

STATE OF POWER 2017

# All Change or No Change?

*Culture, Power and Activism in an Unquiet World*

*– Martin Kirk, Jason Hickel and Joe Brewer*



*“The triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism... But this phenomenon extends beyond high politics and it can be seen also in the ineluctable spread of consumerist Western culture.”*

– Francis Fukuyama (1989) *The End of History*<sup>1</sup>

*“You know in the West we have built a large, beautiful ship. It has all the comforts in it. But one thing is missing: It has no compass and does not know where to go.”*

– Albert Einstein<sup>2</sup>

What a difference a year makes.

Or does it?

2016 was the most tumultuous year most of us can remember. Barrels of ink have been spilt trying to make sense of it and no doubt barrels more are to come. One thing everyone seems to agree on is that we are experiencing some sort of inflection point, with old certainties breaking down, an expanding chasm between people and the large institutions that govern them, and a degrading of belief in things that until recently had been thought inviolable, from the capitalist model to democracy itself. Populations from the United States (US) to Italy to Chile to South Africa to Indonesia are kicking back against a political establishment that feels distant, callous, and nakedly self-serving. This discontent is giving rise to new constellations of political power, as populations elect people who take an innately critical view of orthodox approaches to globalization, from both ends of the political spectrum. In short, everyone is captivated by the things that are changing.

There is another way to read what is happening, though. Beneath all of this change, the most important rules and logic are staying exactly the same.

In this essay, we approach the world from a whole-system perspective. This means looking at those rules, laws, norms and trends that affect the whole planet, rather than any individual nation, region or issue. When you stand back far enough, it becomes clear that dramas of 2016, though vitally important, are nothing like as profound as many are suggesting. In truth, the core logic of the global operating system is going unchallenged. There are hopeful signs from the vanguard of activism, but they are tentative and vulnerable. We argue that far more attention needs to be paid to these whole-system dynamics – to the most fundamental rules of the global operating system. We are in a race against time – against mass species extinction, increasing inequality, ecological collapse, etc. – and every day that we do not try to affect change at the structural level is a day lost.

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In order to make our case, we must not only stand back far enough to see the whole planetary system, but also look into deep history to find the causes of our current crises. Because the events we are witnessing are far more than political; they are cultural. The instincts and assumptions that are driving all this upheaval express core beliefs and logics that have been forged, not over decades or even centuries, but millennia.

This is a story of power, but perhaps not the traditional kind. The kinds of power we are interested in are the deep currents that are largely unacknowledged in standard political commentary. These forces dance through time like the bubbles in a lava lamp, flowing into and away from each other in continuous dialogue. These are the cultural forces that shape all of our lives at the deepest levels.

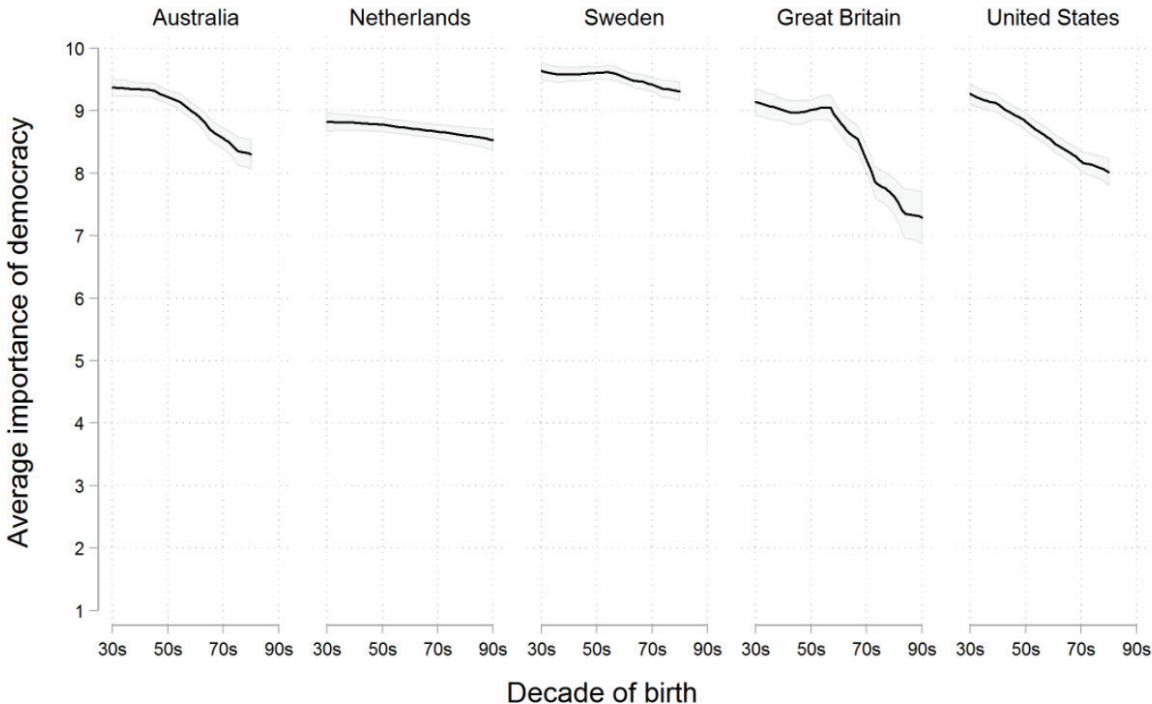
**Where are we?**

There is a level at which things are certainly in flux. The most important of these by far is public opinion.

Right now, it is the public, not political leaders, who are setting the terms of debate, very often to the dismay and confusion of the political classes. This is why 2016 was a year of shocks; the political and media establishment expected one set of outcomes and got another. Electorates all around the world voiced a depth of dissatisfaction with the status quo that the establishment was not prepared for and to which, as yet, it has no coherent response.

This does not mean that the public’s desire is necessarily heard, let alone understood, let alone adhered to by the political elites. Quite the contrary. The inability of political classes over the last few years to truly understand mounting rage and disillusionment is one big reason why the public has started to punish whom they see as the brokers of the status quo through general dissent and disruption, à la Brexit in Britain and the Trump victory in the US. This failure has turned every ballot box into a potential tinder box.

The common reading of what the public are trying to say is that globalization is not working for them. This is telling, because while that is probably true, it is not the whole truth. It still, remarkably, defines the symptom in too-narrow terms. The public are actually starting to show signs of wanting changes that are far more profound than a different flavour of global capitalism. Look, for example, at this:



Graph by Erik Voeten, based on WVS 5

It seems that the representative democracy itself is losing favour. The decline is uneven, and it is far from clear how deep or long a trend this may yet be, but given its spread across multiple countries, it is noteworthy. It may not yet spell a meaningful rejection of the ideal, but, as the author of the study puts it, 'the warning signs are flashing red'.<sup>4</sup>

This is a double-edged sword, and a very sharp one at that. On one hand, it is terrifying. If democracy falls, there is every chance that it will be replaced with something far worse. In our desperation, we may commit what doctors would call an iatrogenic act, and usher in a 'cure' that is worse than the original disease. There are signs that this is one very possible direction some countries could take, including the US, where President-elect (at the time of writing) Trump is putting together the most corporate-friendly administration in history, thereby threatening further enhancement of corporate over public power, a trend that has been examined many times in previous State of Power reports. More generally, the rise of the populist (and in some cases extreme) right in places as diverse as Brazil, Italy and the Philippines, does not augur well as it suggests people are operating out of fear, reaching for strongmen to bring discipline and order to a world they feel is sorely lacking just that.

On the other hand, the fact that so many people appear willing to question orthodoxies at this level is an encouraging opportunity. The question is whether the 'right' orthodoxies will be questioned.

To make sense of this we need to be able to identify the deep cultural beliefs that lie beneath it all. Identifying them will help us understand whether we are seeing a re-appraisal of core beliefs, such that could alter the basic nature of our global system, or mere ripples on the surface of an otherwise stable belief system that we can expect will continue on its current trajectory. And to do this, we will contrast two very different cultural perspectives.



## A tale of two histories

Before we delve in, a quick note on what we're looking for, and why.

What we're dealing with here are complex adaptive systems – by which we mean systems made up of a huge number of diverse and autonomous parts which are interrelated, interdependent, linked through many dense interconnections and that behave as a unified whole. At the highest level, the whole planet is a single complex adaptive system; it is, after all, one single biosphere. As we're learning to our cost through climate change, what happens to one part of the planet – be that one species, the chemical balance of the oceans, or the a destruction of a regional rainforest – affects the whole.

Take it down a degree and there are multiple systems within the one mother-system. The global economy is one, within which there are nested hierarchies of national economies. Political systems are obviously inseparable from the economy, and they are both inseparable from the complex mass of forces that we refer to as 'culture'.

To understand the behaviour of a complex system, we must understand its internal logic. The following two narratives help us do that. They aren't the only ones we could have drawn on but they are directly applicable. Because they are very different, when looked at side by side they help reveal the shape and structure of the logic we are looking for.

It's important to say at the outset that this is not about one story being in any simple way better than the other, let alone one being right and the other wrong. The point is that, by being able to contrast the two, we get a fuller understanding of the present moment than either could offer on its own.

The first narrative has been dubbed 'Plato to NATO' by the cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah. It is the more popular of the two by far, and represents the mainstream perspective.

It boils down to a belief that there is such an organism as 'Western culture', with an unbroken lineage back to Plato and Athenian democracy. The West, in this narrative, is a static concept, largely unchanged over the centuries. Greece is part of the West now, so was obviously part of the West in ancient times, even if it was not called 'the West' back then.

The important point is that there is natural and inviolable cohesion, something that binds people of Europe together in a culture that began in what we now call Europe, reflects distinctively

'European' values, and has been generating its own culture, as if essentially independently, for 2500 years. This culture spontaneously and independently gave us the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and, eventually, capitalism; all gifts to the world.<sup>5</sup> Not perfect gifts, necessarily, but gifts nonetheless. Something Europe, as a cultural entity, invented and then spread around the world via exploration, colonialism, imperialism and trade.

In this story, the nature of these 'European' systems slowly matured to the point where, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the whole world was adopting the European commitment to such liberal values as freedom, equality and the rule of law. Though they may be imperfect, and have some sharp edges that, mostly inadvertently, mean that some people benefit less than others, they are, in their essence, civilizing forces that have powered whatever global progress there has been since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The second narrative comes from a very different perspective. It is much less popular but speaks to a more foundational level of reality. We draw primarily on a specific North American First Nations concept, but similar logic can be found in many Indigenous cultures around the world.

*Wetiko* is an Algonquin word for a cannibalistic spirit – we might think of it as a thought-form or meme – that is driven by greed, excess and selfish consumption (in Obijwa it is *windingo*, in Powhatan it is *wintiko*). It deludes its host into believing that cannibalizing the life-force of others (others in the broad sense, including animals and the Gaia life-energy of the planet) in order to amass advantage for oneself is a logical, healthy and even morally upstanding way to live. It short-circuits the individual's ability to see itself as an enmeshed and interdependent part of a balanced environment and raises the self-serving ego to supremacy. This allows, indeed commands, the infected entity to consume anything and everything it can, far beyond what it needs, in a blind, murderous daze of self-aggrandizement. Author Paul Levy<sup>6</sup>, in an attempt to translate the concept into language accessible for Western audiences, has called it 'malignant egophrenia' – the ego unchained from reason and limits, acting with the malevolent logic of the cancer cell.

In his now classic book *Columbus and Other Cannibals*, Native American historian and scholar Jack D. Forbes describes how there was a commonly held belief among many Indigenous communities in North America that the European colonialists were so chronically and uniformly infected with *wetiko* that it must be a defining characteristic of the culture from which they came. For Forbes, looking at the history of that culture, a conclusion was apparent: 'Tragically, the history of the world for the past 2,000 years is, in great part, the story of the epidemiology of the *wetiko* disease'.<sup>7</sup>

The point is that the epidemiology of *wetiko* culture has left clear tracks. And although it cannot be pathologized along geographic or racial lines, the cultural strain we know today, which undergirds modern consumer capitalism, certainly has many of its deepest roots in Europe. It was, after all, European projects – from the Enlightenment to the Industrial Revolution, to colonialism, imperialism and slavery – that developed the technology that opened up the channels that facilitated the spread of the *wetiko* culture all around the world.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, a *wetiko* culture (albeit not necessarily the first or only) was birthed in the Fertile Crescent, consolidated and matured in Europe, then carried to the so-called New World via the behaviour, signalling, conditioning, and language of European explorers and invaders. From those early

foundations, physical manifestations grew – the institutions, the art and literature, the architecture, schools, media, businesses and governments; all those systems, structures and practices that make up modern societies. In this way, we are all the heirs of *wetiko* colonialism.

We can describe the important differences between the two narratives thus:

- The ‘Plato to NATO’ narrative is primarily about what has happened; *wetiko* is about what has powered and guided what has happened.
- The ‘Plato to NATO’ story is linear and materialist. It defines progress in those terms, and only those terms. One event leads to the next in an unfolding story of ‘a-to-b’ consequences. Generally speaking, each age improves on the last, and material and technological advancement is, by definition, progress. The *wetiko* story, on the other hand, says that reality is more than the material world; progress is far from a simple question of material and technological development; and that one age following another does not mean progress has been made if essential principles are abandoned or trashed.
- ‘Plato to NATO’ separates human beings from nature and presumes we have not just the right but the duty to bend the natural world to our will, *wetiko* says we *are* nature, and our cognitive and technological prowess means not that we have a right to dominate nature and extract all its value for our own aggrandizement, but that we have a responsibility to care for it and leave it in a better state than we found it. All the material and technological advances are for naught if the environment is destroyed; on their own they do not warrant the label ‘progress’.
- ‘Plato to NATO’ is Eurocentric. Its boundaries are geographic and, to a considerable degree, racial. This makes it feel easy and right to assume, today, that a largely unchanging group called ‘Europeans’ are the prime drivers of global progress. The *wetiko* story, because it is a history of a thought-form, moves across a much broader cross-cultural canvas, and traces back over a far longer time period. It identifies Europe as the community of people and nations that powered the spread of a *wetiko* culture around the world, but it makes no sense to say it is an inherently European thing, any more than it would make sense to say that, because it is a framing from North American First Nations that it is ‘their’ thought-form. It is more accurate to say that it vectored through Europe on its passage to where we are now – a global *wetiko*-ized culture. Looked at this way, Europe is less a source of progress than of plunder and destruction.

Is the modern capitalist system a civilizing gift Europeans have bestowed on the world? Or is it the host structure of the suicidal *wetiko* meme that is gradually consuming the planet?

The messy truth, of course, is that it can be both. Capitalism can have offered great benefits to some *and* have both exploited others and plundered the natural world to the point of where it is now on a near-suicidal course. What’s important for our purposes, in this moment, is the ability to hold both in our minds, and be able to assess their relative influence on the global operating system. In other words, how animating is *wetiko* logic, and how does it manifest and power the system? Where do we need to temper what might otherwise be a full-throated *wetiko*-critique with the truthful insights offered by ‘Plato to NATO’ perspective? Only then will we have clear sight of where we need to target our activist firepower.

So let’s now turn our attention to a practical example of how the system manifests its internal logic: growth.



## GDP growth – progress or madness?

If there is one idea that has gained the status of true hegemony – dominant and unquestioned around the world – it is the idea that we need to perpetually grow our economies, and every part of them, in order to improve the quality of human life. This idea is so prevalent that we take it almost completely for granted, as though it is a law of nature. But in reality, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measure was first developed in the 1930s by American and British economists. During WWII, it came into official use by governments keen to know the extent of wealth and resources available for their war efforts.

It is this war-time history that explains why GDP is so single-minded – almost violent. It counts money-based activity, but it doesn't care whether that activity is useful or destructive. If you cut down a forest and sell the timber, GDP goes up; if you fish the seas to extinction, or start a war, GDP goes up. GDP doesn't care about the costs associated with these activities, so long as money is made. What is more, GDP doesn't count useful activities that are not monetized. If you grow your own food, clean your own house, or take care of your ageing parents, GDP says nothing.

GDP exemplifies the logic of *wetiko* by emphasizing material acquisition and encouraging a self-serving pattern of increasing consumption for every society that uses it as a principal measure of progress. GDP, then, is an instruction to power. In defining progress, it directs power to dedicate itself to more of the same, indefinitely and, if left unchallenged, without limits.

The problem is that this hegemonic theory of human progress is rapidly undermining the very conditions of our existence on this planet. Having pursued GDP growth with single-minded recklessness for the past few generations, we're now overshooting our planet's biocapacity by more than 60% each year<sup>9</sup> – vastly outstripping the ability of the natural world to absorb our waste and replenish the resources we're using. There are no longer any frontiers where new growth doesn't directly harm someone else, by, say, degrading the soils, polluting the water, poisoning the air, and exploiting human beings. GDP growth is creating more misery than it eliminates – more 'illth' than 'wealth', as Herman Daly put it.<sup>10</sup>

And all of this is just at our existing levels of economic activity. Now think about what happens when we start to factor in the prospect of *exponential growth*. If the global economy is to expand by 3% next year, that means adding US\$ 2 trillion to this year's GDP. To put that in perspective, this amount is more than the entire global GDP in 1970. Imagine all the cars, all the televisions, all the houses, all the factories, all the barrels of oil, and everything else that was produced in



1970 – not only in Britain and the US, but also in France, Germany, Japan, and every country in the whole world. Everything. Keep that mountain of stuff in your mind. That’s how much we have to *add* next year *on top of* replicating the amount we produced this year. And because growth is exponential – not linear – we have to add even more than that the year after, and so on *ad infinitum*.

But these policy-level parameters are really only the surface of the problem. The deeper force is the imperative of ever-increasing production and consumption, and this is what lies at the very heart of our culture – less as an addiction than as an unexamined assumption, an unquestioned ideological force.

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The point here is that although there appears to have been all this change in the past year or even in the past 200 years, the deep *wetiko* logic of the system has not been questioned. People have turned to the likes of Donald Trump and Nigel Farage and Narendra Modi in hope of change, but the irony is that, of the political choices before us, these are the ones who are the most *wetiko*-ized in their belief system. Donald Trump, for example, is practically *wetiko* personified – Jack Forbes would no doubt have called him a *Big Wetiko*. His conceptions of wealth and virtue and power, his complete comfort with the idea of profiting from the destruction of the natural environment, are all the stuff of pure *wetiko*. Not that there are any truly non-*wetiko* politicians out there, in any national mainstream space we know of. Even Leftist populists, like Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders, stop far short of questioning the deep *wetiko* logic of the system. Their agendas, though far more progressive than their right-wing counterparts, still adhere to the basic economic orthodoxy of perpetual material growth.

When seen through the *wetiko* lens, then, it becomes apparent that all of the political warfare and upheaval of 2016 was mostly about surface-level differences in ideology. If changing the deep *wetiko* nature of our global political economy is what is needed – as we believe it is – we must acknowledge the limitations of electoral politics, and then work to overcome those limitations by changing the cultural environment and assumptions that define them.



## Culture hacking: a new approach to change

In light of the above, we advocate for an approach to social change that we call culture design or culture hacking.<sup>11</sup> Addressing the systemic threats for humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require an intentional, open, and collaborative ‘design science’ for social change. The elements of this approach include a variety of perspectives that will need to be integrated in both theory and practice. We’re not saying every group needs every perspective on this list, but a selection, ideally at least one from each of the following buckets, according to resources and requirements.

- People who study the long view – anthropology, cultural history, evolutionary theory, the rise and fall of empires, cliodynamics (the mathematical study of history), and other related fields.
- People who understand the cognitive and behavioural sciences – cognitive linguistics, social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, sociology.
- People who understand the science of complex systems – nonlinear dynamics, system mapping, root-cause analysis, ecology, and so forth.
- People who live an alternative cultural worldview from the bones out, as it were, rather than just the head down – Indigenous thinkers, leaders and activists, well-established post-capitalist communities.

When we look through a lens created by this sort of multi-disciplinary, multi-experience diversity, we start to see the world differently. Instead of framing policies as issues such as health care or climate change, we start to see cultural ‘anchors’, like GDP, as a measure of progress. These anchors are the fundamental connectors that express the cultural logic baked into the system. They constitute the ‘common sense’ of a culture – the unquestioned filters of interpretation that give shape to political agendas outside conscious awareness. This is where the real power hides and, as always, it is in plain sight.

We see it as a task for 21<sup>st</sup> century social movements to ‘make the invisible visible’ by consciously deconstructing, analyzing, and re-constructing the cultural patterns of meaning that shape political and economic outcomes. This requires a systemic perspective about culture. And it only works when informed directly by rigorous research methodologies from the social sciences.

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To give an example of where this sort of approach can lead:

When the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were launched in 2015, practically every government, large non-government organization (NGO), corporation, and United Nations body signed up and celebrated them. We, at /The Rules, took a different view. Rather than seeing their many laudable objectives, or the fact that they were, in traditional policy and process terms, a marked improvement on their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), what we saw in them was more of the same. More of the same basic cultural and economic logic that has created so much poverty and suffering, and brought us to the brink of climate disaster. We saw them sticking like glue to the 'Plato to NATO' logic of material progress being synonymous with actual progress. Specifically, they hung entirely off the idea of GDP growth. All the good they hope to deliver is dependent on every single country – North and South – growing its GDP. And they are very specific about it: overall they are aiming for at least 7% per year in the least developed countries, and higher levels of economic productivity across the board. Goal 8 is entirely dedicated to this objective.

And so we saw the SDG moment as an opportunity to start to question and deconstruct some of the cultural narratives that underpin International Development 'common sense'. We set ourselves the objective, 'to open up the mental space for inquiry among development professionals and change agents working to address systemic threats to humanity'.

The strategy had two parts:

1. Weaken the core logic of development-as-usual by challenging its assumptions and revealing covert, unpopular agendas.
2. Ask questions designed to initiate people on a learning journey that reveals the structural causes of poverty and inequality – thus opening up the conversation landscape to a new set of stories that give meaning to these emergent understandings.

This was built on a Theory of Change informed by the science of cultural evolution, which has observed that people live within stories that make sense of their social world. These stories become entrenched as institutional structures and practices, making them difficult to dislodge and change. Telling a 'better story' is therefore a process of making the dominant stories less coherent and more difficult to understand, which opens up space for new meanings to fill in where they have broken down. Our Theory of Change is to challenge the logic of the problematic narratives while facilitating a learning process that helps people craft their own new stories that make sense of the knowledge and insights gained along the way.

The three questions we encouraged people to ask were:<sup>12</sup>

***How Is Poverty Created?*** Where do poverty and inequality come from? What is the detailed history of past actions and policies that contributed to their rapid ascent in the modern era? When were these patterns accelerated and by whom?

***Who's Developing Whom?*** The story of development is often assumed or unstated. What is the role of colonialism in the early stages of Western development? How did the geographic distribution of

wealth inequality come into being? What are the functional roles of foreign aid, trade agreements, debt service, and tax evasion in the process of development? And most importantly, who gains and who loses along the way?

***Why Is Growth The Only Answer?*** The mantra that 'growth is good' has been repeated so often that it has the feel of common sense. Yet we know that GDP rises every time a bomb drops or disaster strikes. Growth, as defined up till now, is more nuanced and complex than this mantra would have us believe. Why must the sole measure of progress be growth (measured in monetary terms)? Who benefits from this story? What alternative stories might be told?

We spread these questions through blogs and articles. They were woven into infographics and short videos, and we worked with a network of interested journalists who used them as a basis for reflection and commentary in as many media spaces as possible.

Our strategy was, of course, imperfect in both design and execution. But the intention was correct, and the level of cultural logic it targeted was roughly right. One way we know that is so is because it did not win us many friends. We were accused of naysaying, of undermining hard work of the people who developed the SDG framework (as if that is the point!). And, of course, we were called naïve, because questioning something like GDP growth is akin to questioning the blue of the sky; it just doesn't make sense in the 'real' world. We *know* that GDP growth is essential to healthy economies. Just as we *know* that international development is about developing all countries along the same capitalist, consumerist path. These things are simply common sense. Tellingly, though, we received a fair amount of private, back-channel support. A number of NGO staff, for example, contacted us to say things like, 'I know growth has to be challenged but we can't do it [at x organization], it's too radical'. It's impossible to know from the data we were able to gather how prevalent these opinions are, but it is safe to say we have a long way to go before the political mainstream develops the desire or the imagination to confront the deeper cultural logics that keep us locked into our current path to almost-certain environmental ruin and various forms of civilizational collapse that may ensue.

This does not mean that there are two binary options for historical perspective – the rationalist, linear Western perspective versus the holistic, cultural perspective that accounts for the deep logic to which our rules and laws give daily power. What we *are* saying is that without understanding the latter, we will be forever locked in by the very logic we are trying to change. Culture hacking requires an expanded field of vision that includes a broad range of perspectives not traditionally found around the activism table, and that revels in the non-linear complexity that is the defining characteristic of culture. In order for us to achieve lasting, structural change, a new generation of activists armed with the tools of culture hacking will have to deconstruct and de-programme the dominant modes of action and analysis. As we bear witness to all the changes that we are seeing in the outside world, a critical battleground will be our own conceptions of how activism works.

## About the authors

Martin Kirk is Co-founder and Director of Strategy for /The Rules, a global collective of writers, thinkers, coders, farmers, artists and activists of all types dedicated to challenging the root causes of global poverty and inequality. Prior to /TR Martin was the Head of Campaigns at Oxfam UK, and Head of Global Advocacy for Save the Children. He has written extensively on issues of poverty, inequality and climate change, including co-authoring Finding Frames, to bring insights from psychology, neuroscience, systems theory and other academic disciplines to bear on issues of public understanding of complex global challenges.

Dr Jason Hickel is an anthropologist at the London School of Economics who works on international development and global political economy, with an ethnographic focus on southern Africa. He writes for The Guardian and Al Jazeera English. His most recent book, "The Divide: A New History of Global Inequality," will be published in May.

Joe Brewer is a complexity researcher and evangelist for the field of culture design. He is co-founder and editor for Economics magazine, research director for TheRules.org, and coordinator for the newly forming Cultural Evolution Society. He lives in Seattle and travels the world helping humanity make the transition to sustainability. He does this by working to integrate complexity research, cognitive science, and cultural evolution for the good of humanity.

## Endnotes

1. <https://ps321.community.uaf.edu/files/2012/10/Fukuyama-End-of-history-article.pdf>
2. The origin of this quote is slightly clouded. A.P.F. Abdul Kalam, in his book Ignited Minds, suggests that Einstein was actually restating Heisenberg's view.
3. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/05/that-viral-graph-about-millennials-declining-support-for-democracy-its-very-misleading/?utm\\_term=.fb836e240d55](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/05/that-viral-graph-about-millennials-declining-support-for-democracy-its-very-misleading/?utm_term=.fb836e240d55)
4. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/29/world/americas/western-liberal-democracy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/29/world/americas/western-liberal-democracy.html?_r=0) ; <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Foa%26Mounk-27-3.pdf>
5. In an extreme version of this narrative, such as you might hear from the US right, Europe even gave us the Judeo-Christian belief system, and everything that has flowed from it. In the now infamous words of Fox News host Megyn Kelly, 'Jesus was a white man, too. It's like we have, he's a historical figure that's a verifiable fact, as is Santa, I just want kids to know that'. <http://www.politico.com/blogs/media/2013/12/megyn-kelly-jesus-and-santa-were-white-179491> . Although she later played down her comments as 'an offhand jest', it is not an uncommon belief among the Christian right. Just one example: <http://www.christianidentitychurch.net/anglo1.htm>
6. Levy, P (2013) *Dispelling Wetiko: Breaking the Curse of Evil*, North Atlantic Books, p8
7. Forbes, Jack D. (2008) *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wetiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism and Terrorism*. New York: Seven Stories Press, p.46.
8. For a fuller exploration of wetiko as a lens for understanding Western modernity, see <http://www.kosmosjournal.org/article/seeing-wetiko-on-capitalism-mind-viruses-and-antidotes-for-a-world-in-transition/>
9. [http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/world\\_footprint/](http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/world_footprint/)
10. Daly, H. 'Sustainable Development: Definitions, Principles, Policies' in *Mechanism of Economic Regulation*, 2013, No 3
11. [www.slideshare.net/joebrewer31/tools-for-culture-design](http://www.slideshare.net/joebrewer31/tools-for-culture-design)
12. For a full explanation of this campaign, see <http://therules.org/hacking-the-sdg-discourse/>



This essay appears in TNI's sixth annual State of Power report. This year, it examines the cultural processes that are used by corporations, military and privileged elites to make their power seem 'natural' and 'irreversible'. It also explores how social movements can harness creativity, art and cultural forces to resist and to build lasting social and ecological transformation. Visit [www.tni.org/stateofpower2017](http://www.tni.org/stateofpower2017) to read all the essays and contributions.



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