situation in Eastern Europe, especially tsarist Russia, was much different and far more severe. Jews were not citizens, and salient expressions of anti-Jewish hatred were not political; they were fiercely violent and deadly. The years 1881-1882 saw over a hundred pogroms in the Russian empire, with violent outbreaks repeated in the early decades of the twentieth century. These attacks on Jewish villages, often by the army with the support of the Russian Orthodox Church, bear on my own life story in that my father, as a child, was a witness to a pogrom in his native Ukraine. It caused him to flee to the West, as it did countless other Jews during that dark period. The effects of Russian antisemitism were ongoing. One of its lasting contributions to perennial antisemitism was the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* a fictitious tract that alleged Jewish aspirations toward power and conspiracies aimed at world domination. It became a deep-seated trope that was aggressively appropriated by the Nazis and has been a mainstay of anti-Jewish bigotry employed to the current day.

The fate of the Jews in America, as Teter states, was in some ways more complex. Jews were full citizens and never enslaved. Yet, beginning in the 1870s there was an upsurge of antisemitic discrimination. The 1870s just preceded the waves of millions of European Jews, many impoverished, that extended from 1881 until 1924 when the doors of immigration were

closed.

Teter describes at great length and in detail an incident in 1877 in which Joseph Seligman, the head of an elite banking family, was denied access to the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York, where he had vacationed many times before. Seligman was a noted public figure. He was president of Temple Emmanuel in New York, and President Ulysses Grant had previously invited him to serve as the Secretary of the Treasury. The cause was blatant anti-Jewish bigotry and was accompanied by derogatory depictions of Jews as gluttonous, loud, and smelly. In short, Seligman did not reflect the class that the patrons of the hotel allegedly chose to associate with. It is clear that Seligman was not rejected for who he was personally but as a construct of the white Protestant imagination.

The Seligman incident was followed by a succession of other hotels and resorts prohibiting Jewish entry – in Coney Island, Lake Placid Club, and at the Mohonk Peace Conference, somewhat ironically organized by Quakers.

The discriminatory exclusion of Jews extended beyond exclusive hotels and resorts. Though there is passing mention of restrictive covenants, it was a form of antisemitic discrimination that, in my view, deserves more extensive description. Neighborhoods where Jews were barred from residence were a common feature of American society, especially in the decades prior to World War II. Such exclusion tangentially touches upon my own life. I grew up in the Forest Hills section of New York City. Before the War, the older section of Forest Hills, festooned with tidy Tudor homes and private streets, barred Jews from living there. Teaneck New Jersey, where I worked for almost half a century and now harbors a large population of Orthodox Jews, in the 1940s excluded Jews from residence.

Also significant, but omitted in Teter's narrative, was the restrictive quotas placed on Jews attending American universities, especially the elite schools. The first such restriction was imposed in 1919 at Columbia University, enacted by its famed president, Nicolas Murray Butler. Here too, the history becomes personal. I received my three graduate degrees from Columbia. This discrimination has long been a source of resentment for many Jews and has caused some, who have traditionally been at the forefront of progressive causes, to balk at the adoption of affirmative action initiatives even as they have otherwise supported programs to leverage equality and greater opportunities for Blacks. The exclusion from clubs and universities was also paralleled by the rejection of Jews from selective law firms, which caused them to create their own.

Of historical significance is that antisemitism in late nineteenth-century Europe, anti-Jewish discrimination in America, as well as anti-immigrant nativism and the violent suppression of Blacks all occurred more or less simultaneously, and all emerged as backlashes against

movements toward greater equality, liberalism, and democratic pluralism. Within the American context, this convergence, as Teter, concludes "…helped bolster that 'true' Americans were white Protestant, while others were undeserving of citizenship and equality."

But, of course, the Black experience was different from that of Jews. Discrimination against Blacks was structural, not exclusively cultural. It was baked into the law and the justice system. Though difficult to contemplate, American race laws served as a model for restrictions on citizenship and anti-miscegenation laws that went beyond our borders. The Nazis sent their legal scholars to the United States to learn from us how they could justify the legal disenfranchisement of Jews.

After the Second World War, the enormity of the Holocaust led, for a while, to the mitigation of antisemitic outbursts. But Blacks who fought Fascism in Europe in defense of freedom found themselves, upon returning home, still confronting discrimination, bigotry, and violence. It is well known that the much-vaunted G.I bill excluded Black home buyers, whose political deprivations have long been augmented by structural economic inequality and plunder. On the other hand, there can be little doubt that the experiences of the War, as well as decolonization transpiring in Africa and Asia, helped to inspire the Civil Rights movement, and put an end not to racism but to legal segregation and disenfranchisement.

Beyond Magda Teter's primary thesis that the Christian degradation and subordination of Jews, extending back to biblical times, was transferred to the enslavement of Blacks at the hands of Europeans in the early modern period, a secondary narrative describes how each advance by Jews and Blacks has precipitated a backlash, pointing to the reality that these prejudices remain deeply entrenched in American society. Sitting atop this historical dialectic and providing its justification has been the phenomenon of white Christian supremacy.

Teter ends her book with the insurrectionary assault on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021. In line with her thesis, White Christian supremacy was clearly in evidence; some rioters were donning antisemitic slogans, while others carried crosses and Christian symbols.

It's a powerful narrative, rich in detail, and rigorously argued. But there are also notable omissions. Christian nationalism is ominously present on the Trumpist and extremist agenda. It is the American component of what is a more expansive religiously based nationalism that is making inroads internationally. Arguably inaugurated by the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, we see variants of religious nationalism in Erdogan's Turkey, Orban's Hungary, Putin's Russia, Modi's Hindutva in India, in Israel under Netanyahu, and elsewhere. Magda Teter's study points to the emergence of a Christian nationalist movement in the United States. Its conclusions would be enhanced if she provided elaboration, perforce speculative, as to what precisely Christian nationalists in this country want. How is their movement organized? What

would a Christian nationalist America look like?

Acknowledging white Christian hegemony, I found it surprising that she has little to say about the role of evangelical Christians specifically. Claiming tens of millions of Americans, the evangelical movement since the late 1970s has moved the political landscape far to the right. During the George W. Bush administration, they had hundreds of members of Congress in their pockets. Arguably, evangelicalism is no longer a religious movement, but a political one spewing extremist positions riddled with misogyny, anti-gay rhetoric, and a contempt for Democrats, liberalism, and pluralism. Donald Trump would not have been elected without their support. Their putative love for Israel is based on the theological presumption that Jews need to be regrouped in the Holy Land in order to jump-start the Second Coming of Christ. At that time, Jews will either convert to Christianity or die. Their ostensible philo-semitism is anything but. It is a blatant expression of Christian supersessionism played out on the contemporary political stage, and as such is a prime expression of Teter's thesis.

The author might have given more attention to the role of the Ku Klux Klan, and such noted antisemites as Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, and Father Charles Coughlin. But perhaps she concluded that these subjects have been amply explicated in other texts dealing explicitly with antisemitism, and it better to unearth lesser-known figures.

In closing, *Christian Supremacy* has done a masterful job of explaining how deeply rooted racism and antisemitism have been baked into American history and endures. It goes far in clarifying the extremism of white supremacy and explains how what has in recent decades been confined to the lunatic fringe, is more mainstream than we would otherwise wish to countenance.

We need history to understand the present. But in this critic's view, Magda Teter's prodigious work requires a response that looks to the future. As a progressive, I believe in the possibility of moral and social progress. As a humanist, I believe in an open future, and while our future may be shaped by the past, it is not determined by it.

It's important to note that renewed expressions of white Christian supremacy, as Magda Teter so amply documents, have been responses to advances in the status of Jews and Blacks, both in Europe and the United States. Those advances have been as real as the endurance of racism and anti-Semitism, and provide the foundations on which to build a more benign future marked by greater equality and justice.

Antisemitic incidents are at an all-time high in recent decades, and we have just seen the conclusion of the trial of the assailant in the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in

Pittsburgh, the most devastating antisemitic incident in American history. But this time, the government is on the side of the Jews and not their persecutors as was true in ages past.

Anti-Black racism is still very much with us. We have far to go. But there has been real progress. The Great Society programs of the 1960s helped to leverage more than half the Black population into the middle class. And while the election of Barack Obama has been met by backlash that has unearthed the extremism that so ominously confronts us, electing an African-American to our highest office speaks to a reality that stands against the perdurance of racism.

We are at a precarious moment and our democracy and freedom stand at a precipice. We need history to help guide us to an unknown future, and Magda Teter's far-reaching explanation of where we have arrived is essential reading. It is a book for our time, and I strongly recommend it.

When it comes to our choices in this difficult moment, we must remain as inspired by the future as we are enlightened by the past.

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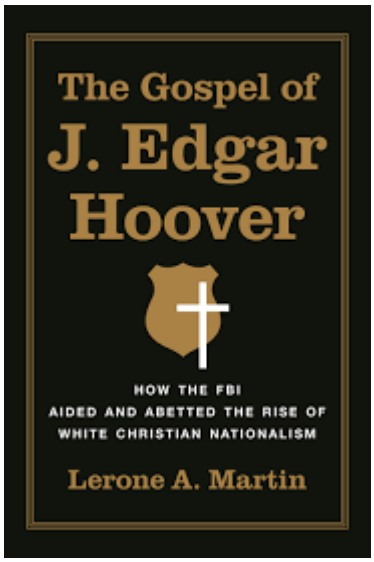
Book Review: Lerone A. Martin's The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: How the FBI Aided and Abetted the Rise of White Christian Nationalism

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

Back in 1961 FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover told staff it was their duty to "reaffirm" the bureau's Christian purpose … to defend and perpetuate the dignity of the nation's Christian endowment," since Christianity was "the main line of resistance against all enemies of our heritage." (P 229)



Many of us had assumed that this public devotion to Bible Belt Christianity was an expedient political front. However, Martin's book put this in perspective. Hoover was truly a devout Presbyterian biblical fundamentalist, and even now the agency makes special recruitment efforts among true believers.

For many Americans the FBI is a creative mélange of motherhood and apple-pie lumpily squeezed into an ill-fitting suit, and yet despite concocting spurious conspiracies while turning a blinkered eye to real ones, the FBI has an unmerited public reputation for probity and efficiency. Unlike the FSB or the Stasis, the FBI, does not evoke instinctive shudders.

Yet this is the bureau that had Martin Luther King surrounded with a phalanx of agents, although they were indeed facing inwards rather than out! And then watched and applauded his assassination. They wiped out the Black Panthers, but only noticed QAnon and the Proud

Boys after they had rampaged through Capitol Hill on January 6th on prime-time television.

It would be easy to dismiss this as the ambient racism of the social environment around the bureau osmosing in, but Lerone A. Martin shows differently. The FBI's religiose and toxic white nationalism was built into its DNA by J. Edgar Hoover- a bigoted Presbyterian methodology survived scrutiny mostly because no one dared scrutinize it! And he was in fact a Sunday School teacher!

We have known for years that J Edgar Hoover was hardly a paragon of heterosexual virtue, but it would be churlish in these more accommodating days to question his life as a "confirmed bachelor" with his mother and then with Special Agent Clyde Tolson. His homophobic contemporaries managed to overlook it, even as the Bureau showed such a prurient and obsessive interest in the love lives of Black leaders, not least Bayard Rustin

But the one issue on which Ultramontane Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants converged was distaste for uppity Blacks, and in particular Martin Luther King. It is astounding how, in this era ,the overt racism and sexism of the FBI has essentially escaped excoriation and exposure. except of course the traits are coming back into fashion.

Hoover was also theologically innovative in other ways: at a time when for many white Protestants being Catholic was barely a step up from being Jewish or Black, he subcontracted the spiritual care of the FBI staff to the Jesuits and had them conduct regular retreats and training for his agents. He accepted the sword of Saint Ignatius Loyola as an honor, which has extra irony since Loyola took the Inquisition to India to whip burn and rack the recalcitrant Goanese into line to accept the church's writ. The FBI's investigative methods do emulate the Inquisition, but ecumenical before its time. the Bureau also hosted a Vespers service for its Protestants. But regardless of their views on the papacy or transubstantiation, the congregations had one thing in common: the homeopathic leavening of Black agents were not invited. Indeed, it were not so appalling it would be the subject of a comedy, Martin reports that for years the only Black special agents were Hoover's driver and gardener – affirmative action appointments made at White House insistence.

His pioneering concordat between Roman Catholics and Protestants of the fundamentalist kind has presaged the politics of the last 60 years and that put a reactionary majority in control of the Supreme Court and many other institutions throughout the Republic. Hoover was ruling on minutiae like the religious orthodoxy of the Revised Standard Version. Even now the FBI has special programs for recruiting evangelists and has become clear over the last few years as the special blind eye towards white nationalist extremists is mirrored by a hypersensitivity to Black and Muslim activities.

Martin's work is at once frustrating and profoundly incisive in its tight focus. Emerging from MLK's own tradition of religious social and political activism, his concentration on the religious aspects of the struggle and divisions brings out whole dimensions rarely touched upon by secular students of the Civil Rights Struggle.

Not many of us browse through evangelical magazines, sermons and tracts, let alone or read the weekly sermons of Hoover to his staff. As historians, it's our loss and we have to thank Lerone Martin for undertaking this task on our behalf and recentering this core ce of the civil rights struggle that we have overlooked. there are other books that could be written about the huge grand transgression of the constitution implied in integrating a Taliban-like cult into the core of law enforcement let alone the huge explicit racist agenda revealed by this correspondence. As a minister himself, Lerone Martin's work is an essential contribution to the religious thinking motivating both sides of the civil rights struggle.

Ian Williams was born and brought up in Liverpool in the UK, where he was a member of the Labour Party Young Socialist in PM Harold Wilson's Huyton constituency but veered leftwards, seduced by the Chinese Cultural Resolution. Expelled from Liverpool University for protesting its investments in Apartheid, he was on a delegation to China in 1970, when he had a drinking competition with Premier Chou En Lai and the Gang of Four, and arguing Eng Lit with Mme Mao.

Inoculated against Leninism, he joined the Labour Party in 1977 and remained a member until Starmer. Working on British Rail he had become a local union rep before being elected to the Executive of the National Union of Railwaymen (sic). In 1983 he had a Nuffield fellowship studying Indian unions, began writing professionally and since 1984 he has been a member of the British National Union of Journalists.

In 1987, he was a speech/article writer for UK Labour leader Neil Kinnock during the General Election. In 1989. Moving to New York, he has covered international politics from his coign of vantage at the UN, where he was the President of the UN Correspondents Association, setting up its annual awards. Currently President of the NY Foreign Press Association, he lectures on English Literature at BMCC/CUNY, and is the author of innumerable articles and nine published books, most recently on the UN and on George Orwell.

Book Review: Andrew Feenberg's The Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

Andrew Feenberg's philosophical work has centred on three main themes: the reconstruction of Herbert Marcuse's philosophy, an appreciation and contemporary reconstruction of Georg Lukács' early work, and an engaged philosophy of technology. The latter project is grounded in the first two insofar as the relation between reification and the critique of technology is central to Western Marxism. Marcuse developed certain aspects of the philosophy of technology but Feenberg goes further in addressing the internet and other contemporary phenomena, including exploring the concrete social implications of technological innovation, as well as integrating several streams of social studies of science and technology. The volume under review returns to interpretation of Marcuse. It is a reconsideration by a mature scholar, profoundly influenced by Marcuse but never shy of criticizing him, that aims to assess Marcuse's importance for contemporary philosophy and social theory. Given Marcuse's fame and influence a half-century ago, not to mention the development of his philosophical work over the bulk of the 20th century, such a contemporary assessment is certainly welcome.

After an introduction where Feenberg recalls his personal recollections of Marcuse and details his public image, three chapters detail the major pillars of Marcuse's philosophy: Marx, Hegel and Freud. He then switches direction to investigate the critique of technology, which is the major theme from Marcuse that has inspired Feenberg's own work and, finally, the related concepts of reason and nature which must be reckoned with to assess the contemporary viability of Marcuse's philosophy. As the book progresses, its major theme emerges: Marcuse's work can only be properly understood if it is acknowledged that his work is distinctively marked by a phenomenological influence due to his early studies with Heidegger, even though such marking is not specifically Heideggerian but is more generally phenomenological. Only on this basis, Feenberg argues, can those aspects of Marcuse's work that distinguish him from his Frankfurt colleagues be understood. Moreover, it is precisely these aspects that make his work more promising in its contemporary relevance and continuing development. Marcuse himself repudiated Heidegger due to his damning association with National Socialism. Most commentators have similarly sought to either excuse Marcuse from any continuing influence or, alternatively, condemn him for its persistence. Feenberg's bold thesis of a continuing subterranean positive influence is a significant one that revives the importance of phenomenology for Critical Theory.

In 1932, Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* became publicly available. Marcuse, among many others at the time, was profoundly influenced by the discovery of Marx's

philosophical origin and the wider philosophical significance of concepts such as labor, alienation, etc. While an earlier generation, including Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch, had to argue in a detailed manner for the conceptual influence of Hegel on Marx, in the early 1930s it became obvious that the early Marx not only used Hegelian terminology but attempted to resolve issues originating in Hegelian philosophy. While orthodox Marxists, right up until Louis Althusser in the 1960s, argued that Marx later rejected this early influence, others used it as a starting-point for raising the question of Marx's relation to philosophy. Marcuse's review of the *Manuscripts* went one step further than this. He interpreted Marx's human-nature dialectic as a constitution of a "world" in the phenomenological sense that he received from Heidegger, thereby not only retrieving a Hegelian Marx but also suggesting a convergence with, and assimilation of, phenomenology.

The *Manuscripts*, while fragmentary, develop a fundamental understanding of human being—or human nature in traditional terminology—that defines this being as essentially historical. The concept of species-being is deployed to describe the universal and social aspect of human being. Statements concerning human sensuousness assert that human being is objective both in its perception of natural beings and that humans are also objects for natural beings. Human-world is a sensuous unity. From this unity derives the fundamental practical orientation of philosophy and, thereby, the understanding of thought not in opposition to practice but as a component of practical comportment. Human being objectifies itself in the world through labour and appropriates the externality of the world through labour. Alienation and reification set in when this sensuous unity is torn apart by private ownership of the means of production and thereby the performance of labour under conditions of external compulsion. The discovery of the *Manuscripts* was a turning point for Marcuse. He had found in Marx the concrete philosophy that he had been seeking in Heidegger. But also, Feenberg's interpretation claims, it could do so only because his reading of Marx was already supported by key phenomenological concepts learned from Heidegger. Thus, Feenberg concludes, while Marcuse could view himself as having departed definitively from Heidegger, a more thorough interpretation can discern a significant continuity.

Marxist philosophy had long recognized that 20th century Marxism required a more vigorous conception of subjectivity than that found in the objectivism and determinism of Marxist orthodoxy. Phenomenological Marxism begins from understanding subjectivity not only as a Hegelian subject-object dialectic but from a phenomenological understanding of "world" as a meaningful practical whole. Prior to explicating Marcuse's review of Marx's *Manuscripts* in chapter 2, Feenberg recounts swiftly the development of the concept of subjectivity in German philosophy from Dilthey to Heidegger and later details the philosophical content of the concept of "world." It is tough going for the uninitiated. However, its main import is to show that the concept of lived experience in phenomenology was a viable route to renew subjectivity in Marxism and thereby to show that the early Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxist project was a credible one that may be regarded as the culmination of previous German philosophy.

Marcuse's *Habilitationsschrift* on Hegel, which is the subject of the next chapter, was written under the influence of Heidegger prior to his encounter with Marx's *Manuscripts*—which

should alert the reader that *Ruthless Critique* is not a chronological account but a philosophical dissection. The concept of "immanent potentiality" that Marcuse derives from Hegel is the core of his philosophical justification of social critique and transformative hope. It aims to chart a path between a Kantian ethical ought, on one hand, and a Marxist determinism, on the other, by rooting the possibility of transformation in the repressed possibilities of the present. In the first place, a given thing is only one instantiation of its essence, which means that other actualizations are possible. But this logical possibility is not sufficient. It must be completed by a concept of necessity which derives from the model of organic growth that he took over from Aristotle and Hegel. If an acorn begins to grow in the context of earth and water, a given stage of its development prior to becoming a tree may be seen as a necessary stage in its full unfolding. Such contextual factors are called in Hegelian terminology the "otherness" of the acorn. Through its encounter with such otherness, the contextual factors of its existence become necessary elements of its development. The tree exists in actuality as the immanent potential of the acorn. In this way potentiality (which is Marcuse's term for the unity of sufficient and necessary elements) emerges from actuality while remaining in tension with it. Actuality is not a simply given static state but emerges from a history that comes to exist in a tense present which contains a potentiality for transformation.

This key concept remained central to Marcuse's thinking afterward. He looked for the repressed potentiality in the present from which could emerge a transformation of actuality. We might wonder whether such a concept of potentiality can be justified outside of its organic model, whether a social form contains an immanent potentiality in an analogous manner. For Marcuse, the important aspect is the Marxist point that the structuring powers of the social system actively repress the real potentialities for emancipation that reside within its social and economic development. A society that has sufficient wealth to meet the needs of its members is, for example, prevented from doing so by vast inequalities of power and runaway inessential consumption. In a version of Critical Theory much more positive and future-oriented than that of his colleagues Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Marcuse identified the realizable futures that current arrangements prevent. The "new sensibility" that he diagnosed in the opposition of the 1960s suggested that the need for goodness, beauty and happiness could be discerned within the social organization that also produced war and technical domination. In this way, he claimed to overcome the plurality of subjectively chosen values with a notion of objective value grounded in an analysis of social repression within the tensions of actuality. Feenberg not only traces the philosophical justification of this difficult philosophical concept but also shows how it oriented Marcuse's speeches, lectures and writing in different contexts.

The last pillar of Marcuse's philosophy is Freud. Marcuse began from an interpretation of Freud's late metapsychological principles of life and death. First, in a standard Marxist move, he historicizes the principles. By making a distinction between surplus and necessary repression, he argues that a different organization of society could reduce repression to increase pleasure and happiness. Second, in a much rarer and distinctive move, he reads the Freudian principles as ontological. Thus, the interpretation of Freud—especially when synthesized with Marx and Hegel—becomes a historical ontology of human being that may be understood as Marcuse's final rejoinder to Heidegger. The concept of subjectivity required to

renew Marxism, when combined with a Hegelian conception of immanent potentiality, creates a tension not only within social-economic life, nor the self-development of consciousness, but in the instinctual reactions and projections of human beings. Life-affirmation, and its struggle with the deathly power of repressive society, becomes the motive-power and goal of social revolution. But here we encounter the same problem as that raised by the Hegelian concept of immanent potentiality: can it function outside the realm of biology? Instinctual life-affirmation may seek support in art and philosophy but can it operate in the world of social change and existential commitment?

These three pillars of Marcuse's thought converge on a conception of the living present as imbued with a potential for historical transformation through the identification of repressive structures and release of the life-affirming power of instinctual revolt. Feenberg's careful explication of the logic of Marcuse's philosophy can be difficult for the beginner at times but opens up considerable depth to the reader aware of the pertinent philosophical issues. Helpfully, he refers appropriately to Marcuse's specific interventions in political events that give rich content to the philosophical outline.

The final two substantive chapters of the book return to themes familiar from Feenberg's work which are explained here as a continuation of Marcuse's. This continuity depends upon one major critique of Marcuse that constitutes the book's persistent theme. In various contexts throughout the text, Feenberg suggests that the influence of phenomenology on Marcuse's thought remained after his repudiation of Heidegger and even stimulates its most distinctive and productive aspects: As we have seen, his reading of Marx claims that it is a diagnosis of the capitalist "world." Likewise, his reading of Hegel, drawing on the lineage of German philosophy from Dilthey to Heidegger, interprets an actual world as imbued with an immanent potentiality that prefigures a different future through reference to the Husserlian phenomenological category of "motility" which refers in the first place to the self-movement of the human body and which Marcuse extends to the self-movement of a world. The interpretation of the Freudian metapsychological concepts of life and death as ontological forces revisits the phenomenological account of critique as based in an ontology of the lifeworld (even though Marcuse leaves this ontology in an implicit state). The central thesis of Feenberg's interpretation of Marcuse's philosophy is that the unacknowledged persisting influence of phenomenology enabled a distinction between the abstract conceptual categories of science and technology, on the one hand, and the lived experience of human beings, on the other. By making this distinction explicit, he aims to resolve two problematic aspects of Marcuse's philosophy in a manner that points to their continuation. This is the topic of the last two chapters.

Probably the most distinctive and controversial thesis of Marcuse's work is that science and technology are intrinsically tied to social domination. This thesis goes beyond the standard Marxist claim that science and technology are *used* by dominant capitalist forces but in themselves remain neutral and can be turned to other purposes. He argues that technoscience (to use the Heideggerian term) has become a total system such that it takes the place previously occupied by ideology to foreclose opposition; that the specific design of technologies

under capitalism gives them a hierarchical structure of control (and are therefore not value-free); that the rationality of modern science that grounds technology is *a priori* oriented to social domination through its conceptual structure. These three claims receive considerable documentation by Marcuse and have led to many subsequent studies in sociology and philosophy which Feenberg sketches. Their arguments cannot be reviewed here. What is central is that if science and technology are essentially tied to social domination then not only is a new technology required, but also a new science, by an egalitarian socialist society.

Marcuse did not shrink from these claims. From our own standpoint, it is not too difficult to see that certain technologies—wind energy, small-scale atomic reactors, personal computers, readable text without the mediation of printing, the internet, etc.—make possible different social relations, even though such possibilities are still constrained by capitalist directives. Moreover, social movements have stepped in to demand citizen input into the design of technosystems such as city planning, traffic control, medical care etc. Feenberg has explained this possibility through the phenomenological distinction between formal, abstract systems (which remain the same in any social system) and their lived application in specific social relations; consequently, technologies can be reformed through the incorporation of countervailing lived experiences. In this way, chapter 5 shows how Feenberg's work on technosystems would be in direct development of Marcuse's work if the suppressed phenomenological element of that work were acknowledged.

But do such new possibilities require a new science with a new conceptual structure? In chapter 6 the same conceptual distinction is mined to suggest that Marcuse's flirtation with a new conceptual structure of science was provoked by his failure to distinguish two concepts of nature: one pertaining to the internal structure of modern science and one that is lived by social subjects in definite situations. The struggle between the environmental movement, which defends lived experiences of nature against corporate self-interest, has often come into conflict with the scientific establishment which sets aside such lived experiences. In more recent times, however, we have seen these two views of nature can work together to document environmental degradation. This shows that they are not necessarily in conflict but that conflict only ensues if one claims to be the *exclusively* valid view of nature—which is an ideological and not an intra-scientific issue. There is no need for a new science but only a science that recognizes the legitimacy of lived experiences of nature and technology. Marcuse looked for aesthetic criteria for social critique in art but is left with the question of whether it can operate outside the artistic domain. Feenberg shows that such criteria can be found operative in lived experiences and can become effective in science if scientists take seriously those value-laden experiences that determine the quality of life of the citizenry. Science would not be new in its conceptual structure but in its social mandate. His recovery of the phenomenological component of Marcuse's thought allows him to clearly distinguish scientific and lived nature, which Marcuse confused, and thus to chart out a possible direction for the critique of technology that is neither anti-scientific nor objectivistic.

Feenberg's recovery and extension of the working of phenomenology in Marcuse's philosophy is detailed, thorough and original. It is, to this reader at least, convincing. For this reason the

book is a significant intervention not only in Marcuse studies but in defining contemporary tasks for a critical theory of society. Such a detailed recovery and extension of Marcuse's work, long after his heyday, provokes the reader to assess the viability of Marcuse's philosophy in a contemporary context. I will make three remarks about this in conclusion.

The title of the book, "the ruthless critique of everything existing," is taken from an 1843 letter from Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge. Marx remarks that the powers of reaction in Berlin and Zurich exhibit a "reign of stupidity" and that the reformers have no idea what the future might accomplish. Still, this may be an advantage because the task is not to dogmatically anticipate the future but instead philosophy must become the ruthless critique of everything existing. Philosophy as critique immersed in real social struggles certainly describes Marcuse's work and Feenberg's extension of it. But what about the "everything"? The phenomenological concept of "world" may suggest that everything in this world might become other than itself, but its import in Feenberg's interpretation is to restrict criticism of intra-scientific conceptuality in favour of criticism legitimating the lived experiences that could reform it and similarly to design or re-design technologies, not under different principles, but with altered social effects. The hope for an entirely new world that Marcuse endorsed with his slogan "the end of utopia" seems to have retreated. Now, perhaps Marcuse meant by this only that there are greater possibilities for equality and happiness than the capitalist system allows and therefore that criticism is legitimate. Certainly so. But it also flirts with, and perhaps means, that all human equality and happiness is possible (unless it contradicts natural laws). Perhaps he even intended to leave this alternative indeterminate, insofar as we will only be able to define the difference through the struggle itself. Be that as it may, the critique legitimated by Feenberg is not total but restricted to reform of technosystems and legitimation of lived experience of nature in social policy.

Marcuse's book on Freud defends a conception of human being and society as capable of attaining freedom, equality and happiness. However, the ontology of human being on which this conception depends is left, as Feenberg remarks, implicit. The rejoinder to Heidegger's ontology is thus incomplete. If we recall that Heidegger's ontology focussed on "being toward death" in its fundamental orientation, the absence of death and tragedy in Marcuse's implicit ontology is striking. Marx also shunted aside the question of death in his *1844 Manuscripts* by pointing out that the individual is a particular being and thus necessarily mortal. In other words, only the social and universal aspects of "species-being" are philosophically interesting. Marcuse possibly mitigated this assessment when he stated that individual conflicts would continue to exist in a society ruled by the pleasure principle but, nevertheless, it seems evident that his ontology does not regard such conflict, nor death or tragedy, as philosophically significant. It is not at all clear from the book whether Feenberg agrees with this. However, his last two chapters sketch an approach that has no reference to, nor need for, this larger claim by Marcuse.

One of the interesting aspects of this book is that it spans three distinct historical periods: that from the end of the First World War to the success of Nazism in Germany; the 1960s in which Marcuse became a world-famous figure and wrote his best-known works; and our historical

present, defined as it is by social movements, massive concentration of wealth, and rampant pessimism over whether humans will have any future at all. This historical depth suggests certain conclusions that are not explicitly addressed in the book. It suggests that a single, coherent philosophical perspective can address these different situations, given enough specifying description, implying a critical theory of society for late capitalism that spans the last century and more. It suggests a certain revival of the hopes of the 1960s along with the desperate struggle against hunger and fascism in the 1930s in modified form for our present. Perhaps most important of all, it asks the reader to look at the struggle for equality, justice and happiness in long historical perspective by focussing on the legacy of one of the most significant philosophers of the last century.

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Book Review: Joan Braune and Kieran Durkin's Erich Fromm's Critical Theory: Hope, Humanism, and the Future

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

This book is a significant contribution to ongoing efforts to re-evaluate Fromm's work. Featuring prominent Fromm experts, including Joan Braune, Kieran Durkin, Michael J. Thompson, Lauren Langman, and Neil McLaughlin, this edited collection approaches the writings and thought of Erich Fromm from multiple angles, offering incisive analyses of his innovations and contributions as a radical humanist and a critical theorist, all the while stressing the distinctiveness of his theories and concepts. The presentation of Fromm's thought in this volume is compelling for many reasons, not least because of the implicit challenge mounted to poststructuralist and dated Marxist approaches to politics throughout. Unapologetically radical and humanistic, with a conspicuous activist slant, the contributions that make up this volume point to an alternative way of thinking about social issues, including class oppression, climate change, the authoritarian character structure, and of course fascism.

Kieran Durkin's introductory chapter offers an insightful analysis of distinct moments in Fromm's intellectual development, both during and after his work with the Institute for Social Research, all the while emphasizing continuities in Fromm's thought throughout these different periods, especially his preoccupation with normativity and humanism. An introduction of such breadth, depth and sophistication could have perhaps made room for a few words about Fromm's religious background and how it may have informed his intellectual trajectory, and perhaps also to help explain why Fromm's thought diverged in key respects from that of his colleagues at the Institute, ultimately precipitating his decision to break with it. Among Durkin's accomplishments in this surprisingly succinct chapter are identification of some of the factors that led to Fromm's departure from the Institute's framework, including a clearly articulated consideration of the points of contention and divergence between orthodox psychoanalysis and Fromm's unique approach to psychology. Durkin simultaneously finds a way to place Fromm in conversation with trends in the contemporary academy, positioning him, for instance, as a potential critic of poststructuralism. Durkin certainly does not purport to be wholly unbiased in presenting the ideas and arguments he does throughout his introduction—it is clearly written by someone who self-identifies as a Frommian. Yet he manages to weave important criticisms of Fromm into his text, one example being a frank discussion of the elements of ethnocentrism in his thought. He does so in a way that invites genuine reflection on the shortcomings of Fromm's thought while retaining a focus on the significance of his intellectual accomplishments as well as of his activist work. This

introduction is required reading for anyone looking for a terse and compelling account of the central motifs in Fromm's oeuvre. Durkin's masterful treatment of the multidimensionality intrinsic to Fromm's thought sets the stage for the consideration from different angles, throughout the volume, of Fromm's sundry contributions to social and political thought.

One of the key strengths of this volume is its breadth. It manages to illuminate different facets of Fromm's thought and situate them within broader traditions and problematics. Lynn S. Chancer's chapter, for example, brings feminist concerns to bear on Fromm's humanism. She underlines Fromm's at times parochial and retrograde use of language, that is, his reliance on gendered words—and therefore implicitly the need to update Fromm's terminology—as well as flirtation with an essentialist understanding of gender. At the same time, her discussion points up the anti-essentialist core of Fromm's humanism, which she identifies as being potentially of service to contemporary debates about the social construction of gender, among other things. Reading Fromm against Fromm, Chancer pinpoints what is essential to Fromm's thought and what is not, helping preserve the critical thrust of his humanism.

In a compelling work of historiography, David Norman Smith provides an account of the development of Fromm's staunch opposition to authoritarian Marxism and reductive psychoanalysis. The mature Fromm was resolutely anti-doctrinaire, maintains Smith, and that is how he managed to preserve his intellectual independence and penchant for conceptual innovation. His proposed synthesis of Marx and Freud is a case in point, as is his important concept of social character. Very interesting and informative also is Smith's discussion of the intellectual and political development of another neglected figure in the history of the Frankfurt School, Hilde Weiss. Weiss, Smith tells us, played a key role in the Institute for Social Research's early work and in developing the workers' survey that she collaborated on with Fromm in particular.

Charles Thorpe, for his part, demonstrates what role *anxiety* plays in the emergence of reactionary movements. He reminds us that it is not just one's agency that is at stake in escapes from freedom, but the difference between a social character that is open to and invites progressive change and one that is amenable to and is preyed upon by far-right forces. Thorpe skillfully shows that "negative freedom" as such does not satisfy the fundamental human longing for meaning and that in the absence of a positive sense of meaning and community, "negative freedom" is tantamount to abandonment to overwhelming existential anxiety and the destructive and predatory forces of capitalism, both of which drive individuals into the arms of reactionary forces. Thorpe also demonstrates the naïveté of Anthony Giddens' approach to the conditions required for the actualization of the self, positing that it overlooks the structural barriers to democratization and community, both of which are essential to human flourishing, under capitalism. In overlooking these structural factors, Giddens is in fact complicit in reproducing neoliberal understandings of individuality. Thorpe's discussion of anxiety links up nicely with Roger Foster's contention that capitalism harnesses progressive social tendencies to its own, conservative ends, for it is clear that anxiety is the lynchpin of this process, at least so far as the experiential, human pole of it is concerned. Foster argues that neoliberalism has managed to secure its foundations by coopting a social character that has been in the process

of transformation as a response to sweeping social changes ushered in as part of postindustrialism and through the new comforts and stability afforded by the postwar welfare state as well as the upheavals of the 1960s. The process of cooptation has unfolded through technocratic modes of governance and a manufactured discourse of authenticity and personal well-being that has interpreted human flourishing as an asocial imperative.

Michael Löwy situates Fromm squarely in the radical romantic tradition of the Jews of central Europe who melded their anti-capitalist sensibilities with German romanticism and Jewish messianism. He then offers an intriguing discussion of Fromm's early work, written when he still subscribed to orthodox Judaism, in which Fromm contrasted what he took to be the anti-capitalist ethics of Judaism with those of Protestantism, which he saw as being more favorable to capitalism. In his early work, Fromm also juxtaposed the more authentic manifestations of Judaism, such as the Hassidic movement, with more conformist strains, such as Reform Judaism. Löwy also mentions Fromm's essay on the Sabbath, in which he opposed Jewish motifs to the capitalist imperative of work. Since Fromm's early work, written by an observant Jew, foregrounds critiques of capitalism, it can be seen as prefigurative of his later work with the Institute for Social Research and beyond. At the same time, since, as is suggested in the introduction to this volume, messianic Jewish themes continued to surface in Fromm's thought throughout his career, it is safe to assume that this is so because Fromm understood them to be *inherently* radical. One of the implications of Löwy's discussion seems to be that Fromm settled into Marxism at least in part through his radical interpretation of Judaism. This should come as no surprise given Fromm's original, radical re-reading of the Old Testament in *You Shall be as Gods*. And it is precisely such a radical religious sensibility that animates George Lundskow's reflections on the necessity of prophetic messianism in contemporary social movements, a sensibility that links up with Joan Braune's subtle valorization of prophetic interventions in a decaying, populism infused capitalist landscape. Intriguing is Lundskow's suggestion that radical left strategy requires a new kind of faith, one that can offer the left unity, a transformative vision, a "transcendent purpose," as well as counteract necrophilous impulses in contemporary society.[1] Interestingly, Lundskow's discussion also implicitly raises an important question about the relationship between productiveness and faith. Can one be productive or a revolutionary—rather than merely rebellious—without hope and faith?[2] At any rate, Lundskow's and Braune's are the two most strategy-oriented contributions in the volume, putting the lie to the notion that radical strategy and religiosity are incompatible.

Neil McLaughlin and Michael Maccoby provide an important elaboration of the concept of social character through a discussion of Fromm's study *Social Character in A Mexican Village* and a comparison with key Bourdieusian concepts, especially that of habitus. The authors' discussion also illuminates why Fromm's important study in Mexico was largely ignored in academic circles. McLaughlin and Maccoby point up the humanistic underpinnings of the concept of social character and note that it serves as a corrective to Marxist approaches that tend to occlude the importance of human agency for the transformation of society as well as reductive and mechanistic Freudian approaches to character and sexuality. Like Joan Braune, though with a slightly different accent, they stress that Fromm's ideas point beyond simplistic structure-agency frameworks. Importantly, the authors also remind readers that a

part of what distinguished Fromm's scholarship, politics, and his activities as a public intellectual were his prophetic proclivities.

At the core of Michael Thompson's discussion of Fromm is also an analysis of Fromm's concept of social character, which Thompson situates within a broader Hegelian Marxist tradition wherein questions of ethics are bound up with social ontology. Highly original and provocative is the claim that underlying Fromm's theorizing is a social ontology predicated on the priority of social relations over the self-development of individuals, as is his claim that Fromm's implicit social ontology should at once be understood as the core of critical theory and serving as a diagnostic of social pathology. His arguments invite reflection on the dialectal quality of the link between "robust" social relations and individual flourishing.[3] Not only does Thompson boldly center questions of ontology and teleology when many contemporary philosophers refuse to do so, but his chapter makes an invaluable contribution to contemporary debates about ethics as he mounts a serious challenge to recognitive, or neo-idealist, paradigms in philosophy, raising questions about the effectiveness of approaches to ethics that overlook the role of ideology in shaping individuals' self-understanding and desires.

Lauren Langman and George Lundskow help explicate Fromm's complex notion of social character as a prelude to a discussion of what they see as a new, emergent character type, which is fluid, generally anti-hierarchical, and open to new experiences and sexualities. There is much sophistication and nuance in their contention that this emergent character structure could serve as a foundation for productiveness but that its traits are also to an extent reflective of, and may be serviceable to, neoliberal aims and agendas. They also observe that the new self's mutability and absent core means that it could potentially be recruited by reactionary movements and enlisted for reactionary ends. Overall, the authors maintain a great degree of optimism throughout the chapter, as is evidenced by their claim that "as oppressive ideologies, hateful prejudices, and coercive normative controls weaken, the default human orientation emerges, which, as Fromm argued, is life-loving, socially committed, sharing, and egalitarian."[4] Such optimism may be unjustified but is very much in line with the injunction coming out of Fromm's "paradox of hope," to treat every day as though it were the beginning of a radically transformed social existence while recognizing that realistically radical social change may not materialize in one's lifetime.[5]

Echoes of the importance of such hope for defeating fascism are found in Joan Braune's beautifully written conclusion. But despite foregrounding the question of how Fromm's thought can be of use to anti-fascist activism, her concluding chapter is rife with important insights about the centrality of Fromm's understanding of love and hope to struggles against oppression in general. Offering people love and compassion, she notes, can be an important tool in undermining fascism as this helps combat the authoritarian character structure. One of Braune's most striking insights concerns the notion that hope, as conceived of by Fromm, points to a unique kind of agency, namely, a *prefigurative* one. Reflecting on and elaborating a theme hinted at by Durkin, and explicitly taken up by Lundskow, Braune insists that hope offers a unique vantage point for radical humanists and activists by encouraging and projecting a transformative vision. Such a vision is a necessary complement to the realism urged in

Fromm's conception of hope,[6] and Braune is often more attuned to the ways such a vision can energize an enervated and a struggling left than was Fromm himself. Her work on and explication of the principles and implications of prophetic messianism in the context of social justice movements are a case in point.[7] Such a vision, she affirms with great lucidity in her conclusion, is necessarily anchored in and illuminates a unique kind of prefigurative agency that serves as a bridge between the capitalist present and the socialist future and is therefore indispensable to socialist strategy.

Despite the book's strengths, there are several areas it could have been more attentive to. First, perhaps the shortcomings of Fromm's thought could have been discussed a little more throughout the volume, the important critiques offered by Chancer and Durkin notwithstanding. Second, and relatedly, perhaps the volume would have benefited from an additional chapter or two placing Fromm in dialogue with other social theorists, in the spirit of Thorpe's and McLaughlin and Maccoby's contributions. A comparative perspective of this sort is helpful in elucidating both the merits and shortcomings of key Frommian concepts such as social character and productiveness. Additionally, such a perspective would have pointed to future directions for research as well as further illuminated the contemporary import of Fromm's ideas. Third, some of the contributions in this volume are ambivalent at times about Fromm's status as a critical theorist; this has to do with the fact that aspects of Fromm's thought are in tension with Critical Theory as "canonically understood."[8] Despite the title's affirmation of Fromm's place in the Critical Theory canon, tackling the question of Fromm's status as a Critical Theorist head on in this volume might have obviated this lingering ambivalence and helped Fromm scholars decide whether Fromm's ideas are best pursued within a Critical Theory framework but to some degree in tension with it, outside of but parallel to it, or in complete isolation from it. After all, as Durkin notes in the introduction, "There are evident similarities of outlook that can be traced to a similar geographical and biographical connections, of course, but also definite differences that need to be more fully understood."[9] Devoting a chapter or two to these similarities and differences here could have helped the Fromm world make serious headway with regards to the question of how we should understand Fromm's relationship to the Frankfurt School and the implications of this for his thought.

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[1] 56.

[2] Erich Fromm, "The Revolutionary Character," in *The Dogma of Christ: And Other Essays on Religion, Psychology, and Culture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955), 150-151.

[3] 27.

[4] 204.

[5] Erich Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), 153-157.

[6] Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 154.

[7] See Joan Braune, “Hope and Catastrophe: Messianism in Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse,” in *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements,* ed. Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter N. Funke (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017).

[8] 5.

[9] 5.

Book Review: Moisés Kopper's Architectures of Hope: Infrastructural Citizenship and Class Mobility in Brazil's Public Housing

By | 2023: Vol. 22, No. 3

In this 2023 book, Moisés Kopper ethnographically investigates the political, material, and subjective layers of the Brazilian housing policy Minha Casa, Minha Vida (MCMV). Drawing on fieldwork conducted mainly between 2012 and 2015, in a local housing association and social movement in Porto Alegre called Conselho de Desenvolvimento do Partenon (Codespa), the author critically traces the way private hopes are honed and harnessed through institutional, economic, and material processes, sometimes being converted into collective and political assets. At the same time intimate and public, the stories of housing activists and policy beneficiaries document the bottom-up political struggles for a better life through what the author calls *material hope.*

In part 1, comprising the introduction, the book discusses the inception of a specific type of hope grounded in a large socio-economic transformation Brazil went through, between 2004 and 2013, with what economist called the arrival of a *new middle class*. This shift was materialized through, among other things, the MCMV. The policy is presented and contextualized in this first part, which situates the housing projects within broader class-formation processes. Many concepts which become central to the following chapters are introduced, such as *material hope*, which, as the author defines "[…] highlights the entanglements of grassroots and post-neoliberal institutions politics, the pursuit of value through market infrastructures, and the projection of life into enduring futures." (p. 36). As this definition makes explicit, the temporality and materiality of hoping are central to the book, both aspects which are often lacking in the critical scholarship of social movements.

Part 2 attends to the history of Codespa and the ways its quest for housing unfolds in multiple scales, through political alignments, everyday bureaucracy, emergent subjectivities, and the fomentation of hope. The first chapter introduces the efforts of community leaders, most notably a woman named Benedita, in negotiating and enlisting politicians, state officials and representatives of the private sector in a precarious participatory machinery for the implementation of housing policies. The stories of Benedita's becoming a community leader and the development of Codespa are interspaced with historical data on housing policies in Porto Alegre, providing a necessary political context for the narrative. The core of the chapter

is the construction of a multiscale moral discourse for the creation of a new political subjectivity of the 'model' community, worthy of the desired policy implementation. The second chapter explores the procedures done for the assessment of potential benefactors and the distribution of housing units in Codespa. As the detailed ethnographic description underscores, this is made possible by what the author calls a *machine of worthiness,* that is, a socio-material assemblage which includes both humans and non-humans. This assemblage performs an important techonomoral work: it provides a sense of objectivity to the contentious moral decisions inside the movement, while at the same time allowing for some flexibility for the leaders to deal with everyday contingencies. The *machine of worthiness* is further scrutinized in the following chapter, where everyday *technologies of participation* are explored. It investigates the process through which artifacts such as t-shirts, food baskets, stories, and even information, assist in converting the uncertainty of waiting and private hopes and dreams into collective assets for political mobilization. In the last chapter of this part, Kopper presents a person-centered narrative of Dona Hilda, a 95-year-old woman who learned to effectively navigate this political and bureaucratic assemblage and become a model beneficiary. The text experiments with ethnographic form, making use of the interlocutor's verses to guide this foray into Dona Hilda's lifeworld and the political affects and subjectivities emergent in the moral economy of worthiness. These chapters, thus, present the complex and multiscale process through which infrastructural citizenship is pursued through the politization of hope.

While in part 2 the diverse processes through which hope is harnessed by Codespa is explored, in part 3 the topic is the aftermath of the struggle, when hopes and subjectivities become reshaped as the new apartment owners deal with their inclusion into the consumer market and community life. In chapter 5, Kopper documents the processes of low-income consumption undertaken by the new house owners. Drawing on a topographical metaphor, the author traces the narrative of several female head of households as they strive for their ideals of the good life through their inclusion in the social market and governmental credit schemes. As they do so, their hopes are refashioned, becoming either *critical hope*, as they learn to become informed consumer citizens who must cope with flawed markets and indebtedness, or *deferred hope*, when their dreams are interrupted and postponed. In the following chapter, the reader explores an MCMV building guided by threads of gossip and rumors which seem to contribute to the creation of a new political assemblage. The politics that unfolds among beneficiaries is not directly related to national matters, but rather become what the author calls *private democracies*, concerning everyday political disputes within the association. In a novel way, Kopper also attends to the material quality of the gossips and how they become imbued in the building's architecture. In the last chapter of the book, the author analyzes the development of surveillance and security apparatus in the newly acquired apartments, where this specific materiality is constitutive of new middle-class belongings. This process is described through the conceptual tool of a *middle-class sensorial*, defined as "[…] a topography of images and affects through which class mobility is experienced and located in time and space." (p. 282). This cartographic approach allows Kopper to explore the subjective and affective experiences of his interlocutors, as well as to be attuned to the socio-material relations that do class-formation work, such as infrastructure. Finally, in the conclusion, the author contextualizes the repercussions of the implementation of the MCMV project in the Brazilian political landscape.

He critically points out the various types of hope which have been honed and captured through public policy in this post-neoliberal moment, and the way such social spendings have been significantly cut due to political and economic shifts.

Throughout the 7 chapters, the book makes way for a critical analysis of public policies through conceptualizations of hope. Hope is explored not only as a subjective feeling, but also as a practice which becomes materialized and temporalized in everyday life. It also manages to masterfully combine qualitative data, collected through a five-year long ethnography, with quantitative data from surveys, allowing the reader to shift between multiple scales of the making of a social movement. Beyond offering an engaging text to scholars of Latin American post-neoliberalism and anthropologists of infrastructure and class, I believe the book's biggest contribution is the innovative conceptual toolbox it puts forth. Although sometimes overwhelming, terms such as *material hope, machine of worthiness, critical hope,* and *deferred hope*could be fruitfully adapted to studies of policies in other settings and, thus, encourage the production of more nuanced and critical scholarship. Far from engaging in a simplified critique of the housing movements studied or an endorsement of the discourse of activists, the book crafts a complex narrative which makes visible fragments of hope pivotal to any quest for the good life.

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