

STATE OF POWER



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This State of Power report is dedicated to the memory of *John Berger*, artist, author and former fellow of TNI who died in January 2017. His life and work unveiled the power relations embedded in modern consumer capitalist culture as well as highlighted how creativity and art could open eyes, transform hearts and mobilise against injustice.

CONTENTS

On culture and power <i>Interview with Ahdaf Soueif</i>	1
All change or no change? <i>Culture, power and activism in an unquiet world</i> <i>Martin Kirk, Jason Hickel, Joe Brewer</i>	13
Monsters of the financialized imagination: <i>from Pokémon to Trump</i> <i>Max Haiven</i>	29
The media-technology-military industrial complex <i>Justin Schlosberg</i>	47
Culture, power and resistance: <i>reflections on the ideas of Amilcar Cabral</i> <i>Firoze Manji</i>	63
Power and patriarchy: <i>reflections on social change from Bolivia</i> <i>Elizabeth Peredo Beltrán</i>	81
Organizing cultures of resilience: <i>activism in the anthropocene</i> <i>Kevin Buckland</i>	97

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HEART OVERTURN

ON CULTURE
AND POWER

INTERVIEW WITH AHDAF SOUEIF

We seem to be entering through a period of contradictions, of dislocating change and crisis, of raised hopes and terrible realities. We have seen the economic crisis questioning the very pillars of neoliberalism yet market fundamentalism has not faltered in its march. We have had inspiring flourishing of social movements yet authoritarian leaders everywhere are rising to the fore. How do you understand this moment?

There's clearly a struggle taking place on a universal scale between a system that has the world in its clutches, and something new that's trying to be born. In a sense, this is the story of mankind. But some elements in our situation are particular to this moment. The first is an awareness of the interconnectedness of the world – in both problems and solutions. Of course people with interests in the matter have always been aware of the opportunities that different parts of the world present; trade, conquest and migration are all based on that. But now there's a growing general awareness that the world's problems need to be solved globally. Environmental issues are the most obvious examples, but there are many more – the exponential increase of both wealth and poverty and the obscene gap

Neoliberalism...understands that it has not delivered its promises to 'the people' and that, therefore, it is under attack. But its answer is to find reasons outside itself for this non-delivery (immigrants, shirkers, Terror)

between rich and poor, wars, migration and the movement of capital, and more – and they're all linked.

We can't pretend that this awareness is shared by everybody, but it's shared by enough politicized groups of – on the whole young – people across the world (can we call this 'the Young Global Collective?') – to make it now unremarkable for us to see Palestinians, say, sending messages of support to Black activists in the US, or

to have seen Occupy using Tahrir iconography. This awareness needs to grow, to coalesce, and to use its potential to generate ideas and action. For this we need forms of global conferring, decision-making, solidarity and action – like the TNI enterprise.

The second element that's particular to this moment is that the Internet and related technology seem to hold a promise that global conversations and actions are achievable.

The third element is that the fate of the planet itself is in the balance; this lends acute urgency to the struggle.

On the other hand, the existing power system also sees the issues in global terms – and it is in a better position to create and enact its own global solidarity in pursuit of consolidating and furthering its power. Bilderberg, Davos, G8 are all examples of this.

I think we need to recognise that neoliberalism has not failed. It has not failed its proponents. It understands that it has not delivered its promises to 'the people' and that, therefore, it is under attack. But its answer is to find reasons outside itself for this non-delivery (immigrants, shirkers, Terror) and to repeat its promises more emphatically every time it changes its front players. It plays to the fears of the audience, and it breathes life into the demons in their psyches: jingoism, selfishness, racism, a readiness to embrace violence, etc. The Trump campaign was an example of this.

The system – being old and in power – has its ideas, arguments, discourse and justifications in place. And embedded within it are the power structures with which it protects and continuously justifies and consolidates itself: the governments, the intelligence, police, security and military establishments, the legal and financial systems that underpin them – and the media.

One of the traits I find really attractive and encouraging in the Young Global Collective is how unconstrained it is by old ideologies. It has powerful ideas – and has ethics and natural justice on its side – but these ideas are not yet translated – how could they be? – into one overarching idea that can develop into a coherent system for running the world. It has not yet found a way to coalesce into a global movement – although we often see bits trying to come together as happened in Cancun and Durban. (My sense is that the Green parties are the most suited to embrace and process the impulses and ideas of the Young Global Collective and forge them into a much-needed vision centred somehow around life, sustainability and human rights).

So what we have now is a situation where the Young Global Collective understands that neoliberalism is lethally bad for most of the world's population and for the planet itself. It continually challenges various aspects of neoliberalism in a variety of ways in different parts of the world: activists take on Big Oil, armaments, dismantling the NHS in the UK, police brutality in the US, austerity in Greece, the BDS campaign takes on the Israeli occupation and ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and so on. Every one of these challenges raises our hopes.

It used to be a received idea that if millions came out onto the streets and stayed there the existing power structures would collapse and space would be created for something new. Exactly what the new thing would be like no-one knew, but everyone had a good idea what it would *not* be like. And everyone hoped there



Street artist El Zeft pays tribute to Egypt's female rebels

would be space and time for forms to evolve. Egypt 2011 proved that this was not true. Syria is proving it in even uglier fashion.

The young of the Young Global Collective are to a large extent averse to the structures and practices of power. They – commendably – want to change the world but not to rule it. In other words, most social movements would find it

In a way, we are witnessing an alliance of neoliberalism and Terror whipping democracies into fascism.

an impossible contradiction to employ, for example, an armed force to defend themselves and spin doctors and PR firms to propagate their ideas.

In the midst of this conflict there are now the emerging armed actors, like Islamic State. They serve the existing system – by purchasing arms, militarizing struggles, normalizing violence and by providing a Terror Monster for the use of fear-mongering politicians and so a justification for increased surveillance of citizens, increased spending on arms, intelligence and security. In a way, we are witnessing an alliance of neoliberalism and Terror whipping democracies into fascism.

All these are things we need to be – I’m certain many of us are, constantly – thinking about, trying to imagine and image, to represent and to develop and to counter.

THE CULTURE OF TAHRIR SQUARE

You had the experience of being part of the movements in Cairo and Egypt that inspired the world. Can you tell us something about the culture of those resistance movements? Is there something of that time that remains today?

What happened in Egypt in January 2011, and so embedded itself in the world’s imagination, was a moment – a climactic moment – in a process that had started years before, and continues today.

I would particularly like to remind us of two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that were set up in the 1990s: al-Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture, and the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC). Both were set up by committed and charismatic professionals: psychiatrist Aida Seif el-Dawla and lawyer Ahmed Seif, who were able to gather



'The Egyptian Citizen' by HeMa AllaGa. On Mohamed Mahmoud St., Cairo.

around themselves similarly committed and smart teams. Their focus was human rights, and their work revealed the extent to which the abuse of human rights had become a normalised part of how power structures in Egypt are serviced, consolidated and extended.

Both organizations sought to redress and challenge this abuse; al-Nadim treated people who had been tortured, published reports and statistics, and took huge risks campaigning against the Ministry of the Interior and individual officers; HMLC provided people with legal support against a wide spectrum of human rights violations, published information and research papers and sought to take cases to the Constitutional Court and so to change and develop the law itself.

By taking on the Mubarak regime in this way al-Nadim and HMLC started this latest round of resistance and enabled it to take root. The positions they took formed the “personality” of the 2011 revolution.

Both organizations provided their services free, paid their staff in line with Egyptian rates, and were very careful in choosing non-governmental funding sources whose agendas matched their own; this way they avoided the alienation and de-politicization that blights so much NGO work.

Both were clear in that their services were available to everybody regardless of nationality, citizenship, faith, gender, sexual orientation, etc. HMLC, for example, took on the defence of the unpopular and dangerous “gay case”; the Queen Boat. Both were welcoming of refugees. Their audience – their constituency – was the public both at home and abroad. They implemented a vision of human rights and speaking truth to power as international as well as local concerns. In Australia, I once met a Sudanese writer who told me al-Nadim had saved his life and his marriage.

The first decade of the new century saw a number of initiatives appearing in Egypt, all seeking change and challenging power.

HMLC then opened its doors to new initiatives like the Movement for the Support of the Palestinian Intifada (2000) providing these initiatives with a free safe space, resources, information and advice. Lawyers trained in HMLC established their own NGOs supporting freedom of information and expression, workers’ rights, land rights, personal rights, economic rights, housing rights and others.

There were movements for the independence of the universities and for the independence of the judiciary and movements simply for ‘change’. ‘Kefaya’ was an umbrella movement for social and political change which put sudden and imaginative protests on the streets from 2005 to 2011. The 6 April Youth Movement, which worked to establish links with workers’ protests, managed to create a reasonable cross-country presence with activists in every major town.

When – after 28 January 2011 – Tahrir – and other locations in Alexandria and other cities – for a period became a liberated space, the culture they created was informed – in its basic principles – by the spirit of the work of the previous decade.

One clear principle was the empowerment of people. Activists taught reading and writing to street children who, for the first time, found a safe space on the street. The Mosireen Film Collective trained anybody who came along to shoot and edit film. Some of the trainees were street children who went on to shoot their own footage with Mosireen equipment. Mosireen documented housing struggles, fishing, industry and legal struggles and amplified people's voices through them.

'Let's Write Our Constitution' was an initiative set up by Alaa Abd el-Fattah (Ahmed Seif's son and one of the most prominent figures of the revolution. Now serving five years in prison for protesting) to elicit a new set of constitutional governing principles from ordinary people across the country.

Freedom of information was another principle, with Mosireen, again, acting not only as producer of footage but as collector, archivist, point of exchange and distributor of footage onto mobile phones. By the end of 2011, when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) was killing revolutionaries on the streets, this footage was used by activists in the campaign: Kazeboon ('They Lie'), to expose the lies of the military. Kazeboon achieved what every grassroots movement aims for: non-ownership. People across the country downloaded footage from mobile phones, acquired or borrowed projectors and set up surprise screenings against walls. This was how everyone came to see the huge gap between the rhetoric of the military and what they were doing on the ground.

Another initiative set up by Alaa Abd el-Fattah – who happens to be a software designer – was 'Tweet-Nadwa'; a discussion forum run by Twitter rules. This was one of the activities in which technology and game-playing were used to celebrate diversity, tackle difficult topics and bring people together. The first Tweet-Nadwa brought young people from the Muslim Brotherhood and others who'd left the Brotherhood to talk about their experience with each other and with a wide audience – a meeting that was a ground-breaker for everyone involved. Another was held sitting on the ground in Tahrir, about reforming the police. Applause was not by clapping but by 'twittering' your hands in the air. Attracted by the twittering hands more and more people joined the nadwa and the discussion. Tweets were streamed on a large screen.

In Tahrir there was, overall, a rejection of Neoliberal capitalism. There was true altruism, a rooted belief in human rights and a tremendous emphasis on social justice. People understood that their views about how to achieve social justice ranged from centre right to far left, but it was enough that everyone wanted it. For the moment the work of keeping the sit-ins alive, pressing for the removal of Mubarak and then trying to press for transparent, democratic government provided enough common ground for people to work from.

As Tahrir was periodically under attack by security forces, the army and various related thugs, field hospitals very quickly appeared. The organization and efficiency of these cannot be overstated. Entire systems came into being organically to save and treat people. After the attacks they often stayed in place to provide everyone with free medical care. A culture also grew where many physicians who did not come to Tahrir made themselves available to perform emergency surgery – particularly eye surgery – for free at their hospitals and clinics.

And, of course, art was everywhere. From simple pavement drawings by people who suddenly realised they were free to make them, to huge sophisticated murals by graffiti artists that expressed – and created – the collective spirit of Tahrir. Graffiti artists recorded events, made statements, created iconic emblems – The Blue Bra, Nefertiti in a Gas Mask, Angel Ultras, Universal Man – and eventually created massive murals which mined the art of every era of Egypt's long past to bring its aesthetic and moral force to bear on the present moment.

There's much more. But I want to close this section with a quote from a young revolutionary, written in December 2011:

Tahrir Square worked because it was inclusive – with every type of Egyptian represented equally. It worked because it was inventive – from the creation of electric and sanitation infrastructure to the daily arrival of new chants and banners. It worked because it was open-source and participatory – so it was unkillable and incorruptible. It worked because it was modern – online communication baffled the government while allowing the revolutionaries to organise efficiently and quickly. It worked because it was peaceful – the first chant that went up when under attack was always 'Selmeyya! Selmeyya!'. It worked because it was just – not a single attacking (thug) was killed, they were all arrested. It worked because it was communal – everyone in there, to a greater or lesser extent, was putting the good of the people before the individual. It worked because it was unified and focused – Mubarak's departure was an unbreakable bond. It worked because everyone believed in it.

Inclusive, inventive, open-source, modern, peaceful, just, communal, unified and focused. A set of ideals on which to build a national politics.

You ask *Is there something of that time that remains today?* The answer has to be 'yes'. Even though thousands of our young people have been killed and thousands

...Everybody who was truly involved in 2011 and who is now working on something – anything, whether they are in Egypt or outside it – is doing work that will one day fuel the next revolutionary wave

have been injured – some without repair; even though tens of thousands are in prison and hundreds of thousands live in trauma.

Even though the country has been through betrayals and massacres, the democratic process has been discredited and the military has established a counter-revolutionary regime more repressive and vicious than any that Egypt has ever known.

Even though there are people who found themselves in the revolution and when it was lost they were lost. Even though there are people who are disillusioned and bitter and people who pretend 2011 was a mass hallucination and people who have gone back to their lives and are trying to forget that the last six years ever happened.

Yet, I would say that everybody who was truly involved in 2011 and who is now working on something – anything, whether they are in Egypt or outside it – is doing work that will one day fuel the next revolutionary wave.

Enough to note the internet news sites like *MadaMasr*, or *al-Badeel*, or *Yanair* and all the people working in them, still providing news, analysis and commentary. The network of legal and practical support for the prisoners – still functioning despite exhaustion. The human rights organizations born of HMLC, still working despite arrests, freezes on assets and smear campaigns. Aida Seif el-Dawla and her colleagues sitting in their office, refusing to close, and facing down 20 security agents just a few weeks ago. And all of this while arrests disappearances and deaths in prisons and in police stations continue.

CULTURE AND MEANING

From your experience in participating in the Arab Spring and then seeing its hopes and aspirations diverted or crushed, how do you see the role of culture in sustaining and one day delivering on those dreams?

It is through culture that we describe the world and what has happened to it and to us in it. We comment on the present, excavate the past and try to imagine a future – or several. Culture holds up a mirror, criticizes, tries to synthesize; it puts worlds together, opens up feelings, validates them, provides illumination, ideas, respite. Culture is dreaming the dream, it is also enacting it. Culture provides us with the language, the symbols, the imagery to explore, communicate and propose. Without culture no dream is dreamable.

I'd like to give you one tiny, and to me, powerful example of the role of culture creating meaning.

We've all seen the ancient Egyptian symbol of the scarab with a disc between its front legs. Well, some artist, thousands of years ago, watched a black beetle lay its eggs in a bit of animal dung. The beetle rolled the dung and rolled it and rolled it till the eggs were encased in a ball of dung at least twice its own size. Then the beetle dug a hole. Then, moving backwards and using its hind legs, it rolled the ball of dung deep into the hole. It then came out of the hole, filled it up and went away. The artist watched the space where the hole had been until one day, struggling out of the earth, there emerged 15, 20 baby beetles. As they found their feet and shook the dung and the earth off their wings and started to take their first tentative flying leaps the artist saw the new little beetles' luminous bright blue wings catching the light. Iridescent, sparkling little joyous flickers of sapphire blue against the earth. The Scarab is the dung beetle, the Disc is both the ball of dung and the sun that gives light and life to everything. For the reader, thousands of years ago, the image of the 'Scarab holding the Disc' spoke of 'becoming', of transformation and emerging. Just think of all the elements that image brought together, and of the power of what it proposed.

"Culture" is often regarded – and may be presented by political and religious authorities – as being both homogeneous and static, yet we know that there are always fault lines and voices that don't get a hearing or are suppressed. We also know that well-intentioned external efforts to address harmful or gender-restrictive traditional practices can have the effect of further entrenching them. How, then, can changes happen and be sustained?

I think change happens organically within each community/culture group. The change is for the better – in other words towards more freedom, openness, transparency etc – when people are confident and not defensive. 'Outside' intervention should only ever be at the request and according to the demands and guidelines of trusted and authentic 'inside' groups. So a feminist group from Somalia, say, wanting to work on feminist issues in Norway, would only do so in partnership with credible, rooted Norwegian groups and within their programme.

What does a culture of transformation, democracy and justice look like?

The society we dream of would be one in which no child is born disadvantaged, where basic education and healthcare are free, where people don't have to worry about survival, where everyone has enough time and resources to fulfill their potential as they see it, where people are truly involved in the decisions that will affect them, where we respect the earth and all natural creatures on it.

I believe that the world needs to be engaged with and run as one unit.



I believe that the processes of democracy unless accompanied by certain safeguards are merely a tool for the system. When people have to make a decision on an issue they need to have all the information that's relevant to that issue, be able to understand it, and be free of any need or coercion that affects their decision. Without transparency, freedom of information, education and guaranteed human rights there is no democracy.

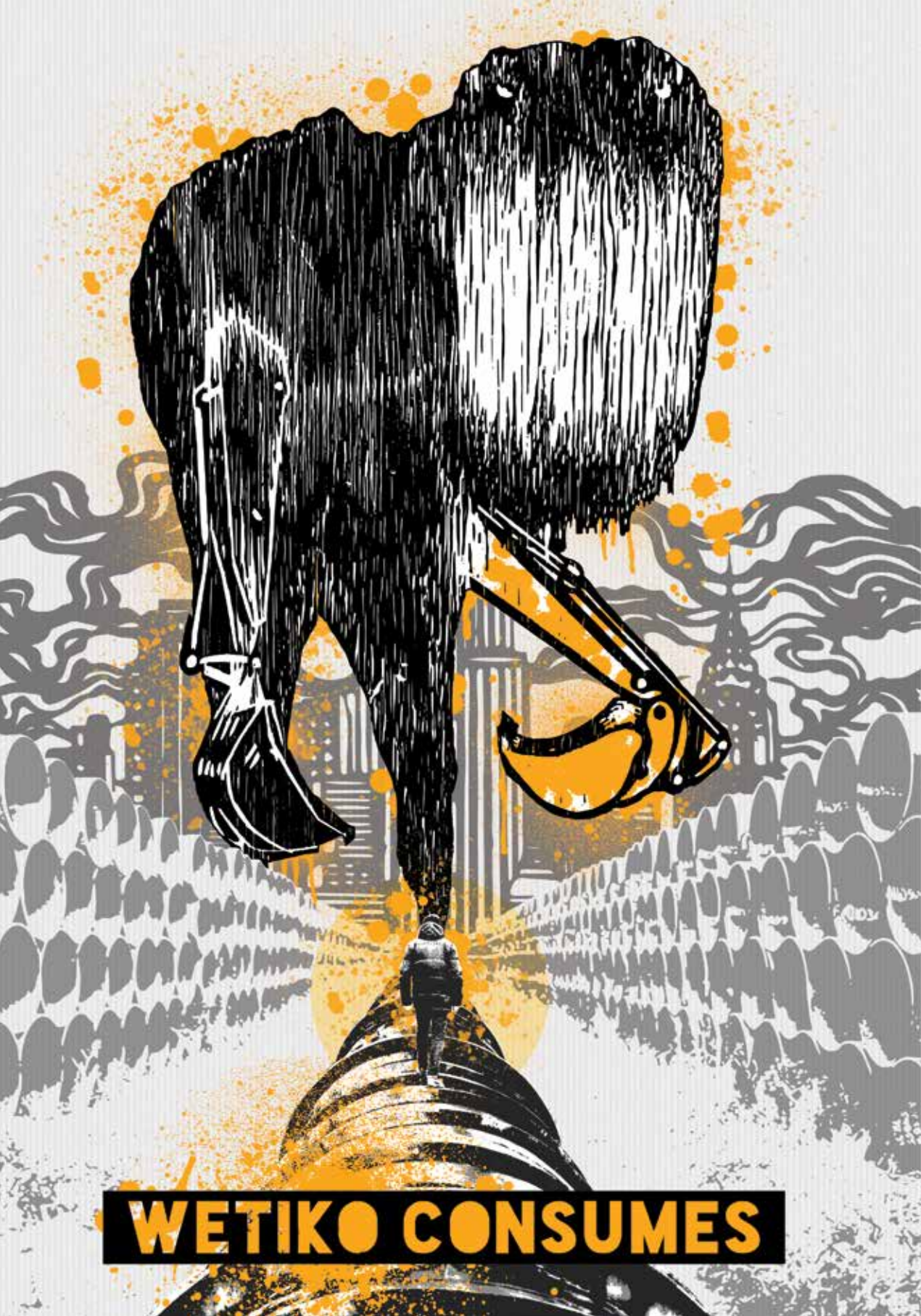
Finally, this is a statement that I've been making for a while, and I would like to make it again here, as particularly relevant to TNI:

"If I could decree a universal education programme, I would make every child in the world learn a brief history of the entire world that focused on the common ground. It would examine how people perceive their relationship to each other, to the planet, and to the universe, and it would see human history as an ongoing, joint project, where one lot of people picked up where another had left off."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ahdaf Soueif is an Egyptian short story writer, novelist and political and cultural commentator. Ahdaf's latest book is her memoir of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, *Cairo: A City Transformed*. She is the author of *The Map of Love* which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1999. She is also a political and cultural commentator; she writes regularly for the Guardian in London.



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*¹

"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 Einstein²

WETIKO CONSUMES

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,

This is a story of power, but perhaps not the traditional kind. The kinds of power we are interested in are the deep currents.... the cultural forces that shape all of our lives at the deepest levels.

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.

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?

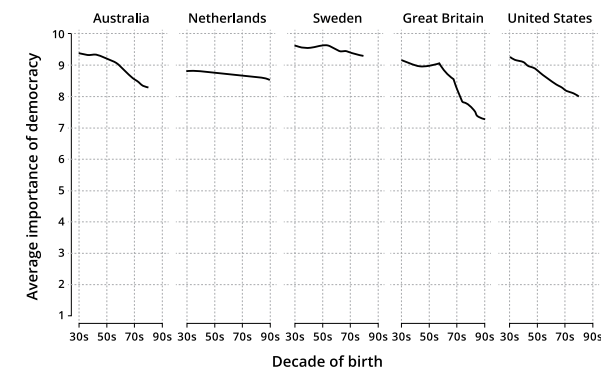
There is a level at which things are certainly in flux. The most important of these by far is public opinion.

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'.⁴

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.⁵ 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 20th 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 16th 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 Objjwa 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 Levy⁶, 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'.⁷

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.⁸

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, signaling, 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 year⁹ – 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.¹⁰

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.

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,

Donald Trump is practically *wetiko* personified – his conceptions of wealth and virtue and power, his complete comfort with the idea of profiting from the destruction of the natural environment.

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.¹¹ Addressing the systemic threats for humanity in the 21st 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 21st 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.

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:¹²

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

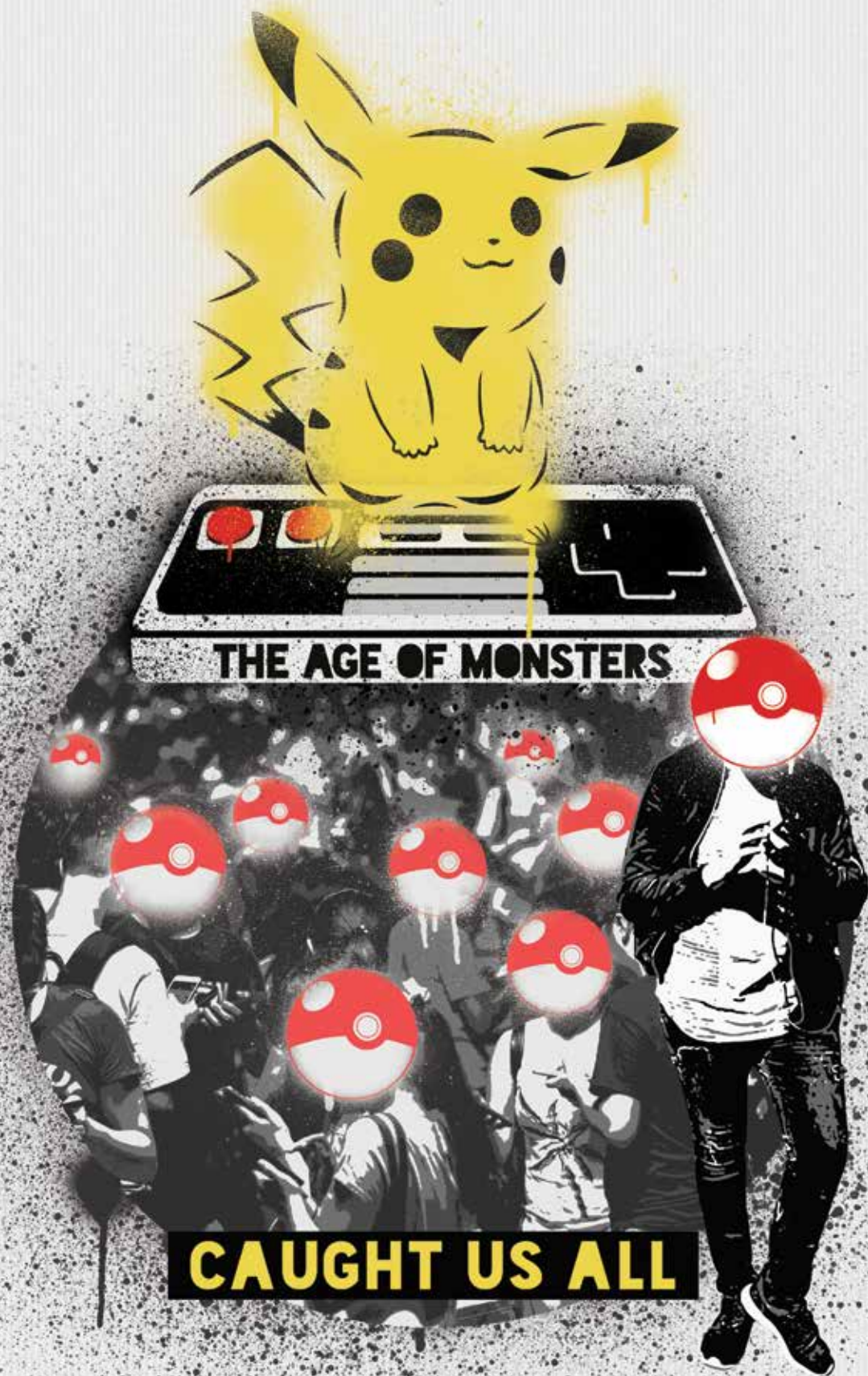
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ENDNOTES

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
4. 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/>
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MONSTERS OF THE FINANCIALIZED IMAGINATION

FROM POKÉMON TO TRUMP

MAX HAIVEN

In the summer of 2016 the global imagination was consumed by monsters.

I am not speaking primarily about the rise of reactionary nationalist authoritarianisms in Austria, France, Hungary, India, Netherlands, Russia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and elsewhere, though to these monsters we shall return. I am talking about Pokémon, Japan's most successful international brand, which once again stormed onto the cultural stage with the release of its first 'augmented reality' (AR) video game for smartphones.

Pokémon GO built on the theme developed in previous products since 1995, including a hit TV show (translated into dozens of languages and broadcast in scores of countries), video games, books and comics, a trading card game and literally hundreds of thousands of different items of branded merchandise, from plush toys to airliners. The Pokémon brand depicts a world like ours inhabited by cartoonish ‘pocket monsters’ that humans capture from their natural habitats, collect, trade and train to do gladiatorial battle.¹ After 20 years, for the first time, the brand was able to integrate itself into ‘real life’, allowing players to use the GPS and data functions on their smartphones to discover and kidnap otherwise invisible Pokémon in their cities and towns. The results were phenomenal – as the ‘free’ game was released in different countries around the world throughout the summer and autumn of 2016 it broke numerous records.² Dozens, even hundreds, of players could be found around popular public monuments and spaces, now reconfigured as ‘Pokéstops’. Scandals soon emerged: rumours abounded that ne’er-do-wells were luring teenagers into traps with the promise of rare Pokémon, and that over-enthusiastic players had walked into traffic or off cliffs in their single-minded zeal to ‘Catch ‘Em All’.

For some, the Pokémon GO craze was evidence of the triumph of fantasy over reality, the consummation of what US journalist and cultural and political critic Chris Hedges called, years earlier, an ‘empire of illusion’³ in which, as the neoliberal economic situation deepens and becomes more intractable, and as democratic horizons recede from view, a culture of narcissistic escapist individualism comes to reign.⁴ Certainly there is merit to this argument, though others have argued that Pokémon GO represented the ‘coming out’ of an internet-raised generation that had developed modes of social interaction that, while foreign and fearsome to older critics, was not necessarily apocalyptic.⁵ After all, what is imaginary is also real to the extent it shapes and informs people’s real actions. And from this perspective, Pokémon, with tens of millions of adherents, might be more ‘real’ than Chris Hedges.

THE LOGIC OF FINANCIALIZATION

Perhaps the answer is both, and neither. Having studied the Pokémon brand in its previous instances, I have sought to link the phenomenon to the processes of financialization, an argument that I think has more merit today than ever.⁶ Briefly, financialization implies the growing power of the so-called FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) sector over the rest of the capitalist economy. Globally interconnected, digitally accelerated financial markets have come to hold a massive, coercive, disciplinary force over almost everything imaginable: multinational corporations, government fiscal and economic policy, housing markets, basic food and commodities prices, individual debt, and the list goes on.⁷ While a global empire of speculative finance has expanded globally, it has also intensified socially, reaching deeply into everyday life and the realm of cultural understandings and practices, reconfiguring the imagination not only

of corporate executives, politicians and opinion-leaders, but each one of us, even if we have little experience or understanding of finance.⁸ I see Pokémania as, in part, a symptom of this transformation.

It’s not only that the Pokémon brand is a financialized enterprise. Certainly, the costly development of the AR game depended on a sizable investment by its developers to hire designers, coders, marketers and others, and they didn’t do so for the good of humanity: they did so to reap future rewards.⁹ Importantly, these rewards are arriving not primarily in the form of direct revenue from players – the game is free to download. It comes in the form of the terabyte after terabyte of precious data shed by users: data concerning their geographic behaviour, their social connections, their purchasing preferences, their demographic information and any of thousands of other datapoints that can be extracted. While we should be sceptical of arguments that suggest that ‘data is the new gold’, it cannot be denied that some of today’s most profitable corporations, such as Google, Facebook or Twitter, generate the lion’s share of their revenue from collecting and parsing this ineffable digital substance and selling it on to others, or using it to sell targeted advertising or services to ever more finely cut populations of user/consumers.¹⁰

The example of Pokémon GO represents not only the monetization of data – the discovery of new ways to commodify and sell it, once collected – but also its financialization: the ability to make money now from the pre-emptive anticipation of profit yet to come, the selling of future potentials as present-day products. Capitalism today, driven by the FIRE sector, is increasingly fixated on transforming tomorrow’s promises into present-day, commodified exposure to risk. It does not so much matter if a start-up has a sustainable business plan or even a product to sell as long as investors can sell its shares for more tomorrow than they bought them for yesterday. Pokémon GO and other products are created thanks to an economic ecosystem eager to capitalize not merely on the prospect of future revenues, but on the value of the promises themselves.

While an empire of speculative finance has expanded globally, it has also intensified socially, reaching deeply into everyday life and the realm of cultural understandings and practices, reconfiguring the imagination... of each one of us.

CULTURES OF SPECULATION

The trade in the future demands not only a limited commercial infrastructure for the exchange of financial assets like futures, options and swap contracts, it also requires a broader cultural infrastructure of beliefs and understandings to give these hallucinogenic assets meaning, value and power in the wider world. As finance’s reach and power expand and deepen, thanks to the neoliberal deregulation of financial markets and privatization of collective services, this financial idiom infects

not only corporations but also the realm of daily life.¹¹ Bereft of any assurance of our futures in an increasingly competitive ‘free-market’ society, we each are encouraged to model ourselves on the image of the investor and reimagine most aspects of our lives, from housing to education to friendships, as investments that may bear future material or immaterial gain.¹²

I have argued that the Pokémon brand in its various manifestations (primarily as trading cards and video games) is both a *symptom of and a contributor to* the culture of financialization. On the one hand, it echoes the key themes of a financialized society that draws on residual colonialist narratives: players imagine themselves entering an untamed ecosystem to capture creatures of prospective value. They then invest their time, energy, intelligence and care in training their pocket monsters before essentially betting on the outcome of their battles with others. Importantly, according to the narrative of the games and the accompanying TV series and books, Pokémon require not only martial discipline but also love and nurturing, in other words a form of caring or affective labour. In this way children – by and large Pokémon’s main consumers – ‘learn to learn’ the proper dispositions and behaviours expected of them in a financialized society, where their lives stretch before them as a field of risks to be managed, competitions to be entered, wagers to be made, and sources of value (including not only money but education, personal connections, passions and hobbies) to be leveraged for future profit.

You may think such an argument is far-fetched, but from an anthropological perspective, it is not surprising. Studies of a wide swathe of human civilizations reveal that children’s play echoes the ‘serious’ world of their elders and prepares them for the challenges they will face as adults.¹³ The difference here is that Pokémon, unlike make-believe games of ‘house’ or war (though it has dimensions of both), was not developed autonomously by children; a corporation carefully crafted, marketed and profited by it. I am not arguing that the inventors of Pokémon set out to transform children into pint-sized Trumpish money monsters. Quite the opposite is the case: the game’s primary designer was trying to re-enchant nature for alienated urban children in Japan’s metropolises.¹⁴ Rather, I am arguing that, above and beyond the intentions of its inventors, the brand succeeded and continues to succeed because it resonates with a deeper, more profound chord that vibrates the social atmosphere in a financialized age.

RISK, INVESTMENT AND OTHER VIOLENT METAPHORS

This is an important distinction, because it reveals something else very profound about the culture of financialization. While it is all too tempting to blame financialization on the nefarious actions of a few FIRE executives, that’s not the whole story: it also relies on each of us enacting it in our everyday life, and imagining that, by doing so, we are empowered and in control.

Of course, in general terms, the financial realm is increasingly in the grip of a handful of corporate leaders whose firms (notably investment banks, hedge funds, private equity companies and the like) between them trade and manage the vast majority of financial assets.¹⁵ This is all the more so in an age when these exchanges occur millions of times in the blink of an eye, thanks to the empowerment of algorithmically-informed supercomputers that, today, account for somewhere in the realm of 60–80% of the volume of global financial exchanges.¹⁶ So too does the alchemical necromancy of derivatives trading and other complex financial products place financial power in the hands of a corporate elite who so jealously guard their esoteric wisdom that their machinations would flummox even the most crafty regulators, if indeed almost all the so-called regulators were not the alumni of the self-same corporations. But despite the fact that, from a bird’s-eye view, the financial power structure appears as an incestuous oligarchy, its influence depends on the infiltration of financial ideas, metaphors, logics, measurements and protocols into the governance of nearly every social institution and into the fabric of daily life.

The metaphor of ‘investment’ is a good example. Originally a euphemism for shady business dealings in Renaissance Italy, the word has become a useful term to describe the transformation of ever more aspects of life into commodities and the orientation of our social imaginations towards individualized risk management and speculation. Students today are exhorted to ‘invest in their future’ by pursuing a commodified university education, often going into staggering debt to ‘improve their human capital’. Housing is now no longer merely a matter of shelter and community, or even of prestige, but of investing in real estate in the name of future economic security and wellbeing. Relationship advice books abound, suggesting that the methods, measurements and rhetoric of the financial world can help one reimagine parenting, friendship and love.

Investment...has become a useful term to describe the transformation of ever more aspects of life into commodities and the orientation of our social imaginations towards individualized risk management and speculation.

Likewise, ‘risk’ has become a central term that both hides and normalizes catastrophic economic violence. Under the banner of ‘risk management’ corporations routinely lay off workers, instigate punitive lawsuits, gobble up competitors, divest from nations in search of cheaper or less risky hosts, and ‘externalize’ the social and ecological costs of their profit onto vulnerable populations.¹⁷ Meanwhile, marginalized and impoverished people, usually the subjects of systemic racism, imperialism or other forms of oppression, are reclassified as ‘at risk’, effacing any trace of what led to their situation and making them the targets of (often punitive) ‘social investment’ schemes.¹⁸ Contemporary imperialist wars are waged in the name of pre-empting the risks of terrorism or ‘failed states’.¹⁹ All the while, the massive

risks to the planet and its people – global warming, the acidification of the oceans, the desertification of lands, the poverty-driven rise of epidemics, the swarms of killer robots that now conduct imperial warfare – are largely ignored, or at best framed as risks to the future profitability of capitalist firms or the nation-state's economic competitiveness.

FINANCIALIZATION, C'EST MOI

Yet we financialized souls do not perceive these shifts as the gruesome double-speak of an authoritarian regime, although in reality the overarching effect of financialization can readily be compared to a sort of economic totalitarianism. Rather, we are encouraged to imagine that our individual embrace of a financial logic is a form of personal liberation and empowerment. Hence we are treated to a barrage of popular culture that lionizes the entrepreneurial investor. It is not only popular, franchised series like *Dragons' Den* or *The Apprentice* that celebrate ruthless, single-minded, fangs-bared avarice, nor the bemusing drug-addled, sex-crazed anti-heroes of the *Wolf of Wall Street* and his pack; it is also the canny antique-hunter, the shrewd house-flipper, the driven restaurateur, or the single-minded start-up genius of 'reality' TV.²⁰ All are different vantage points on a financialized Vitruvian Man willing to risk and leverage everything, and mobilize every ounce of ingenuity, daring, 'social capital' and talent, towards realizing their privatized ambitions.

Financialization is a vast but distributed system by which capitalism conscripts, seduces and organizes the imaginations and the creativity of millions of people.

The problems are systemic, not simply moral, and they arise from a society where financialized techniques are posed as the best or only means to achieve security, meaningful work and some of the nice things in life. While it is no doubt true that many corporate executives are indeed venal monsters, the reality is that most feel helplessly caught up in a vast machine that would just as soon eject them if they failed to play their role.²¹ Yet so too is this the general sense that so many of us feel in an age of financialization, where debt and precariousness make us all timid to buck the system, and encourage us each to carve out a little space of safety and possibility in what otherwise feels like a roiling social disaster.

Indeed, the financialization of the public sector, the NGO sector, the arts sector or academia is not orchestrated from above by some rotund caricature of a banker complete with top hat and tails.²² Rather, they depend on the innovation, creativity and imagination of otherwise reasonable, often caring and thoughtful managers working under desperate circumstances. For instance, in

Importantly, the goal of this lauded, idealized 'risk-taker' is never simply greed, and it would be dangerous to imagine (as many activist groups encourage us) that the pathologies of our financial system are due purely to the villainous acquisitiveness of some bad individuals in positions of power.

the United States, subprime mortgages were developed and fought for, in part, by well-meaning and sometimes quite radical urban activist groups and NGOs attempting to remedy the historic financial disenfranchisement of racialized people who, for generations, had been denied home ownership and made vulnerable to the predations of slum landlords.²³ Likewise, private and semi-private charter schools, whose rise has represented a massive blow to the US public education system by essentially financializing education provision, were often pioneered by sympathetic and politically astute teachers and principals looking for a way to serve 'at risk' children otherwise abandoned by a racist and classist system.²⁴ Social impact bonds or the new breed of 'philanthrocapitalism' or 'venture philanthropy', which seek to introduce the metrics and models of the financialized corporate world into the realm of social services and international development, likewise emerge from a kind of torqued financialized imagination.

the financial sector has also always been essential to the functioning of capitalism in all its many dimensions and various modes of exploitation

Financialization is a vast but distributed system by which capitalism conscripts, seduces and organizes the imaginations and the creativity of millions of people – even some of the world's poorest people, thanks to the evangelism of microfinance lending in the Global South.²⁵ The outcome is, indeed, dystopian, but in neoliberal times, when corporate-controlled and financialized media dominate and when any notion of social care recedes, this overarching outcome is obscured: we are each left to fend for ourselves, and so find in the tools and rhetorics of financialization a sort of cold comfort.

ECONOMIES: REAL AND IMAGINED

It is for this reason that we should be suspicious of approaches that frame financialization as *merely* the rule of imaginary money over the so-called 'real economy'. Certainly, such an approach is tempting when only some 5–8% of all the world's circulating money could actually be 'cashed out', the rest being notional data in inter-bank databases, promissory notes, complex derivatives or other forms of financial speculation.²⁶ But while it has been a common point of reference for many populist social-democratic movements, it risks making three (to my mind) grave mistakes.

First, to believe we can separate a 'bad' financialized economy from a 'good' real capitalist economy would be to fall prey to anachronistic thinking. Capitalism has always had a financial sector, which has always been the scene of excesses of speculation and the tendency towards crisis; but the financial sector has also always been essential to the functioning of capitalism in all its many dimensions and various modes of exploitation,²⁷ from colonialism to industrial production, from agriculture to civic infrastructure. Capitalism is always already financialized although, as we have noted, today's financialization has new characteristics.²⁸

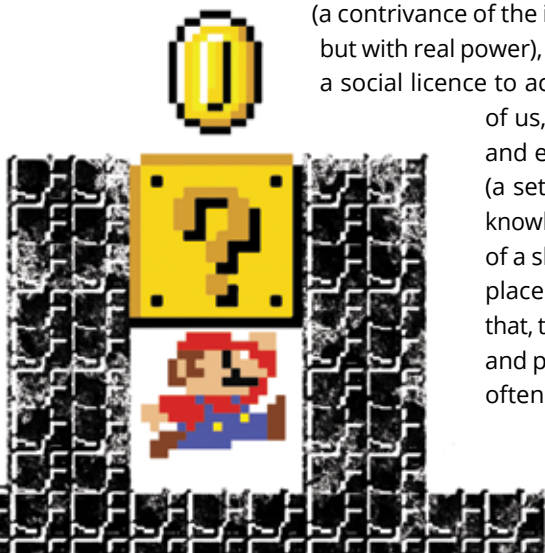
While this point may appear academic, it is acutely political when we consider today's nostalgia for a post-war Keynesian 'golden age' common to both the Left and the Right in the Global North. This notion all too often dovetails with hallucinations of ethnic-national purity and conservative moral righteousness. Yet while this golden age may well have provided middle-class security for straight, white, able-bodied men, it was miserable and often deadly to women, people of colour, those with physical or mental disabilities, queer and gender non-conforming persons, children and youth and others who fell outside its strict normative boundaries. By the late 1960s, nearly all these populations were in open revolt.²⁹ Further, the 'gold' of this period came less from the hard work of blue- and white-collar workers and more from the neocolonial pillage of the Third World, with financialized debt (usually brokered by intermediaries like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) used to leverage a magnitude of energy and wealth that even direct colonial control could not extract.³⁰

MONEY: THE ORIGINAL POCKET MONSTER

The second key problem with the distinction between a 'real' and an 'imaginary' economy is that it makes 'imaginary' synonymous with an ignorant or even malevolent unreality. Yet this definition of the imagination, especially when attributed to money, hides more than it reveals. After all, all money is imaginary, and not only the paper slips of fiat currency, the eternally deferred promissory notes, that we use daily. Gold is a fairly useless metal, after all, except to the extent a society recognizes it as having money-like virtues and properties. Even when currencies have direct use values (for instance, the word salary is thought to come from the time Roman soldiers were paid in salt) their exchange values relative to other commodities always fluctuated based on social impressions, power relations and a multitude of other factors.³¹

This is because money is a social institution: a durable set of beliefs, protocols and expectations that are attached to a physical thing (like a coin), a ritual (like accounting), a person's rank (a CEO) or place (a bank). In this sense, other social institutions include heteronormative monogamous marriage

(a contrivance of the imagination to organize social affinities, but with real power), the police (ordinary human beings given a social licence to act outside the laws that govern the rest of us, allegedly in the interests of preserving and enforcing those laws) and the university (a set of buildings held to be a repository of knowledge). Social institutions are the products of a shared imaginative effort and are held in place not only by violence (though plenty of that, too), but also by shared belief, expectation and participation. But still they have very real, often deadly, power.



Money is one very particular such imaginary institution with special qualities, given power by our daily use of and belief in it. In some sense, money is a solidification of the collective imagination that, at the same time, shapes the collective and individual imagination. We, its users, unconsciously consent to give it value and power, and it comes to define our sense of value, and to have power over us. Like all social institutions, it shapes the way we, as a cooperative species, cooperate with one another to reproduce our lives, though often (usually, perhaps) this 'cooperation' is in some way coerced, unequal or exploitative. The coercion, inequality and exploitation enabled by money, especially financialized money, are extreme: they define our global system today, with all its injustices. But (conveniently for its beneficiaries) this violence is typically seen as natural, inevitable and logical.³²

If financialization is, in some sense, an empire of the imagination... of what else might the collective imagination, now augmented by our thinking machines and our global telecommunications network, be capable?

This is all a bit abstract, but it problematizes any easy distinction between an imaginary and a real economy: all economies are always *both* real and imagined. What is key is that, in moments of crisis, the radical imagination – the form of imagination that questions and refuses, that insists on seeing the roots of social life – rises to challenge the imaginary institutions of society, including money. This is, in a sense, what happens in financial crises: the imaginary value of money and the institutions that surround it are called into question. There is a rush to either replace those institutions or restore them.³³

On a cultural level, the efforts of central banks in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis aimed to restore our faith in the money system essentially, and it did so by drastically indebting governments to the same financialized markets they were bailing out. While this financial system certainly does function in the interests of the proverbial 1%, that fact alone does not make it any more imaginary than any other financial or economic system. It is a system for bestowing symbols and tokens (in this case they also include bonds, derivatives contracts and other financial 'objects' that can only be fathomed or controlled with elite supercomputers) with imaginary value, and using them as a means to coordinate a vastly complex and hideously exploitative and destructive global orchestration of objects and labour: neoliberal capitalism.

THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION

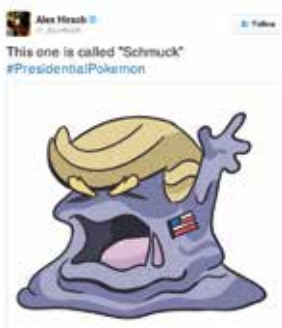
Which brings us to the final and most substantial point: if, on some level, the financialized order is an order of the imagination, two things are true. First, as I have sought to argue here, it relies not only on threatening or beguiling us all, but also on captivating, conscripting, seducing and recalibrating our imaginations. Viewed as if by a future archaeologist sifting through the midden of our civilization's

collapse, a cultural artefact like a Pokémon trading card would appear as a toy our society produced to inadvertently teach its young people about how to prepare themselves to integrate into a complex order of imaginary institutions held together by the imaginary forces of finance. Such a presentation would echo the way we, today, view the material cultures of empires of old that sustained themselves for millennia not merely through brutal violence and subjugation (our age include a great deal of this, and more daily), but by the individual internalization of an imagined paradigm of value that seemed to its participants not only natural and inevitable, but one within which they had as much agency as one might like.

And here is a silver lining: if financialization is, in some sense, an empire of the imagination, we can glimpse for a moment the true power of the imagination. Today, the circulation of imaginary assets represented by financial markets essentially coordinates a global circulation of goods and of labour so vastly complex it is literally unimaginable. It is also destroying the planet's ecosystems, leading to the completely unnecessary deaths of millions of living beings, and spawning new mutations of imperialism and nationalist authoritarianism that are devastating whole populations. Yet of what *else* might the collective imagination, now augmented by our thinking machines and our global telecommunications network, be capable? When we take the imagination seriously, we open ourselves to a glimmer of hope.

THE AUTHORITARIAN TURN

Before we take up that glimmer, there is a little more gloom to consider. The uneven and topsy-turvy rise of far-right authoritarian politics around the world has been taken as evidence of the end of globalization and of neoliberalism. But while these ideals may be ideologically bankrupt, they remain structurally powerful: the new authoritarians have an unswerving belief in free markets, deregulation and corporate power, they just no longer trust a multi-centric global system to enforce these, preferring to militarize the state against its citizens and use ethnic-nationalism, religion or xenophobia as a means to quell dissent and divide the disenfranchised.



More profoundly, the financialized subject is also, to a very real extent, the flip side of the coin of the authoritarian subject. Whereas neoliberalism stripped society down to the individual, depriving us of any imagination of a collective fate and rendering each of

us a lonely risk-manager, competing tooth and claw against everyone else to succeed, it promised that hard work and playing by the given rules would result in a good life. This promise has proven false: the financialized subject has awakened from a neoliberal reverie indebted, fearful and existentially and economically

precarious. The structural forces of neoliberal financialization that cause this are unintelligible; the tools of systemic analysis and the radical imagination have been deprived or dulled by, on the one hand, a system of cultural storytelling (media) that is geared towards sensationalism in the name of private profit and, on the other, an education system stripped down to its most instrumental core, aimed at churning out job-ready debtors rather than educated citizens.³⁴

Meanwhile, the objective conditions of life for many if not most under financialization are tense, except for the wealthy (and even for them as well). It is not only that, in most of the Global North, real wages (adjusted for inflation) have declined at the same time as public services and forms of collective insurance have withered. Social solidarity has frequently collapsed into an individualized consumer society, leaving many pathologically lonely.³⁵ The typical experience is to be hovering on the precipice of a profound social abandonment, of a precarious life of competition without respite, where survival demands the leveraging and financialization of everything of value in one's life. Nothing is sacred, and there is no escape, and no help.³⁶ As Walter Benjamin pointed out some 80 years ago, authoritarianism cannot fix these problems – indeed it will entrench them – but it will allow some of the dispossessed a chance to recognize and express themselves and their anger in a perverse collectivity.

For many, especially those who have experienced racialized oppression, economic precariousness and a hostile society is nothing new, and it has been combined with cultural and sociological hostilities that range from daily forms of micro-violence to outright terrorism. As noted earlier, for many, post-war Keynesianism was no golden age. Yet for those whom the golden age did offer promise, those with racial or other forms of privilege, the loss of this promise (even when it was patently false) is a devastating blow.³⁷ Meanwhile, liberal multiculturalist efforts to rectify the systemic imbalances caused by racism or sexism, such as those aimed at benefitting racialized people in the workplace, become the targets of the ire of the formerly privileged, even while only moderately effective and largely

What is vital to recognize is that this particular form of proto-fascist authoritarian disposition is the reactive by-product of financialization.

mobilized for government public relations. Real or (more often) hallucinated 'special benefits' or leniencies afforded to marginalized people become the focal points of a surplus rage among those privileged subjects who feel that they have done everything right, played by all the rules and remain fundamentally insecure, precarious and alone. While this rage draws on and revivifies old hatreds, especially forms of racism, residual like dormant viruses in the social body, they do so in new ways. Notions of racial superiority, while definitely still present (especially in terms of notions of the 'cultural' inferiority of 'non-white' people), have given ways to a sense of wounded fair play, where the racists of today believe that they themselves are the victims of a racism orchestrated by a more or less coordinated

alliance of the sneering liberal intelligentsia, the lazy bureaucrat, the activist on their high-horse and the conniving 'special interest group'. The result is a system where the normative 'white' subject feels not only that they cannot succeed, but also that they cannot speak for fear of being labelled a racist.

What is vital to recognize is that this particular form of proto-fascist authoritarian disposition is the reactive by-product of financialization. It is the subject who has been told to transform their entire life into a gamble but who has never won big, a subject who has been told that the market will provide peace and plenty, but who sees a future not necessarily of poverty but of constant worry and pressure. It is the debtor (or the investor) for whom the future is nothing more than an endless now, mapped out in every direction by an imagination trained and honed to manage risks, leverage potentials and maximize returns. It is an imagination that is at once put to work as never before, but also to all intents and purposes dead because it is denied the prospect of the unknown.

This is not the full story of the rise of today's authoritarian imagination, nor does it capture the intricate connections and contradictions between it and the financialized imagination. But it does suggest that the political monsters that now stalk the earth are the product somehow of both, combined.

BLACK SNAKE, BLACK SWAN

To close, I want to return to the concept of the imagination as a social force. The imagination is not only something that happens in the individual mind – it occurs between people as they share ideas and stories, as they interact. In this sense, the imagination is not just something that emerges from the arts or from discussion or debate, it is an essential element of social 'doing', of how we collaborate inherently cooperative beings.³⁸ The patterns of our cooperation shape the imagination, and the imagination shapes how we cooperate. If we imagine one person as the boss and the rest as the workers, that belief will shape how we are coerced to cooperate, and also how the fruits of that cooperation will be divided, which in turn will allow the boss to reproduce the means of his coercion (though the imagination is of course not all that keeps the boss/worker relation in place).³⁹

If the imagination is a reflexive part of how we cooperate together, the hope for a radical imagination that could show us the way beyond the world of monsters will have to emerge not merely from the genius mind of any one individual, important as such minds can be. It will emerge from collective experiments that attempt to allow us to cooperate differently on more egalitarian footing. I am not simply talking about reclusive utopian communities, though these too are valuable, in their way: they are laboratories that refine the tools for a collective life. I am also talking about the imagination to emerge from social movements as they struggle within, against and beyond financialization.

Let us close with the recent victory of the Indigenous-led resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline project, which, at the time of writing, has been halted by the

US Federal Government thanks to consistent non-violent direct action. This has rightly been pointed to as a sorely needed victory for movements struggling to stay optimistic in the face of the coming Trump presidency and his support for a revanchist white nationalism to compound the almost unimaginable racialized violence that already defines the United States. But the #NoDAPL victory, even if it will prove short-lived, has wider implications for the radical imagination.

First, it is part of a massive, continent-wide (some might say worldwide) resurgence of Indigenous militancy based on the recollection of other systems of cooperation beyond the colonial capitalism and its recent manifestation as financialized neoliberalism. The rituals, dances, protocols and songs that characterize these struggles are not merely the cultural ephemera of activism; they are an intimate and constitutive part of Indigenous world-making, a means to coordinate and align the collective imagination so as to facilitate and enrich the cooperation of those involved.⁴⁰ They speak to a fundamentally different order of value, completely alien to the financialized idiom of today. I do not wish to romanticize these struggles – they are hard, they are problematic, they are fractured and they are barely surviving – nor do I wish to rehearse the self-serving settler mythology of the Indigenous 'other' and their fabled closeness to 'nature'. Such tropes are important, but they beg a much longer engagement. Suffice it to say that the forms of insurgent Indigenous land-based resistance, as Yellowknives-Dene theorist Glen Coulthard notes, are fundamentally opposed to capitalism.⁴¹

Second, as non-Indigenous allies flock to and learn from the Indigenous-led #NoDAPL struggle, they learn to learn from this anti-capitalist value paradigm, but also learn to practise their forms of cooperation differently, and hence their imaginations are radicalized as well. At stake here is a bigger, wider and more capacious imagination of risk. Whereas the financialized soul is exhorted to perfect itself as a private manager of risk in their own life, the sum effect of all these individualized acts of risk management is a sociological catastrophe, in the same way that the sum of a million corporate acts of highly savvy risk management exploded into an unforeseen 'black swan' systemic risk event in the 2008 financial crisis.⁴² In their participation in the #NoDAPL protests, financialized subjects are learning to understand and act upon risk collectively, identifying the pipeline, the monstrous 'black snake' as it has been dubbed, as a risk to them all, not only as individuals but as a collective.

The radical imagination that can confront financialization and its monsters will emerge from frontline struggles based on direct action against capitalist financialization and the forms of authoritarianism it is unleashing. It will necessarily come in the form of people learning to cooperate differently, providing not only militant solidarity but also sophisticated and long-term care to one another in grim times. Yet we should not be seduced by our own imaginations: it will also require the hard work of political organizing – and such organizing, at some point, needs a vision and needs a structure. In previous eras, such unifying visions and structures have become monstrous regimes. It will take all our cooperation and all our imagination to prevent this from happening.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Haiven is Canada Research Chair in Culture, Media and Social Justice at Lakehead University in Northwest Ontario and director of the ReImagining Value Action Lab (RIVAL). He writes articles for both academic and general audiences and is the author of the books *Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Creativity and the Commons, The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (with Alex Khasnabish) and *Cultures of Financialization: Fictitious Capital in Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. He is currently working on a book titled *Art after Money, Money after Art: Radical Creative Strategies Against Financialization*.

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TECH TRENDS



THE MEDIA- TECHNOLOGY- MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

JUSTIN SCHLOSBERG

Invisibility is the essence of the radical view of power developed in 1959 by US sociologist C. Wright Mills, according to which concentrated power in late capitalist democracies was invisible, and no longer to be found in the observable decision-making and conflicts of day-to-day partisan politics.¹ Two years later, it was echoed in the concept of a military-industrial complex, first articulated by the then US Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In his farewell address in 1961, Eisenhower issued a famous warning to the American people:

We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.²

Mills, like Eisenhower, reflected on the exponential growth and consolidation of corporations, the military establishment and government bureaucracy during the post-war period, along with the rapid development of communication technologies and infrastructures. These were not coincidental and autonomous processes but mutually constitutive of an ever more integrated elite power structure; and one that transcended the formal checks and balances of the political system.

But for critics of Mills, the suggestion of any kind of definable club at the top echelons of state–corporate power lacked empirical foundation and flew in the face of what seemed to be an opposite and prevailing trend. This was characterized by growing *disunity* among elite factions as the political economy became increasingly complex and fractured. As Daniel Bell observed in respect of corporate power in post-war America: 'I can think of only one issue on which the top corporations

would be united: tax policy. In almost all others, they divide.³

the essential characteristics of revolving doors, intimate social relations and strategic partnerships remain as pertinent today as they did in the 1950s.

Bell pointed out some of the fault lines that divided industrial interests in the post-war period, including those between railways, truckers and airlines; or between coal, oil and natural gas. In this essay I address similar fault lines in the digital information

economy, which have manifested themselves in public squabbles and legal battles between content owners (especially publishers), intermediaries (such as search and social networking sites) and network operators (including Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and app platforms). From net neutrality to ancillary copyrights, these titanic struggles suggest – on the surface at least – a far more profound disunity among the established and emergent gatekeeping powers than the industrial tensions to which Bell pointed. In short, the media–technology complex hardly seems to reflect anything like an 'interlocking directorate' that Mills ascribed to the power elite, much less a hegemonic consensus that radical critics of the media have long identified.

But on closer examination, the picture is much less fractious than it appears. In the discussion that follows, we review the underlying and overall consonance of interests between different players in the information economy, as well as evidence of an intensifying alliance and collaboration that extends to the wider

military–industrial complex. Although the composition of the power elite inevitably varies according to place and time, the essential characteristics of revolving doors, intimate social relations and strategic partnerships remain as pertinent today as they did in the 1950s.

This does not mean that the tensions between corporate interests, both within and across communications sectors, are a charade. But, just as Mills suggested, these are not the whole story, and perhaps not even half the story. In a world of so-called fake news and post-truth politics, the largely invisible qualities of concentrated power that Mills highlighted, along with its potential influence over media, public and policy agendas, warrant renewed and urgent scrutiny.

THE BLOOD, THE VEINS AND THE HEARTBEAT

To get to the heart of the matter, we have to consider how concentration and consolidation in media markets is intensifying under the shadow of digital monopolies like Google and Facebook. Indeed, what is truly unprecedented about the market power of these platform monopolies is not the extent of dominance within their own core markets (search and social networking), but the immense influence they wield over others. This is precisely *because* they occupy the hinterland between industries built on network and copyright control. In so doing, they have assumed control of something of far wider consequence: the means to connect these industries with end users. If 'referral traffic' is the blood that now sustains much of the cultural industries, and the pipes and networks through which that traffic flows are the veins, then intermediaries provide the heartbeat. And there are no industries now more dependent on that heartbeat than news. Facebook and Google together account for more than 70% of users directed to the websites of major news publishers. From any perspective this translates into a stunning degree of market influence.

To understand the impact on concentration on news markets, we have to get to grips with how dependence on referral traffic has raised capital costs in the world of digital journalism and erected new barriers to market entry. Although newsgathering may be cheaper than ever before, this is countered by the growing costs of competing on *volume*, while the ever-expanding information noise means that prospective new entrants often need sky-high marketing budgets in order to compete. This is seen not only in rising advertising costs, as major brands out-bid smaller players in keyword auctions; but also in the development of new marketing specialisms, namely strategies of search engine and social media optimization that have particular resonance for the news industry. These in turn have spawned a whole new professional class of skilled marketers and agencies that make competing with the big names a very costly business.

THE TYRANNY OF AUTOMATION

In spite of these obstacles, the last decade or so has seen the rise of a small number of new entrants in mature digital publishing markets, from the *Huffington Post* to the *Intercept.com*. But their overall audience still tends to be marginal compared to dominant television and newspaper brands, and it remains to be seen how much of a challenge they present to mainstream consensus agendas.

What is clear is that offering such a challenge is, from a commercial perspective, a high-risk business. This is partly because major news algorithms disproportionately favour not only established large-scale brands, but also a consensus news agenda. In May 2016, five whistle-blowers revealed the existence of a specialist 'curating' team within Facebook, responsible for manually editing its trending topics. Housed in the basement of its New York offices, this team was widely accused of peddling an anti-conservative editorial bias, although this proved to be more a reflection of the personal political sensibilities of the curators than any top-down editorial directive.

What was fed down from the top was explicit instruction to defer to a mainstream agenda consensus: curators were to ensure that stories that were attracting substantial coverage in mainstream media and on Twitter were given a boost if they were not trending on Facebook 'organically'.

Deference to a mainstream news consensus can also be embedded inadvertently in algorithmic design. Arguably the closest proxy for a news agenda in the social

media world is Twitter's trending topics (a forebear of Facebook's equivalent). These highlight the most popular issues

discussed on the social network in any locality or region, at any given time, as denoted by the hash-tag label for particular topical discussion threads. In 2011, considerable controversy was stirred when activists from the Occupy movement – a global direct-action protest network born out of the fallout from the 2008 financial crash – noticed that the hash-tag for Occupy Wall Street (OWS) never seemed to make it on to the trending topics list in New York.⁴ This seemed particularly bizarre because OWS was at the heart of a movement that was attracting significant attention from mainstream media at the time. *#OccupyWallStreet* had also been 'trending' regularly all over the world, but never in the city



where its direct action and protest activity was taking place. Even more bizarrely, the same thing was happening with the *#OccupyBoston* hash-tag, which was regularly trending in cities and regions *other* than Boston but never in Boston itself.

Not surprisingly, the social network was accused of cooperating with local authorities in censorship and efforts to suppress the movement. Part of the suspicion stemmed from the fact that the technical apparatus of trending topics has always been hidden from public view. But in a brilliant 'reverse engineering' data analysis, Gilad Lotan showed how the anomalies in Boston and New York were not in fact the function of any intentional manipulation by Twitter or the authorities, but rather the unintended consequences of a particular algorithmic feature.⁵

Trending topics have become a key mechanism by which certain ideas or perspectives gain visibility in the digital domain.

Contrary to what might be assumed, Twitter's determination of 'trending' is not based exclusively on the volume of tweets attracted by any given hash-tag at any given time. This is because one of Twitter's principal concerns with trending – as the term suggests – is to do with 'newness'. So its algorithm rewards particular terms and topics that experience 'spikes' in users' attention and participation, rather than those that attract consistent and prolonged activity. The reason that *#OccupyWallStreet* and *#OccupyBoston* had never trended in their respective cities was because they had, from the start, attracted a gradual and *sustained* growth of local attention, as opposed to simply spiking around particular events that attracted broader mainstream media focus. As Lotan remarked, 'There's nothing like a Police raid and hundreds of arrests to push a story's visibility'.

So this was not, after all, censorship – or at least not in the way that many had suspected. But it did reveal an important feature of Twitter that has potentially profound implications for the news agenda at large, and for the way that information flows across the network. Trending topics have become a key mechanism by which certain ideas or perspectives gain visibility in the digital domain. They have become a symbol of *newsworthiness*. Most would assume that they reflect the most popular topics at any given time in any given place, but that's not strictly true. Spikes are more likely to be driven by headlines that are still predominantly determined by editors in traditional newsrooms. So, rather than offering a challenge to the editorial agenda set by mainstream media, trending topics may serve in many ways to reinforce that agenda.

SIZE MATTERS

As for Google, its news-service algorithm has for some time been weighting news providers according to a broad spectrum of what it considers reliable indicators of news quality. But one look at Google's most recent patent filing for its news

algorithm reveals just how much size is used as a proxy for quality in the world of digital news: the size of the audience, the size of the newsroom, and the volume of output.⁶

In relation to audience, Google rewards providers with an established record of click-throughs from its pages; those that feature prominently in user surveys and data collected by market research agencies; and those with a relatively global reach as detected by clicks, tweets, likes and links from users based in other countries. For newsroom capacity, Google embeds metrics into its algorithm that 'guesstimates' the number of journalists (with reference to by-lines) as well as the number of 'bureaus' operated by the news provider.

It's not hard to see how these metrics can disproportionately favour mainstream news providers over more specialist or alternative outlets. Above all, Google's quality weighting hangs on volume. According to the patent filing:

A first metric in determining the quality of a news source may include the number of articles produced by the news source during a given time period [...] [and] may be determined by counting the number of non-duplicate articles [...] [or] counting the number of original sentences produced.

Some volume metrics favour long-form and original news, which are fairly uncontentious indicators of quality (even if they still favour news organizations with relative scale and resource advantage). But others are more problematic. For instance, Google rewards organizations that provide a 'breadth' of news coverage, which penalizes more specialized news organizations. Specializing

in this sense is really the only way that potential new entrants, which lack the resources and scale of existing providers, can compete by offering an in-depth and 'quality' news alternative.

Perhaps the most contentious metric is one that purports to measure what Google calls 'importance' by comparing the volume of a site's output on any given topic to the total output on that topic across the web. In a single measure, this promotes both concentration at the level of provider (by favouring organizations

with volume and scale), as well as concentration at the level of output (by favouring organizations that produce more on topics that are widely covered elsewhere). In other words, it is a measure that reinforces both an aggregate news 'agenda', as well as the agenda-setting power of a relatively small number of publishers.

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Google favours automated indicators because they rely less on human subjective interpretations of news value. But while they may be free of subjective bias in one sense, they rely on quantitative indicators of quality, which produce their own bias towards large-scale and mainstream providers.

Google engineers may well argue that the variety of volume metrics embedded in the algorithm ensures that concentration effects counterbalance pluralizing effects, and that there is no more legitimate or authoritative way to measure news quality than relying on a full spectrum of quantitative indicators. Rightly or wrongly, Google believes that 'real news' providers are those that can produce significant amounts of original, breaking and general news on a wide range of topics and on a consistent basis.

At face value, that doesn't sound like such a bad thing. In a world saturated with hype, rumour and fake news, it's not surprising that most people are attracted to media brands that signal a degree of professionalism. But there is little evidence to suggest that mainstream media brands have offered a meaningful corrective to fake news stories and considerable evidence to suggest that they have served to amplify them.

Consider, for example, an open letter calling for the re-election of the Conservative Party during the 2015 British general election campaign. The letter was published on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* and presented as a spontaneous initiative by the small business community with apparently 5,000 signatories and a statement that implored voters to give the Conservatives a chance 'to finish what they have started'. It was duly picked up by the BBC and other television news channels and largely covered without critical scrutiny, on a day when the Conservatives happened to have launched their small business manifesto and incumbent leader David Cameron gave a speech to an audience of small business leaders in London.⁷

Within hours, however, it emerged that the letter had in fact originated from the Conservative Party's campaign headquarters, and it was not long before Twitter users identified several duplicate signatories, as well as references to companies that no longer existed or claimed not to have signed. They even found Conservative Party candidates among the signatories. But by then, the uncorrected news story had already reached many more millions of prospective voters, courtesy of the mainstream broadcasters. For its part, Google *pre-emptively* regards major news brands like the BBC as more likely to produce what it considers quality news. The company made clear as much when it stated in its patent filing that 'CNN and BBC are widely regarded as high quality sources of accuracy of reporting, professionalism in writing, etc., while local news sources, such as hometown news sources, may be of lower quality'.

When major western news brands are held as a definitive benchmark of news quality, we start to run into real problems from the perspective of media diversity.

For one thing, Google's quality metrics give favoured news organizations a *prior* weighting, which means that the ranking of stories is not exclusively matched to the keywords of any given search. An article by a relatively unknown provider may thus find itself out-ranked by competitors with greater scale and brand presence, even if the article is more keyword-relevant, in-depth and original.

Perhaps of greatest concern, Google's news algorithm discriminates against providers that focus on topics, issues and stories beyond or on the fringes of the mainstream agenda. Even its 'originality' metric – which purports to favour diverse perspectives in the news generally – is limited to measuring the number of 'original named entities' that appear in any given article in comparison with related coverage on the same story or issue.

This underlying alliance between Google and major news publishers is very much at odds with the public war of words that has surrounded issues such as ancillary copyright. In 2013, the German government passed a law attempting to force Google to pay publishers for the use of cached content in its search listings. Yet within a matter of weeks, the law was rendered defunct after publishers lined up to issue Google a royalty-free license. It became clear that much as Google values the news content of major publishers, the latter are even more dependent on the referral traffic that Google provides.

DOUBLE SPEAK

Arguably, even testier than the relationship between Google and publishers in recent years has been that between Google and the US and British governments in the battle over surveillance and encryption. In 2013, classified documents leaked by Ed Snowden suggested that the US National Security Agency (NSA) had surreptitiously tapped into the backbone infrastructure of a number of intermediaries, including Google, prompting a chorus of outrage over what appeared to be a hacking of their servers. Intermediaries also responded by installing or upgrading encryption of their servers and software, prompting the US government to look to the courts in order to force open the 'back door', and the British government to enshrine similar measures in proposed new legislation.

Google in particular reacted with characteristic outrage to the Snowden revelations, decrying the US government for its surveillance over-reach and failure to protect the privacy of its users. Yet at the very same time, we now know that the company was actively seeking to *collaborate* with state surveillance programmes.

On 18 February 2014, hundreds of privacy and civil liberty activists filled City Hall in Oakland, California, protesting against the local government's state of the art surveillance system known as the 'Domain Awareness Center'.⁸ The programme was based on a centralized hub receiving real-time CCTV (closed-circuit television) and other audio, video and data feeds from around the city, and integrating them

with a range of surveillance applications including face-recognition software. Funded by the federal government, officials hailed it as an innovative and comprehensive public safety initiative.

This was not, however, enough to convince concerned local citizens for whom the scope and reach of the programme posed, from the outset, unprecedented threats to privacy and civil liberties. But the protestors at this particular meeting had even bigger worries on their mind. After reams of internal email disclosures were enforced by the Public Records Office, it became clear that the programme was not just about protecting residents in the event of a natural disaster or terror attack, as officials proclaimed. It seemed to be aimed at least as much at political activists and civil disobedients in a way that touched a nerve for a city with a troubling history of police brutality. In the event, the protestors won a significant concession from the authorities, which agreed to limit the project to cover surveillance only at the city's port and airport rather than its entire metropolitan area as originally planned.



But there was a little-noticed sting in the tale. Among the thousands of emails disclosed was an exchange between a City Hall official, Renee Domingo, and Scott Ciabattari, a 'strategic partnerships manager' at Google.⁹ In one email in particular, Domingo asked Google for a presentation of 'demos and products' that could work with the Domain Awareness Center, as well as more general ideas of 'how the city might partner with Google'. The company appeared eager to participate in the very practices of blanket public surveillance that it had publicly scorned in response to the Snowden revelations.

THE INTERLOCK

This was no isolated example of Google's keenness to develop partnerships with the surveillance and military state. Consider Michelle Quaid, Google's Chief Technology Officer for the Public Sector between 2011 and 2015 and voted the most powerful woman by *Entrepreneur Magazine* in 2014. Before joining Google, she had built a prodigious career in roles spanning the Department of Defense and several intelligence agencies. At Google, she self-styled her job as that of a 'bridge-builder' between big tech and big government, especially the worlds of military and intelligence.¹⁰

Other senior positions in Google's 'Federal' division exemplify the company's efforts to cash in on lucrative partnerships with the military and security establishment. The most senior is perhaps Shannon Sullivan, head of Google Federal,

the company's government-facing division. Sullivan was a former defence director for BAe Systems, the world's largest arms manufacturer, and a senior military adviser to the US Air Force.

But it's not just the security state that has developed entrenched links with Google. Notwithstanding the temporary spat over surveillance revelations in 2013, the Obama administration had from the outset forged a long-term love-in with Silicon Valley. The regular exchange of senior staff between the top branches of government and the boards of big tech companies has produced not so much a revolving as a spinning door between Big Tech and the White House. Loisa Terrell, former legal counsel to Obama, joined Facebook as Head of Public Policy in 2011 before being appointed Advisor to the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 2013. And in 2015, Facebook hired former FCC Chairman Kevin Martin to direct its mobile and global access policy.

Tech companies have also ratcheted up their political donations in recent years, establishing 'political action committees' or PACs to front their political lobbying efforts and campaign contributions during election cycles. Not surprisingly, Google's is the largest PAC and has grown exponentially since its inception in 2006. In the 2014 mid-term elections, Google spent \$1.6 million compared to a mere \$40,000 in 2006, and in the 2016 election cycle, it spent \$2.2 million, most of it on Republican candidates.¹¹ Two years earlier, Google's Michelle Quaid joined

the board of the campaign technology company Voter Gravity, which provides services to Republican candidates and technological support for a number of conservative groups.¹²

During the 2015-16 electoral cycle, Google spent almost \$12 million on lobbying US representatives, and three out of four of its lobbyists had previously held senior

government posts.¹³ In 2015, Google had 10 employees devoted to lobbying European politicians, an investment that appears to have borne some fruit at least with the British government. According to an investigation by the *Observer* newspaper in 2015, 'Britain has been privately lobbying the EU to remove from an official blacklist the tax haven through which Google funnels billions of pounds of profits'.¹⁴ In 2014, towards the end of his stint as EU Competition Commissioner, Joaquín Almunia complained bitterly of the pressure applied by member state governments to go easy on Google. Almunia had spearheaded anti-trust investigations into the company during his four-year tenure and, coincidentally perhaps, was also revealed to be one of the victims of the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and NSA surveillance in a target list leaked by Ed Snowden.

The regular exchange of senior staff between ...government and ...big tech companies has produced not so much a revolving as a spinning door between Big Tech and the White House.

There have also been a number of recent key cross-appointments between intermediaries and media organizations. In 2010 Google hired Madhav Chinnappa, former head of development and rights for BBC News, to lead its partnerships team for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, while in 2015, senior Google executive Michelle Guthrie was poached by Australia's leading broadcaster ABC. The following year, Facebook recruited the editor of Storyful – Newscorp's social media news agency – to manage its journalism partnerships, while Google's vice president for communications and public affairs in Europe, the Middle East and Africa is (at the time of writing) Peter Barron, former editor of the BBC's *Newsnight*.

Communications and PR roles have also sustained a bridge between newsroom and government employment. In Britain, the conviction and imprisonment of former *News of the World* editor Andy Coulson in 2015 was a PR disaster for the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, who had hired Coulson to direct his communications after he had left the paper in 2010. But less prominent is the interlocking directorate between media, the state and the defence industry. William Kennard, for instance, has served on the boards of the *New York Times*, AT&T and a number of companies owned by the Carlyle Group, a major US defence contractor.¹⁵ His full-time roles have included serving as Chairman of the FCC (1997-2001), managing director of the Carlyle Group (2001-2009), and US ambassador to the EU from 2009 to 2013.

Perhaps more significant than the formal links between big tech, media and the state are the various milieus and forums in which their representatives congregate, both socially and professionally.¹⁶ The annual Sun Valley conference in Idaho, for example, is credited with spawning major tech-media mergers such as Comcast's purchase of NBC in 2009, and the deal that put the *Washington Post* in the hands of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos in 2013.

As for social cliques, Britain's 'Chipping Norton Set' refers to a gang of media and political elites based in the upmarket Oxfordshire village of the same name. Its members include David Cameron, Elizabeth Murdoch (daughter of Rupert), Rebekah Brooks (now CEO of Murdoch's UK newspaper operations), and Rachel Whetstone (former Google director of communications and public policy). The resilience of such intimate ties in the aftermath of the phone-hacking scandal was demonstrated in December 2015, when the Murdochs hosted Cameron, among others, for a Christmas drink. This followed on-going and persistent meetings

There is nothing legally or perhaps even ethically wrong with politicians having meetings or developing close friendships with media executives. The problematic question concerns the degree to which this kind of interaction – which takes place beyond public scrutiny or participation – yields a trickle-down influence both over media and policy agendas.

between Murdoch and senior government ministers in the year leading up to the 2015 general election.

Of course, there is nothing legally or perhaps even ethically wrong with politicians having meetings or developing close friendships with media executives. The problematic question concerns the degree to which this kind of interaction – which takes place beyond public scrutiny or participation – yields a trickle-down influence both over media and policy agendas. One of the most striking features of testimony given to the Leveson Inquiry in 2012 by former prime ministers (including close friends of Rupert Murdoch) was the frank admission that their views were affected by, in the words of Tony Blair, ‘how we are treated by them’.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Though the examples pointed to above are by no means exhaustive, they paint a picture of a complex network of institutional power with media, communications and technology players occupying key nodes and playing crucial enabling roles within it. This does not mean that the ‘club’ functions as an entirely exclusive, cohesive, centralized and coordinated vehicle of elite power. It does not even tell us much about how or to what degree power is mobilized to produce an agenda consensus. But these are all empirical questions that are *raised* by the emergent media–technology–military–industrial complex. And they are questions that are overlooked by those who assert or imply that the concept of a power elite or ideological hegemony belongs to an outdated ‘control paradigm’ in media studies.¹⁸

Both activists and researchers must remain vigilant in a world where established media brands still account for the vast majority of news consumption on all platforms; where the peddling of fear-mongering nationalism in much of the commercial press has been exploited by far-right political actors; and where there remain heightened concerns about journalists’ autonomy against the background of austerity, technological disruption and, in Pentagon-speak, ‘the long war’.¹⁹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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SOW CULTURE

**HARVEST
EMANCIPATION**

CULTURE, POWER AND RESISTANCE

**REFLECTIONS ON THE IDEAS
OF AMILCAR CABRAL**

FIROZE MANJI

Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon¹ are among the most important thinkers from Africa on the politics of liberation and emancipation. While the relevance of Fanon's thinking has re-emerged, with popular movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa proclaiming his ideas as the inspiration for their mobilizations, as well as works by Sekyi-Otu, Alice Cherki, Nigel Gibson, Lewis Gordon and others, Cabral's ideas have not received as much attention.

Cabral was the founder and leader of the Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde liberation movement, *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC). He was a revolutionary, humanist, poet, military strategist, and prolific writer on revolutionary theory, culture and liberation. The struggles he led against Portuguese colonialism contributed to the collapse not only of Portugal's African empire, but also to the downfall of the fascist dictatorship in Portugal and to the Portuguese revolution of 1974/5, events that he was not to witness: he was assassinated by some of his comrades, with the support of the Portuguese secret police, PIDE, on 20 January 1973.

By the time of his death, two thirds of Guinea was in the liberated zones, where popular democratic structures were established that would form the basis for the future society: women played political and military leadership roles, the Portuguese currency was banned and replaced by barter, agricultural production was devoted to the needs of the population, and many of the elements of a society based

on humanity, equality and justice began to emerge organically through popular debate and discussion. Cultural resistance played a critical role in both the defeat of the Portuguese and in the establishment of the liberated zones.

Cabral understood that the extension and domination of capitalism depends critically on dehumanizing the colonial subject. And central to the process of dehumanization has been the need to destroy, modify or recast

the culture of the colonized, for it is principally through culture, 'because it is history', that the colonized have sought to resist domination and assert their humanity. For Cabral, and also for Fanon, culture is not some aesthetic artefact, but an expression of history, the foundation of liberation, and a means to resist domination. At heart, culture is subversive.

For Cabral, and also for Fanon, culture is not some aesthetic artefact, but an expression of history, the foundation of liberation, and a means to resist domination. At heart, culture is subversive.

CULTURE AS SUBVERSION

The history of liberalism has been one of contestation between the cultures of what Losurdo² refers to as the sacred and profane spaces. The democracy of the sacred space to which the Enlightenment gave birth in the New World was, writes Losurdo, a '*Herrenvolk* democracy', a democracy of the white master-race that refused to allow blacks, indigenous peoples, or even white women, to be considered citizens. They were regarded as part of the profane space occupied by the less-than-human. The ideology of a white, master-race democracy was reproduced as capital colonized vast sections of the globe. Trump's victory in the US and the establishment of his right-wing, if not fascist, entourage, is in many ways an expression of the growing resentment and antagonism among significant

sections of white America towards the perceived invasion and defiling of the sacred space by indigenous people, blacks, 'latinos', Mexicans, gays, lesbians, organized labour, immigrants and all those profane beings that do not belong in that space. We can safely predict that Trump's presidency will see efforts to mount an assault on the cultures, organizations, and organizing capacities of those they view as the detritus of society, to remove them from the privileges of the sacred space and to 'return' them to the domain of the dehumanized. At the same time, we can predict that there will be widespread resistance to such attempts, in which culture will be an essential element.

In this context, Cabral's writing and speeches on culture, liberation and resistance to power have important implications for the coming struggles not only in the US, but also in post-Brexit Britain, and in continental Europe, where fascism is once again raising its ugly head in several countries. Drawing upon Cabral's works,³ I look at how colonialism established and maintained its power through attempts to eradicate the cultures of the colonial subject, and how culture as a liberatory force was essential for African people to reassert their humanity, to invent what it means to be human, and to develop a universalist humanity. I discuss how neocolonial regimes have attempted to disarticulate culture from politics, a process that neoliberalism has exacerbated. But as discontent after nearly 40 years of austerity (a.k.a. 'structural adjustment programmes') in Africa rises, as governments increasingly lose popular legitimacy, there is a resurgence of uprisings and protests, and once again culture is re-emerging as a mobilizing and organizing force.

Cabral's writing and speeches on culture, liberation and resistance to power have important implications for the coming struggles...[as]...fascism is once again raising its ugly head

COLONIALISM, CULTURE AND THE INVENTION OF THE DEHUMANIZED AFRICAN'

The philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Hegel, considered that Africans had no history. But what was the 'African' that they were referring to? It was only in the 15th century that Europeans began to use the term 'African' to refer to all the peoples who live on the continent. The term was directly associated with the Atlantic slave trade, and the condemnation of large sections of humanity to chattel slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean. To succeed in subjecting millions of human beings to such barbarism depended on defining them as non-humans.

The process of dehumanization required a systematic and institutionalized attempt to destroy existing cultures, languages, histories and capacities to produce, organize, tell stories, invent, love, make music, sing songs, make poetry, create art – all things that make a people human. This was carried out by local and

European enslavers and slave owners and all those who profited from the trade in humans, not least the emerging European capitalist class.

In essence, the word that encapsulates this process of dehumanizing the people of this continent is *African*. Indeed, anthropologists, scientists, philosophers and a whole industry developed to 'prove' that these people constituted a different sub-human, biological 'race'. Africans were to be considered as having no history, culture, or any contribution to make to human history. As slaves, they were mere chattel – property or 'things' that would be owned, disposed of and treated in any way that the 'owner' thought fit.

This attempt to erase the culture of Africans was a signal failure. For while the forces of liberalism destroyed the institutions, cities, literature, science and art on the continent, people's memories of culture, art forms, music and all that is associated with being human remained alive, and were also carried across on the slave ships to where African slaves found themselves, and where that culture evolved in their new material conditions to become a basis for resistance.

The Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery were the cornerstones of capital accumulation that gave birth to capitalism, as were the concurrent genocides and mass killings of indigenous populations of the Americas and beyond. The systematic dehumanization of sections of humanity – racism – was intimately intertwined with the birth, growth and continued expansion of capital, and remains the hallmark of its development.

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Cabral understood that separating Africa and Africans from the general flow of common human experience could only lead to the retardation of social processes on the continent. 'When imperialism arrived in Guinea it made us leave our history ... and enter another history.' This process was to continue from its origins in the European enslavement and forced removal of people

from Africa to the expansion of Europe's colonial ventures to the present day. The representation of Africans as inferior and sub-human justified the terror, slaughter, genocides, imprisonments, torture, confiscation of land and property, forced labour, destruction of societies and cultures, violent suppression of expressions of discontent and dissent, restrictions on movement, and establishment of 'tribal' reserves. It justified the division of the land mass and its peoples into territories at the Berlin Conference in 1884–85 by competing European imperial powers.

The faith in the superiority of the culture of the sacred space combined with Christianity's missionary zeal laid the foundations for empire and the spread of Christendom. 'After the slave trade, armed conquest and colonial wars',

wrote Cabral, 'there came the complete destruction of the economic and social structure of African society. The next phase was European occupation and ever-increasing European immigration into these territories. The lands and possessions of the Africans were looted'. Colonial powers established control by imposing taxes, enforcing compulsory crops, introducing forced labour, excluding Africans from particular jobs, removing them from the most fertile regions, and establishing native authorities consisting of collaborators.

Cabral pointed out that whatever the material aspects of domination, 'it can be maintained only by the permanent and organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned'. Of course, domination could only be completely guaranteed by the elimination of a significant part of the population as, for example, in the genocide of the Herero peoples in southern Africa or of many of the indigenous nations of North America, but in practice this was not always feasible or indeed seen as desirable from the point of view of empire. In Cabral's words:

The ideal for foreign domination, whether imperialist or not, would be to choose: either to liquidate practically all the population of the dominated country, thereby eliminating the possibilities for cultural resistance; or to succeed in imposing itself without damage to the culture of the dominated people – that is, to harmonize economic and political domination of these people with their cultural personality.

By denying the historical development of the dominated people, imperialism necessarily denies their cultural development, which is why it requires cultural oppression and an attempt at 'direct or indirect liquidation of the essential elements of the culture of the dominated people'.

'Of the African population of Angola, Guiné and Mozambique, 99.7 per cent are classified as uncivilised by Portuguese colonial laws...' wrote Cabral in an assessment of the Portuguese colonies. 'The so called "uncivilized" African is treated as a chattel, and is at the mercy of the will and caprice of the colonial administration and the settlers. This situation is absolutely necessary to the existence of the Portuguese colonial system. He provides an inexhaustible supply of forced labour for export. By classifying him as "uncivilized", the law gives legal sanction to racial discrimination and provides one of the justifications for Portuguese domination in Africa.'

CULTURE AND THE RECLAMATION OF HUMANITY

The use of violence to dominate a people is, argued Cabral, 'above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least neutralize and to paralyze their cultural life. For as long as part of that people have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be assured of its perpetuation'.

The reason for this is clear. Culture is not a mere artefact or expression of aesthetics, custom or tradition. It is a means by which people assert their opposition to domination, a means to proclaim and invent their humanity, a means to assert agency and the capacity to make history. In a word, culture is one of the fundamental tools of the struggle for emancipation.

Haiti's slave revolution in 1804, which established the independent black republic, constituted one of the first significant breaches against racial despotism and slavery. Toussaint Louverture, the first leader of the rebellion, drew on an explicit commitment to a universal humanism to denounce slavery. In Richard Pithouse's succinct summary: 'Colonialism defined race as permanent biological destiny. The revolutionaries in Haiti defined it politically. Polish and German mercenaries who had gone over to the side of the slave armies were granted citizenship, as black subjects, in a free and independent Haiti.'

In Guinea-Bissau, Cabral was commissioned by the colonial authorities to undertake an extensive census of agricultural production, enabling him to gain a profound understanding of the people, their culture and forms of resistance to colonial rule. He recognized that building a liberation movement required a 'reconversion of minds – a mental set' that he believed to be indispensable for the 'true integration of people into the liberation movements'. To achieve that required 'daily contact with the popular masses in the communion of sacrifice required by the struggle'. PAIGC cadres were deployed across the country to work with peasants, to learn from them about how they experienced and opposed colonial domination, to engage with them about the cultural practices that formed part of their resistance to it. 'Do not be afraid of the people and persuade the people to take part in all

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the decisions that concern them', he told his party members. 'The leader must be the faithful interpreter of the will and the aspirations of the revolutionary majority and not the lord of power.' And, 'To lead collectively, in a group, is to study questions jointly, to find their best solution, and to take decisions jointly.'

For Cabral, culture has a material base, 'the product of this history just as a flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of the productive forces and the mode of production. Culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humus in which it develops, and reflects the organic nature of the society.'

Culture, insists Cabral, is intimately linked to the struggle for freedom. While culture comprises many aspects, it '... grows deeper through the people's struggle,

and not through songs, poems or folklore. ... One cannot expect African culture to advance unless one contributes realistically to the creation of the conditions necessary for this culture, i.e. the liberation of the continent'. In other words, culture is not static and unchangeable, but it advances only through engagement in the struggle for freedom.

National liberation, says Cabral, 'is the phenomenon in which a socio-economic whole rejects the denial of its historical process. In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, it is their return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which they were subject'.

Or, as Fanon put it: 'To fight for national culture first of all means fighting for the liberation of the nation, the tangible matrix from which culture can grow. One cannot divorce the combat for culture from the people's struggle for liberation'. Furthermore: 'The Algerian national culture takes form and shape during the fight, in prison, facing the guillotine and in the capture and destruction of the French military positions.' And, 'National culture is no folklore ... [it] is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remain strong.'

If being cast as African was originally defined as being less than human, the resounding claim of every movement in opposition to enslavement, every slave revolt, every opposition to colonization, every challenge to the institutions of white supremacy, every resistance to racism, every resistance to oppression or to patriarchy, constituted an assertion of human identity. Where Europeans considered Africans to be sub-human, the response was to claim the identity of 'African' as a positive, liberating definition of a people who are part of humanity, 'who belong to the whole world', as Cabral put it. As in the struggles of the oppressed throughout history, a transition occurs in which terms used by the oppressors to 'other' people are eventually appropriated by the oppressed and turned into terms of dignity and assertion of humanity.

It was thus that the concept of being 'African' became intimately associated with the concept of freedom and emancipation. The people 'have kept their culture alive and vigorous despite the relentless and organized repression of their cultural life', wrote Cabral. Cultural resistance was the basis for the assertion of people's humanity and the struggle for freedom.

With the growing discontent with the domination of the colonial regimes, especially following the second world war, many political parties were formed, many of which sought to negotiate concessions from the colonial powers. Colonialism had been reluctant to grant any form of pluralism to black organizations, but as popular protests grew, so there was a grudging opening of political space, often involving favours to those who were less threatening to colonial rule.

But such associations with freedom were, tragically, not to last for long beyond independence.

THE DEPOLITICIZATION OF CULTURE

What happens when culture becomes disarticulated from struggles for freedom and emancipation? In a speech to cadres of the PAIGC, Cabral said:

We talk a lot about Africa, but we in our Party must remember that before being Africans we are men, human beings, who belong to the whole world. We cannot therefore allow any interest of our people to be restricted or thwarted because of our condition as Africans. We must put the interests of our people higher, in the context of the interests of mankind in general, and then we can put them in the context of the interests of Africa in general.

What is important here is the assertion that Africans are not only human beings, but that their history, struggle and experiences are part of the struggle for a universal humanity that 'belong[s] to the whole world'. 'We must have the courage to state this clearly', wrote Cabral. 'No one should think that the culture of Africa, what is really African and so must be preserved for all time, for us to be Africans, is our weakness in the face of nature.'

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resisting, Africans have understandably tended to emphasize and idealize their own distinctive identity, history, culture and civilization'. Or, as Fanon put it: 'It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates negritude.' And that '... it is all too true that the major responsibility for this racialisation of thought, or at least the way it is applied, lies with the Europeans who have never stopped placing white culture in opposition to the other noncultures'.

This is in marked contrast to the ideology of 'Negritude' that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s in Paris and was to become associated with the writings of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire. Its philosophy was based on essentializing Africa and Africans, claiming that Africans have a core quality that is inherent, eternal and unalterable, and which is distinct from the rest of humanity. However, as Michael Neocosmos points out, if Africa 'historically was a creation of liberalism's sacred space which claimed a monopoly over history, culture and civilisation, then as a way of

While the ideas of Negritude had positive impacts on the way in which the colonized viewed themselves, and helped to inspire the flourishing of poetry, art and literature, and of research about the pre-colonial civilizations in Africa – such as the exceptional work of Cheikh Anta Diop – it also contributed to depoliticizing the meaning of African and of culture that was once powerfully associated with freedom. This resulted in eschewing the idea of human universality, preventing African people's 'return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which they were subject', as Cabral put it.

But Negritude was only one of the factors that led to the depoliticization of culture and identity.

The second half of the 20th century saw the establishment of independence governments in most of Africa (the exceptions being Western Sahara, currently occupied by Morocco, and US-occupied Diego Garcia). Movements that had sought a radical agenda to advance the people's interests were systematically removed through coups d'état and assassinations (for example, Lumumba in Congo, Nkrumah in Ghana, Sankara in Burkina Faso). As stated earlier, Cabral too was assassinated by a group of his own comrades, apparently with the support of the Portuguese secret police (PIDE), on 20 January 1973.

The rise of neocolonial regimes, many of which arose out of the defeat or attrition of the mass movements, gradually resulted in the demise of the struggles for emancipatory freedoms in Africa. What happened after independence cannot be entirely blamed on imperialism. As Cabral pointed out: 'True, imperialism is cruel and unscrupulous, but we must not lay all the blame on its broad back. For, as the African people say: "Rice only cooks inside the pot"'. And '... here is the reality that is made more evident by our struggle: in spite of their armed forces, the imperialists cannot do without traitors; traditional chiefs and bandits in the times of slavery and of the wars of colonial conquest, gendarmes, various agents and mercenary soldiers during the golden age of colonialism, self-styled heads of state and ministers in the present time of neo-colonialism. The enemies of the African peoples are powerful and cunning and can always count on a few lackeys..., since quislings are not a European privilege.'

Nationalist governments were to play a critical role in the demise of emancipatory struggles. The newly emerging middle class saw its task as one of preventing 'centrifugal forces' from competing for political power or seeking greater autonomy from the newly formed 'nation'. Having grasped political self-determination from colonial authority, it was reluctant to accord the same rights to others. The new controllers of the state machinery saw their role as the 'sole developer' and 'sole unifier' of society. The state adopted an interventionist role in 'modernization' and a centralizing and controlling role in the political realm. The idea of 'development' had, as was intended by Harry Truman, an implicit allusion to progress of some kind, and acted as a counterweight to the attraction of socialism that the US saw as a threat to its growing hegemony.

The popular associations that had projected the nationalist leadership into power began to be seen as an obstacle to 'development'. No longer was there a need, it was argued, for popular participation in determining the future. The new government would bring development to the people, representing the nation and everyone in it. Now that political independence had been achieved, the priority was 'development' because, implicitly, the new rulers concurred that its people were 'under-developed'. Social and economic improvements would come, the nationalist leaders said, with patience and as a result of combined national effort involving all. In this early post-independence period, civil and political rights soon came to be seen as a 'luxury', to be enjoyed at some unspecified time in the future when 'development' had been achieved. For now, said many African presidents, 'our people are not ready' – echoing, ironically, the arguments used by the former colonial rulers against the nationalists' cries for independence a few years earlier.

Camouflaged in the rhetoric of independence, the prevailing narrative treated the problems faced by the majority – deprivation and impoverishment and its associated dehumanization – not as consequences of colonial domination and an imperialist system that continued to extract super-profits, but rather as the supposedly 'natural' conditions of Africa. The solution to poverty was seen as a technical one, supported by 'aid' from the very colonial powers that had enriched themselves at the expense of the mass of African people.

Almost without exception, the nationalist movements insisted on occupying the colonial state rather than constructing democratic structures that enabled popular participation, as Cabral had created in the liberated zones of Guinea. As a result, the repressive arms of the state remained intact. The police, armed

forces, judiciary, and civil service, had been designed to protect the interests of capital and of the colonial powers. Fundamentally, the colonial state was premised on the notion that its function was to perpetuate the dehumanization of the colonized. In almost every case, freedom fighters of the liberation movements were, if not entirely marginalized in the post-independence period, incorporated, integrated, and placed under the command of the existing colonial

military structures. The only real change was to deracialize the state while dressing up the armed forces in the colours of the national flag.

Cabral was adamantly opposed to this tendency. He did not believe that independence movements should take over the colonial state apparatus and use it for their own purposes. The issue wasn't the colour of the administrator's skin, he argued, but the fact that there was an administrator. 'We don't accept any institution of the Portuguese colonialists. We are not interested in the preservation of any of the structures of the colonial state.'

Almost without exception, the nationalist movements insisted on occupying the colonial state rather than constructing democratic structures that enabled popular participation.

The destruction of the colonial state was not a goal in itself, but the means to establish structures that the people would control and whose interests they would serve. 'Our objective is to break with the colonial state in our land to create a new state – different, on the basis of justice, work, and equality of opportunity for all the children of our land ...We have to destroy everything that would be against this in our land, comrades. Step by step, one by one if necessary – but we have to destroy in order to construct a new life.'

Culture was no longer considered a means of liberation. Instead, disarticulated from such notions, it was left empty of meaning beyond representing a caricature of some imagined past comprised of customs and traditions, consistent with notions of the savage that still prevailed in liberalism and which provided fodder for tourists' imaginations. As Fanon described it, 'Culture never has the translucency of custom. Culture eminently eludes any form of simplification. In its essence it is the very opposite of custom, which is always a deterioration of culture. Seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one's people.'

At the same time, the emerging national bourgeoisie had growing aspirations to assimilate and become full members of the culture of the sacred space, for which they received encouragement from cultural institutions such as the French Cultural Centre and British Council.

Once the concept of being African is delinked from notions of liberation and emancipation, all that remains is a depoliticized taxonomic identity that renders people merely objects rather than determinants of history. Indeed, the very notion of African began to disintegrate, except if it represented the sum of national states, as in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (and subsequently the African Union). It was easy then for empire to drive a wedge between the emancipatory histories of the peoples referred to as 'Arab' and those of so-called 'Black Africans' in the mythical geographies of 'Sub-Saharan Africa'.

Even the idea of the nation, disconnected from ideas of liberation, gradually gave way to the politics of identity, tribe and ethnicity. The consequences of this degeneration became apparent in the genocide in Rwanda, the ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Kenya and Burundi (to name just a few), the disenfranchisement of citizens because of their supposed ethnicity, as in the DRC and Côte d'Ivoire, the growing antipathy towards and internment of refugees, especially in Kenya, and the xenophobia that has taken root in South Africa.

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The re-emergence of liberalism in the 1980s in the form of 'neoliberalism'⁴ exacerbated the depoliticization of culture. The cult of the individual, fundamental to neoliberalism, has grown, especially among the middle classes for whom personal accumulation and privilege is held as a value above all else. It is accompanied by attempts to break up the collective – especially organized forms such as trade unions, farmers' organizations and youth movements. The decline in the value of wages and the need to do more than one job in order to survive has frequently restricted the time for community and organization.

The growing domination of Western culture is supplemented by the hegemony of the corporate media, the ubiquity of CNN, Fox News and of a generalized Coca-colonization of everyday life, with the commodification of anything that can make a fast buck. Just as the early years of liberalism were characterized by the plethora of charitable organizations, so today Africa is replete with development NGOs contributing to the depoliticization of poverty by diverting attention away from the processes that create mass impoverishment and misery. Citizens have been transformed into consumers, and those without the means to consume have been thrown on the dung heap of history as the seldom or never employed. And neoliberalism has attempted to rewrite the histories of the damned (Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre*), seeking to erase their memories of the past through its invasion of the curriculums of schools and universities.

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF RESISTANCE

Cabral's words resonate today: 'The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated.' Despite the power of neoliberalism and the trillions of dollars at the disposal of the corporations, banks, financial institutions, governments and local elites, the people have not lost their desire for agency, for making history, for engaging in struggles wherein they both demonstrate and invent their humanity, for constructing the basis for a true universalism.

The mass mobilizations in Egypt, Tunisia, and Burkina Faso that led to the overthrow of local despots are but some of the examples of such struggles. I have written elsewhere⁵ about other uprisings and protests that have swept the continent as a result of growing discontent over austerity these uprisings and protests reflect the re-emergence of resistance in which culture is once again manifest with an emancipatory dimension. Consider how millions occupied Tahir Square in Cairo: songs, music and dance were just some of the features that emerged. People's security, defence, the provision of food, healthcare, childcare, and shelter, all these were created anew by those present. Decisions were made collectively. Where just a month before, people were considered apathetic and seemingly non-political, were transformed into political beings willing to put their lives at stake, to participate in mass meetings, and to release their creativity. It was

demonstration of how the engagement in struggles releases not only people's ability to claim their humanity, but also to re-invent themselves, something that Fanon insisted upon.

Many current movements are fired by the energy and creativity of young people. One effect of neoliberalism has been to endeavour to remove the experiences and knowledge of history. Fanon writes:

Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it. The effort to demean history prior to colonization today takes on a dialectical significance.

In such circumstances, Fanon points out: 'Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.' In the underdeveloped countries preceding generations have simultaneously resisted the insidious agenda of colonialism and paved the way for the emergence of current struggles.

The Western liberal conception of humanity has been deficient from birth, argues Neocosmos, and that deficiency is ever more obvious today.

Its ultimate dependence on exploitation, colonial oppression and racism for its existence is now more evident than during previous historical epochs because it exercises its dominance over the whole globe in a manner which is manifestly inhuman. Thus the contradiction between a liberal conception which restricts freedom, equality and justice to a minority while denying it systematically to the majority of the world's population is becoming more and more obvious. In this context, the search for a true universal, without excluding supposed 'barbarians', is becoming more urgent.

I end with the words of Cabral:

Except for cases of genocide or the violent reduction of native populations to cultural and social insignificance, the *epoch of colonization* was not sufficient, at least in Africa, to bring about any significant destruction or degradation of the essential elements of the culture and traditions of the colonized peoples ... the problem of a ... cultural renaissance is not posed nor could it be posed by the popular masses: indeed they are the bearers of their own culture, they are its source, and, at the same time, they are the only entity truly capable of preserving and creating culture – in a word, of *making history*. (Emphases in original)

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ENDNOTES

1. While Fanon was originally from Martinique, he became Algerian and was deeply involved in the FLN's struggle against imperialism in Africa. All quotes from Fanon are taken from the works cited in the bibliography.
2. Losurdo, D. (2014).
3. The essay quotes extensively from the works cited in the bibliography. For reasons of space, I do not give specific page references.
4. For more information about the nature of neoliberalism, the essay by Prabhat Patnaik is a useful starting point.
5. See Manji, F. (2012) 'African Awakening: The courage to invent the future', in Manji, F. and Sokari Ekine (eds.) *African Awakening: The Emerging Revolutions*. Oxford: Pambazuka Press.

RESTAURACION RESTORATION



POWER AND PATRIARCHY

REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL
CHANGE FROM BOLIVIA

ELIZABETH PEREDO BELTRÁN

After more than a decade of processes that brought hope to the progressive world, several developments in Latin America in 2016 suggest we have reached the end of a cycle of left-wing victories in the region. The collapse of left-wing governments in Argentina and Brazil, and the wave of environmental, democratic and political conflicts in others (Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela) raise critical questions about the viability of these models of social change.

Why are these important progressive processes that began with a huge degree of legitimacy now facing social resistance for departing from the ideals that inspired them? This is a crisis that offers pointers and important lessons for us all, about the dynamics of social transformation and about ourselves as activists.

BOLIVIA AND WHAT IT MEANS TO THE WORLD

Bolivia is an important learning laboratory with useful lessons not only for the local left but also to progressive and left-wing forces in the region and worldwide. It was the first country in the Southern Cone to re-establish democracy in the 1980s, following a lengthy period of military dictatorships. It was the first in the region to experience significant anti-colonial indigenous rebellions in the late twentieth century. It led the fight against neoliberalism, with major victories such as the expulsion of Bechtel (the US transnational corporation (TNC)) in the famous

‘now I am myself, the person I always was...’.

‘Water War’ in 2000, the nationalization of its natural gas reserves in 2005 and the country’s withdrawal from the World Bank’s International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).¹ Bolivia was

in the vanguard in developing concepts on which the narrative of ‘Twenty-First Century Socialism’ is based, such as ‘living well’ and participatory democracy, summed up in the famous slogan ‘govern by obeying the people’.

Bolivia’s experience provides an exceptional opportunity for us to conduct an in-depth analysis of the unresolved ‘knots’ and challenges that the last few years have laid bare.

This essay is partly a personal testimony based on my recollections and assessment of the path Bolivia has taken, its process of emancipation and social change, and the attendant difficulties and frustrations. My aim is to provide a perspective from the ‘inside’, drawing on the feelings and ideals of those of us who believed profoundly in the need for social change and committed our energy and convictions, our lives and our emotions, to these processes.

It is also a heartfelt response to a reality that pains and concerns us as we see a powerful process of social change collapsing and becoming more extreme (and dangerous) on issues of power, the environment, democracy, women, and hopes for a caring society. This represents a profound challenge to us in how we put our utopias into practice and make them effective and real.

I still remember how deeply moved I felt in 2003, after President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada had been forced to flee the country as a result of mass street protests against his role in the October Massacre, when a woman in El Alto took off her ‘señorita’s [employer] clothes’ of blouse and trousers, burned them in the middle

of the street and wearing the traditional clothes of the indigenous *chola*, proudly proclaimed: ‘now I am myself, the person I always was...’.

This was the beginning of a new and different time for Bolivian society. In the past, indigenous women were not allowed to enter the parliament building or the presidential palace. They were even banned from luxury hotels and theatres. Social exclusion and racism were deeply entrenched in everyday life and seen as a ‘natural’ component of social relations. It was thanks to struggles by indigenous urban and rural unions, such as the union of domestic workers who fought long to have their rights legally recognized, that changes great and small penetrated the farthest reaches of Bolivian society. They shook up the discriminatory practices of the white elites accustomed to expropriating their labour, as well as the *mestizo* and urban indigenous property owners who likewise exploited impoverished women in their homes, secure in the impunity that a deeply racist, neocolonial society protected them. ‘Imagine wanting to regulate the work of the domestic workers with new laws!’, said the elites. ‘It would be like stirring up a hornets’ nest – they’re only going to create turmoil in society!’ ‘We can’t allow them to unionise’, said others. ‘When they get together they just infect each other...’

But it was the domestic workers who won. Working as a unified movement with rural and indigenous movements, workers, residents of low-income and even some middle-class neighbourhoods, they managed to impose their demands as part of a huge wave of social change that had been building up for decades. It was the culmination of a mass social mobilization for indigenous territories and autonomy, respect for human rights, recognition and inclusion of their vision of the commons. But it was also the result of the determination of broad swathes of the middle class, intellectuals and activists who took up these demands as a way of saving themselves, of escaping from the prison that discrimination and the exclusion of indigenous people meant for their own lives, in order to build a different Bolivia.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

The recent progressive period in Bolivia – and in other countries too – was the result of a lengthy political build-up: almost 40 years of resistance, rebellion and proposal-making. It was nourished by the work of various groups of activists and collectives forged in different historical periods, such as those that resisted the dictatorships, neoliberalism, machismo and colonialism. It emerged after nearly two decades of bourgeois democracy that had focused on building an institutional framework under the mandates of neoliberalism to serve the class interests of Bolivia’s national elites in partnership with TNCs and international financial institutions (IFIs).

The wisdom accumulated in these protests and movement-building took political form and society was obliged to integrate them into new social pacts. These were

expressed in the new Constitution (enacted in 2009 after being approved in a referendum) which led to the founding of a new state that finally put an end to republican-era colonialist ideas: the new Plurinational State of Bolivia, in which society's expectations and ideals were distilled, shaping a new national horizon.

Capturing this historical moment of such transcendental importance was a new leader, an indigenous president who before taking office had said humbly: 'With great respect, I want to ask our indigenous authorities, our organisations, our *amautas* (wise people) to control me, and if I am unable to move forward, please push me, brothers and sisters' (Evo Morales, 2005).

FROM THE PROCESS OF CHANGE TO THE EXTRACTIVIST STATE

When Morales took office as President in 2006, he appointed Casimira Rodríguez, Executive Secretary of the Bolivian Federation of Domestic Workers, as the first indigenous Minister of Justice. A woman who wore indigenous dress and spoke Quechua, she had spent almost all her life performing household chores for derisory wages. Nothing could be more symbolic than appointing an indigenous woman who was a cook and a worker to this post.

A series of progressive measures characterized the first years of the Morales government. These included the nationalization of the oil and gas industry, which restored the revenue from the sale of natural gas to the state, allowing the new government to develop redistribution policies that increased benefits for children, pregnant women and new mothers, and older people. It also marked the start of a period of economic growth that moved Bolivia from the category of 'low-income country' to 'middle-income country'. Support for the Morales government rose to as high as 81%.

Now, ten years after taking state power with the legitimacy of social struggles that demanded deep social change, things have changed a great deal. This is not simply a 'revolutionary ebb' but a change of direction that can be seen in the deteriorating social fabric and institutions, and the impact of its economic and political model in local territories. It also represents a failure to establish the necessary social oversight mechanisms to sustain the vision.

Gaining access to power gradually became an end in itself. Hundreds of trade union and social movement leaders became secretaries, vice-ministers, ambassadors or members of parliament, weakening these popular forces. The number of civil servants grew by more than 70% since 2005, with the consequent increase in expenditure and government infrastructure.

By 2009, the Morales government and its Movement for Socialism (MAS) long-term political and economic project was becoming more apparent. It involved so many concessions to the reactionary and racist forces of the Santa Cruz oligarchy

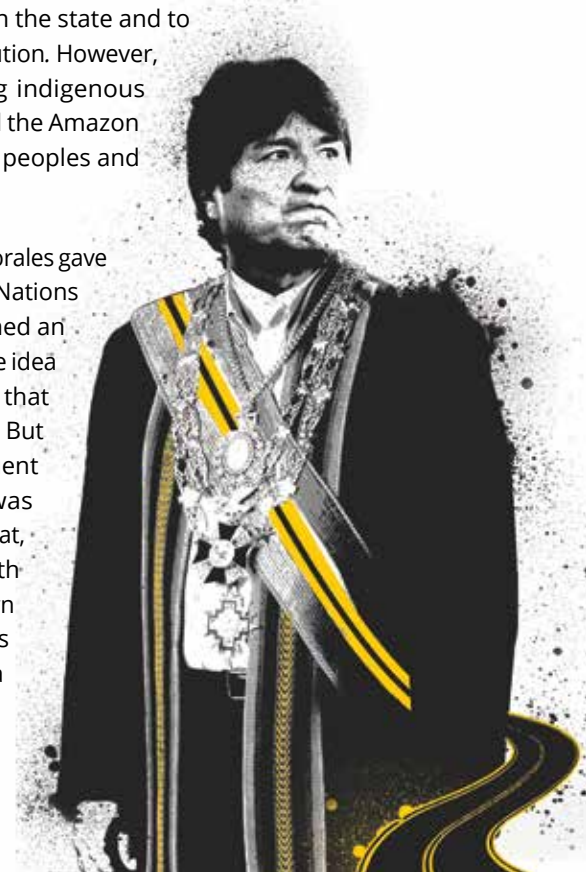
(in the east of Bolivia), that its youth wings – such as the Juventud Cruceñaista, which had committed violent racist attacks against indigenous people during the Constituent Assembly process – actually joined the MAS support base in eastern Bolivia.

Even though, MAS leadership continued to use an attractive of environmentalist and leftist rhetoric in practice they had already opened up to the proposals of the agribusiness sector and conventional visions of development. They aligned themselves with a vision that is industrialist (this has not been achieved), developmentalist (this has not produced much in the way of results either) and extractivist, in partnership with local trade unions and capitals from Europe, China and Russia. This model carries a heavy environmental and social toll for Bolivian society.

The rebellious and anti-systemic legacy of the water and gas wars – led by working class and rural peoples – ended up being expropriated by the government, which turned it into the emblem of its 'crusade for gas and economic growth'. This became a dogma laid out in national development plans that nobody is allowed to criticize² The slogan 'partners not bosses', which was used to confront regional economic powers and transnational imperialism, had secured the government a high degree of legitimacy and enabled it to strengthen the state and to establish a basic system of social redistribution. However, it also fortified a process of plundering indigenous territories in the Altiplano (highlands) and the Amazon region, affecting the rights of indigenous peoples and rural communities around the country.

On the international stage, President Evo Morales gave lengthy ecological speeches at the United Nations (UN) on the rights of nature and proclaimed an alternative view of development around the idea of 'Living Well' and 'Mother Earth Rights' that captivated everyone, at home and abroad. But the rhetoric was not matched by consequent actions within Bolivia. In fact, Bolivia was already wedded to a development model that, far from reflecting a vision of harmony with nature, sought to re-enact a populist modern industrialism and developmentalism. This was evident in April 2010, when Bolivia organized the World Peoples' Conference

The conflict over the TIPNIS road revealed the crudest side of the process of change: the use of power and a national project... imposing an unscrupulous developmentalism.



on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, bringing together thousands of international activists in an edifying policy debate that produced one of the most interesting social movement declarations on climate change. Yet at the same time, the government was going ahead with gas and oil exploitation in national parks, mining projects and had already decided to build a road through the TIPNIS national park and indigenous territory.

The TIPNIS road, a government project to connect Villa Tunari (in the Chapare region of Cochabamba) with San Ignacio de Moxos (in Beni in the north of the country), would cross the Isiboro Sécuré National Park and the territory of indigenous peoples, supposedly protected by the Constitution. The people – still trusting in their power to change government decisions – took to the streets in September 2011 to oppose the government's plans, without suspecting that this time their power to change things would not stop this new injustice. The government did not hesitate to harshly repress the lowland indigenous peoples as they began the 8th Indigenous March to La Paz. The conflict caused the resignation of two ministers³ and great desperation and outrage among people who had supported the process of change right from the start. Shortly afterwards, the indigenous authorities who had led the march were harassed and persecuted, and the indigenous organizations forcibly split and manipulated by the government, which would then go ahead with the road-building project.

The conflicts surrounding TIPNIS marked a turning point in the process of change in Bolivia. It split the social movements, breaking the unity of the indigenous and rural organizations that had driven the process of change and alienating many activists who were not in government. The conflict over the TIPNIS road revealed the crudest side of the process of change: the use of power and a national project which – departing from constitutional principles – was imposing an unscrupulous developmentalism and breaking openly with the rhetoric of Mother Earth and the rights of indigenous peoples.

It is hard to forget the way in which the government promoted this road using populism and the language of machismo and patriarchy. When the project began, Morales said to people in the Chapare region:

If I had time, I'd go and flirt with all the Yuracaré women and convince them not to oppose it [the TIPNIS road]; so, you young men, you have instructions from the President to go and seduce the Yuracaré Trinitaria women so that they don't oppose the building of the road. Approved?⁴

Although women's movements criticized these statements, they did not cause much of a reaction in the left-wing circles that were part of the Morales government.

It was with these contradictions that Bolivia consolidated its model, defending its decisions by celebrating the highest economic growth rate in the region, ignoring the fact that it increased the economy's dependency on the primary sector and

inherently unstable commodity prices. The oil and gas industry currently accounts for 69.1% of Bolivia's exports, while agriculture (timber, quinoa etc) contributes 3.3% and manufactured products – in which the National Institute for Statistics (INE) includes soya and gold – represents 26%.⁵

Annual deforestation rates in Bolivia are extremely high, with roughly 270,000 hectares disappearing each year. The country's main contribution to global emissions and climate change comes from this change in land use, and it now ranks 27 out of 193 countries on this count.⁶ In the last year, the clearing of new land for agriculture has been legalized in an agreement with agroindustry and the farming sector, allowing four times more land to be deforested than in the past. These agreements have also led to an exponential increase in the use of genetically-modified seeds and glyphosate. Ninety-seven per cent of the soya produced in Bolivia is now genetically modified, and although it is argued that this is justified in order to supply food to the Bolivian people, these crops are mainly destined for export. Corporations like Monsanto, Syngenta or Bayer are already in Bolivia.

Major mining TNCs such as Sumitomo, Glencore, Pan American Silver and others are operating in the country in business deals with the state mining company. And the government has done little to address the power of so-called 'mining cooperatives' – small informal local enterprises that make up most of the mining industry (115,000 miners, compared with the only 7,500 workers in the state mining company), known for exploitative working conditions and destructive environmental practices due to the lack of regulations of this sector. The Mining Law approved by the government in 2013 did little to improve this situation, undermining principles of prior consultation mandated by ILO Convention 169 and even allowing water courses to be altered to benefit mining projects.

Even the huge revenues obtained from the sale of natural gas at better prices have not been able to generate value-added productive industries nor used to assist the transition to renewable energies that would be more in tune with the rhetoric of climate justice that Bolivia proclaims in UN negotiations. Indeed, contrary to its discourse, Bolivia did not support proposals to limit fossil-fuel subsidies at the Rio+20 and UN Climate Change summits, and it continues to subsidize its oil industry without even considering transitional energy policies.

Worse still, in the National Development Plan for 2025, Bolivia proposes to become a major regional 'energy power' (based on fossil fuels and big dams) and supply energy to neighbouring countries, which hardly reflects the transitions recommended by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to avoid worsening the climate crisis:

The new idea coming from this government is that we're going to be an energy power. The twenty-first century for Bolivia is to produce oil, industrialise petrochemicals, industrialise minerals.⁷

The plan is based on the commercial logic of selling electricity to Brazil to generate revenue expected to materialize in 10–15 years. Major hydroelectric dams, like the Bala-Chepete Project and Rosita, take pride of place in the plan, even though this model has displaced indigenous peoples elsewhere in Central and South America, costing the lives of union leaders such as Berta Cáceres in Honduras. Vice-President García Linera appears to see no limits to their expansion:

That's why, with President Evo (Morales), we've flown all over Bolivia in helicopters, looking for places where we could put a dam, and looking for gas. We're seeking out the areas where there's more gas, where there's water, sites for dams. Where there is water, it's like pure gold falling from the sky. Where there is water, where we can build dams, that's where you'll find the gold, the money.⁸

These plans are clearly out of line with the energy transitions required to mitigate and adapt to climate change. They do not consider the damages in ecosystems and to indigenous peoples that currently inhabit those forests. They also fail to take into account that neighbouring countries may take advantage of falling prices for solar and wind energy in the near future, which would eliminate the market for Bolivia's energy exports. As part of the same aim to become a major energy power, the government has also proposed investing in research on nuclear energy in partnership with Russia, with an ambiguous proposal that includes research on health and food radiation and the building of an experimental nuclear generator. This is a project that requires a vast amount of money and, in spite of protests, is being imposed on the people living in one of the country's largest cities, El Alto. The project was approved through an international treaty signed with Russia that has been criticized as illegal for contradicting constitutional restrictions that prohibit transit of nuclear waste in Bolivian territory.

CHANGE, CULTURE AND POWER RELATIONS

What has happened to Bolivia's progressive and left-wing forces? What happened to the drive for change and the social narrative in favour of water rights and sovereignty against corporate and imperialist power, and that conceived the idea of 'living well' as the basis for a new society? How is the left processing its government's retreat from the ideals of emancipation and social change? What happened to the autonomy of the social movements? What happened to the indigenous peoples? What happened to women and feminisms? What happened to the rights of Mother Earth?

In short, what does this process tell us about ourselves?

Thinking about 'where to start to change things' and 'how to bring about change' is of paramount importance right now and leads us to the key question regarding power, culture, the state and society. What is it that really changes a society?

And which structures, processes or values should we strengthen in order to ensure a solid, progressive social change, with an *ajayu* (spirit) that stays firm over time despite the disagreeable ups and downs of politics and power plays?

What is the place of culture and ethics in this enquiry? Although it seemed to have it all, the left is now facing unresolved 'knots' or contradictions that have led to a significant weakening of the progressive field and a shocking rise of authoritarian populist leaders.

Based on Bolivia's experience, we need to ask why the left's political legitimacy has allowed the traps of power to become invisible.

Based on Bolivia's experience, we need to ask why the left's political legitimacy has allowed the traps of power to become invisible. And ask how the left can continue on its path

and resolve its relationship with essential aspects of processes of social change such as democracy, the notion of the 'vanguard' and the subjects of social change, ecology and nature, patriarchy, feminism and women, the diversity of indigenous peoples, and, finally, how it processes its relationship with power.

EXTRACTIVISM AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

One of the most meaningful terrains in the contradictions besetting the Bolivian political process is the patriarchal ideology that has been like a second skin in the MAS way of governing, based on an authoritarian, male-chauvinist discourse and a symbolically powerful link between patriarchal power and the cultural foundations of the extractivist model.

The argument that '*we are using capitalism to arrive at socialism*'⁹ became officially enshrined in the narrative of the Bolivian state, permitting both the control of financial capital and extractivism. In the same way, the androcentrism expressed in Morales' phrase '*I am a feminist who tells sexist jokes*'¹⁰ became part of the content of government discourses and statements. The 'radical' left that has accompanied this government from the beginning never challenged this 'way of governing' and permitted the spread of this heavily symbolic ideology. Those on the left who said they wanted to change the system 'overlooked' the patriarchal attitudes of their leaders and 'forgave' their unbridled machismo in the interests of a supposedly 'higher purpose' – the building of socialism.

Unmistakeable signs of a populist authoritarianism could be seen in the misogynistic remarks, sexist jokes, and homophobic statements such that made by Morales at the World Peoples' Conference in April 2010: *The chicken we eat is full of female hormones. That's why when men eat that chicken they deviate from being men.*

Or when Morales boasted of his 'EVO CUMPLE' (Evo Delivers) social programmes in villages using sexist jokes: *When I go to a village, all the women end up pregnant and on their bellies it says: 'Evo delivers'.*

Or when he encouraged young men to do their military service as a way to 'free' themselves from the responsibility of paternity: *As you generals, admirals, officers all know, when a youngster gets his girlfriend pregnant he prefers to escape to the barracks and when he gets there that soldier is untouchable.*

Although laws and decrees have been passed in Bolivia to promote gender equality, eradicate violence and achieve parity in political representation, the repeated attacks on women in government speeches and the scant public investment to enforce stronger gender policies have weakened the process. This is yet another example of the dissonance between discourse and practice.

Patriarchy has features such as:

- Devaluing the different 'Other' and making it invisible
- The systematic practice of dividing the public from the private sphere, thus widening the distance between words and deeds
- The denial of diversity and difference, negatively valuing difference as a deficit
- Violence and subjugation as a means of self-assertion

These features have become consolidated in the government, together with the need to exercise power and control and demonstrate strength, authority and infallibility. This ended up co-opting leaders of the process of change from different walks of life. When a comrade – a lifelong colleague – in a high-ranking political post

said to me: *'I am a good politician, because I am able to be cruel'*, two things became clear to me. First, that the cycle of social change had come to an end because it had lost the ethical values that made the quest for social change worthwhile; and second, that power and machismo had become deeply embedded in this process as part of a structure that combined subjectivity and politics and reproduced a culture of violent, destructive power – exactly what extractivism is all about.

Exploitation and violence against women and exploitation and violence against nature are two sides of the same coin, two expressions of the same system, the empire of patriarchy governing in coalition with big business.

Among Morales' most outrageous and widely criticized remarks was one he made while visiting an oilfield in April 2012. To laughter from other workers, he 'jokingly' asked two women professionals at the 'Sísmica 3D' camp in Chimoré: *'Oil workers? Are you drillers? Or do you get drilled? Do tell me.'*

Every three days a woman dies horribly in Bolivia in crimes of femicide. Although there are no official figures, the rates of violence are extremely high. Obviously, gender-based violence is worse in societies that do not see caring for life as a priority

and have allowed gender-based violence and discrimination to be 'normalized'. Alarmed by the way official discourse has legitimized violence, women's movements have run many public information campaigns and demanded, among other things, that MAS exclude *machistas* from their lists of electoral candidates.¹¹

Internationally, Bolivia is celebrated by multilaterals such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for its economic model that has delivered the highest rate of economic growth in the region. Yet at the same time, few of these institutions remark on the fact that Bolivia is one of the 12 countries in the world with the highest rates of femicide and violence against women.¹² Moreover the government certainly does not re-invest – or rather redistribute – this money in policies that would effectively combat violence. Investment (or 'expenses' as some prefer to call it) is less than 2% (1.91%) of municipal government budgets, while the funds allocated to specific programmes on violence eradication, prevention and victim protection amount to no more than 0.33%. Although a Law 348 against gender-based violence was approved, it has proved difficult to implement, partly because of the lack of investment in the institutional structure required to enforce it.

In contrast, investment in natural resource exploration and production in our forests is huge, as is investment in infrastructure for transport, energy and the oil and gas industry. Together, they amount to 65% of the government budget, invested in a national dream of turning Bolivia into a regional 'energy power' and, supposedly, making everyone more prosperous.

Notably in this plan, renewable energies (more likely to protect nature and human rights) only account for 2% of the energy structure,¹³ a figure quite similar to the investment in women. All these decisions are being taken unilaterally by the male politicians at the top who supposedly – like all good patriarchs – 'know what's best'. They even disregard the mechanisms for prior consultation with indigenous peoples, whom they seem to consider 'subalterns' who ought to submit to these plans at the cost of their territories and the survival of their cultures.

They take no heed of the feminist position, which demands sufficient resources and democratic, relevant, fair and inclusive policies not only to ensure effective justice systems but also to develop education programmes to put an end to the cultural patterns of machismo.

Exploitation and violence against women and exploitation and violence against nature are two sides of the same coin, two expressions of the same system, the empire of patriarchy governing in coalition with big business. Women's bodies and Mother Earth have now become the metaphor of what is sacrificed to maintain the capitalist illusion of infinite, androcentric, ecocidal growth that is disdainful of nature and the lives of people and communities.

LEARNING TO DECONSTRUCT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM

Capitalist power is able to reproduce itself efficiently thanks to its alliance with very ancient systems of oppression such as patriarchy – which is much older than capitalism – and colonialism, which likewise predates forms of capitalist appropriation. Its capacity to remain the dominant system of civilization is subjectively based on capitalist values that separate human beings from nature. It does this through science and philosophy and also through the economy, culture and the values of everyday life.

Modern capitalism survives because it feeds ideals, representations and subjectivities based on the domination of nature, over-consumption and the modern imagery of economic growth associated with happiness and wellbeing. The combination of these forms of domination is precisely what enables the exercise of power, and we see these patterns repeated again and again, even in attempts to subvert the capitalist order.

The thoughts I have set out here reveal how patriarchy is wholly at the service of the exercise of power and enables capitalist violence to take effect, becoming the linking mechanism through the power of the state. The alliance between patriarchy and extractivism naturalizes violence against women, devalues them and constructs a social mindset that endorses abuse and impunity. Indeed, a state that promotes extractivism has to base itself on an authoritarian rationale that discredits rights to territory, the rights of nature and indigenous peoples,

and female otherness. Extractivism as proposed in our countries is exacerbating a violent mentality.

Capitalist accumulation is essentially dependent on a mindset that reinforces the idea of the public sphere as the 'property' of the governing elites rather than a common good that belongs to everyone. Capitalist accumulation is ultimately based on the abuse and destruction of the values of caring and solidarity between human beings and with nature.

Modern capitalism survives because it feeds... [on]... subjectivities based on the domination of nature, over-consumption and the modern imagery of economic growth associated with happiness and wellbeing.

We need more critical thinking on social change, the state and power relations. The process in Bolivia and – as in-depth enquiry will surely find, many other processes that have sought to change society – are learning experiences about ourselves, our goals and our limits. Although the MAS initially enjoyed a huge degree of social legitimacy and was sincere in its proposals on decolonization and overcoming capitalism, in the end it has replicated relations of domination and plunder.

In the last few years, global challenges have multiplied, become more complicated and raised major questions about the values behind social transformation. It is no longer a question of moving forward with an agenda of national sovereignty or controlling corporations and major powers. We need to develop real emancipatory projects and unite against capital with a solid culture of social change that does not shy away from examining the ethical dimension of change. We need to engage in a self-critical debate on how power is exercised, the continuing presence of patriarchy in the ranks of progressive movements, and the pernicious effects of our movements' dependence on unchallengeable, messianic leaders. We need to propose forms of power that change things from below and from everyday life; the power of healing, of solidarity; power that is embodied and built gradually over time. We need to get beyond the simplistic critique of what we oppose and turn our sights to our own practices to build alternatives to the system. With that in mind, and focusing on the ethical dimension of social change, here are some of the ideas emerging from the forces of change who refuse to admit defeat:

- We do not need heroes or strongmen to bring about social change.
- We oppose individualism with the values of community, the common good and solidarity, but without ceasing to be individuals ourselves.
- We oppose the paradigm of infinite development or 'sustainable development' with the paradigm of restoration, of healing the planet, of care and regeneration.
- We oppose the practice of plunder by developing the idea of cooperation with nature.
- We oppose the idea of power as violent control and domination with the power of caring for life, the power of love, empathy and emotions.
- We oppose the concentration of power and exclusion with the recognition of diversity and democracy in all its different forms.
- We oppose notions of global power by strengthening local power and developing local systems resilient to the centralized politics of power.
- We oppose the practice of patriarchal power that refuses to politicize the private sphere with the principle of 'the personal is political'.
- We oppose the culture of top-down change by reinforcing those constructive, restorative, healing practices that have the real power to bring about change.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Peredo Beltrán is a psychologist, researcher and author. As a collaborator with TAHIPAMU (Workshop on Women's history participation), she researched anarcho-sindicalist women's movements in 20th Century La Paz, the rights of domestic women workers and the rights of water as a common good. In 1997 she joined the Solon foundation and was its director between 2006 and 2014, developing work that combined art, culture and politics. She coordinated Blue October, promoting water as a common good and pushed for a Tribunal on Climate Justice at international level. In recent years she has dedicated her attention to the issue of climate change and the civilisational crisis and set up *Trenzando Ilusiones* (Weaving Hope) as a space to reflect on social transformation. She is on the Board of Food and Water Watch, the Scientific Committee of the Citizens Earth University, and belongs to various activist collectives working on water, climate change, women's rights, and nuclear threats.

ENDNOTES

1. A tribunal established to settle disputes between corporations and states. Its tribunals are dominated by the corporations, and in most cases end up ruling in their favour.
2. Agenda Patriótica 2025. The government has declared that any NGO that criticizes this agenda could be subject to sanctions or even being forbidden from operating. This agenda, among others, includes the government's plans to develop nuclear energy. <http://www.planificacion.gob.bo/pdes/>
3. Cecilia Chacón, Minister of Defense (April/2011- Sept/2011) resigned in protest at the police repression of the march. Earlier on, just prior to the Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights Conference in Tiquipaya, Juan P Ramos, Viceminister of Environment, resigned after refusing to grant environmental permission to build the TIPNIS road.
4. La Razon, La consulta del TIPNIS no será vinculante. http://www.la-razon.com/index.php?url=/economia/consulta-TIPNIS-vinculante_0_1441655852.html
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STANDING LIFE



ORGANIZING CULTURES OF RESILIENCE

ACTIVISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

KEVIN BUCKLAND

The biological, chemical, social and political reality in which all humans beings live is changing our planet and our culture exponentially. This is the Anthropocene – a new geological age characterized by the critical impacts of human activities on the Earth’s systems. As the physical world around us is transformed, so too movements for social change must evolve if they are to have the structural integrity to survive the coming waves, winds and wars.

INTRODUCTION

I stumbled into the climate justice movement, somewhere between resisting the war on Iraq and realizing that there was a clear need in any movement for a guy who was good at painting banners. As an arts organizer I was in an interesting position for, as one colleague said, 'You have no power, but everyone wants to work with you'. Over the past decade, my position led me through many diverse and divergent parts of the Global Climate Justice Movement: from UN Summits to rural indigenous land occupations, from massive youth skill-shares to academic conferences, from mainstream NGO coalitions to squatted anarchist collectives. This has been a transformative time, both for myself and for the nascent Climate Justice movement – it often felt like we were coming of age at the same time.

As a cultural organizer, I became increasingly aware of the diversity of organizing cultures I was engaged in, and how those different structures affect the work I am able to do. What has struck me as a cultural worker has been not only the way most movements either devalue or 'celebratize' cultural work almost as much as mainstream capitalism, but how little movements take the time to intentionally cultivate divergent cultures or understand themselves as cultural actors. Inside our own movements, I have seen both the glimpses of revolutionary equality and rigid militaristic patriarchal hierarchies. Slowly, I have begun to see my work differently, less as an artist and more as part of developing culture as an approach to organizing.

The word 'apocalypse' comes from the Greek, *'apokaluptein'*, meaning 'to reveal'. As the world faces ongoing and exponential ecological crises, we will see which structures have the integrity to function on scale with the climate crisis and survive in the Anthropocene.

This is a call for anyone working on social change in the age of climate crisis to stop and look carefully at *how* we are working together, rather than just *what* we are working on. If our movement of movements is to withstand the coming storms, floods and fires, we need to be addressing our own incoherencies, lest they open fissures in our structures at every weak point. Let us be intentional about our cultural legacy; the organizing structures that thrive in the Anthropocene may just be the ones to write the next chapter of human history.

ACTIVISM AS USUAL?

Time for a quick reality check. The world's temperature has risen by 1.2°C and further warming is already locked into our global ecosystem. Scientists predict that two-thirds of wild animals will be lost by 2020.³ Each of these factors will cause

unprecedented and unpredictable chains of events on a scale never before seen in human history. Farmlands are turning to desert as wildfires pump more CO₂ into the atmosphere, coastal communities will increasingly be rendered will have to be abandoned or will become uninsurable, and ocean acidification is causing reactions along global food chains. The three years of drought that preceded the spike in food prices and the destabilization of Syria have shown us a glimpse of the challenge of simply surviving on a tougher planet. Take a moment to let the discomfort of those thoughts sink in. Get used to it – this isn't going away. The rest of your life will be defined increasingly by an accelerating political and ecological destabilization of unimaginable scale.

In the most optimistic scenarios, climate change may eventually be reversible, but it is not avoidable. Change is inevitable, and it is already upon us. While the crisis cannot be avoided, however, disaster can. The main question regarding the severity of the Anthropocene will be how human beings organize in this unpredictable and hostile terrain. As such, the Anthropocene can be understood not as an issue but a context: it is the world we do and will inhabit – internalizing this knowledge will allow movements to build resilience that prepares for coming destabilization. For our movements to thrive and survive, we need to look deeper into the long-term cultural change that may be what can hold humanity together in the coming centuries.

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It is in this stark context that global movements for change need to pause and look at the implicit values of their own organizing cultures and tackle the current contradictions between values and structure. Simply racing ahead in a world of 'activism as usual' mirrors the neoliberal blindness of 'business as usual'. Yet, while transnational corporations (TNCs) are moving from being climate deniers to articulating themselves as part of the solutions, many environmentalists are still 'fighting' climate change as if it could actually be defeated. For example, a popular slogan of the global climate justice movement – 'system change not climate change!' – illustrates the false dilemma in which the movement seems to be trapped. While this slogan was originally useful in pushing for systemic societal changes, it must now also evolve to acknowledge a future world in which it is impossible to avert climate change. The true work to be done comes from examining the relationship between 'system change' and 'climate change' rather than trying to secure the triumph of one over the other. If climate change is inevitable, so then is system change; this poses great opportunities for movements in the Anthropocene, but also great challenges.

If our movements are to have the structural integrity to thrive in this disrupted reality we must create coherence between form and rhetoric, values and structures,

and acknowledge the profound difference between merely articulating and truly enacting these values. Already this is happening, and as movements in the Anthropocene begin to inhabit their politics, they tilt from being diverse protest movements towards being a truly revolutionary force that articulates and enacts a cultural alternative to global capitalism.

DECENTRALIZED ORGANIZING ON A GLOBAL FRONTLINE

A thousand of us rushed into a lignite coal mine, swarming the machines. We were nervous; the police could come from anywhere. This was Ende Gelände, a mass direct action horizontally organized around an 'action consensus'. We were organized into a scalable structure that had grown exponentially over recent years: 'buddy' pairs joined to form affinity groups, affinity groups joined together to form 'bloques', 'bloques' joined together to form fingers. Today we were four fingers and 5,000 people.

We all had a common objective, but each 'affinity group' acted autonomously within the parameters of the action consensus. Shutting down a coal mine is a collective project, it doesn't matter who gets in – it just matters that enough get through to stop the machines.

The climate crisis is happening alongside new tools for decentralized communication that have transformed the ways we organize and push the 'culture' of activism into new arenas, innovating new forms of disruption and protest. This technological decentralization is redefining the scope of *how* we resist and organize, not only *what* we resist. A new generation of activists has come of age in the place-based uprisings of the Arab Spring, Spain's 15M/*Indignados* movement, the US and then global Occupy movement, Turkey's Gezi Park, Ukraine's EuroMaidan, Taiwan's Umbrella Revolution, France's *Nuit debout*, and many others. This is a generation of radicalized dreamers who were called out to the participatory assemblies of the parks and plazas by strangers using decentralized communication platforms. There is an understanding that ideas and proposals can come from anywhere and anyone.

With this decentralization of power, there is vastly more space for experimentation and innovation as diverse individuals collectively throw things at their walls to see what sticks or replicates. In a globally connected culture, new forms can spread quickly; cross-pollinating, mutating and merging new tactics into the mainstream of resistance cultures. In doing so, the climate justice movement is evolving with new decentralized digital forms of organizing and increasingly insisting that 'real life' follow such horizontal models. In contrast, many large 'mainstream' organizations still maintain one-directional tactics of traditional social change: the rally, march, petition, etc.

One notable example from recent years is the emergence of the Climate Games format – a decentralized, affinity-group based 'online/offline disobedient action game' that is bringing mass activism into the digital age. Originating in Amsterdam as a direct-action strategy, the Climate Games expanded to organize around the COP21 UNFCCC Climate Conference in Paris.⁴

The attacks of November 2015 radically disrupted organizing plans around the conference, offering an insight into what organizing in a destabilized future may mean. Most centralized plans made by the Climate Coalition and mainstream organizations were either disbanded or simply failed. Yet, despite the disruption, the Climate Games format succeeded in completing more than 200 actions, including coal mine blockades, bank occupations, radio frequency takeovers, speech disruptions, and a fair amount of lone-wolf graffiti. Selj Balamir, a Climate Games organizer, elaborated: 'We realized that big organizations tend to break down when they are hit by a shock. As a small affinity group, you can revise your plans over a bottle of wine in the evening.' The Climate Games succeeded, in part, because of the coherence between rhetoric and form that are lacking in conventional approaches to mass organizing. Balamir further commented on the successful string of direct actions: 'It is truly distributed through network-based politics – it's peer-to-peer disobedience. Proof that we are a rich and diverse convergence of movements that support one another, not just people saying "we are a big climate movement".' The games format has also proved replicable, with the recent *TTIP: Game Over* action in Brussels attracting more than 500 people with 50 different groups carrying out decentralized actions all across Europe.⁵ If the climate justice movement is striving for resilient, decentralized, autonomous communities, these same structures must be woven into its tactics – building coherence between tactics and politics, resistance and resilience, protest and prefiguration.

Disobedience should be understood as more than just a tactic to be used sporadically – it is also a political decision towards empowering a politics of autonomy.

The organizing culture of the climate justice movement is also being pushed towards transformation as more large mainstream organizations, understanding the gravity of the current crises, are increasingly advocating civil disobedience and direct action. This trend is inspiring, as it becomes an embodied politics based upon actions rather than just discourse or conventional lobby-based advocacy. But, disobedience should be understood as more than just a tactic to be used sporadically – it is also a political decision towards empowering a politics of autonomy. By collectively agreeing to break laws, groups are declaring their own ability and legitimacy in defining what is and should be legal, collectively creating and enacting new norms and agreements on their own terms.

Yet, for many mainstream organizations disobedient organizing points to a structural paradox. Direct action organizing is, to state the obvious, a call to disobey. But how can any organization coherently ask people to disobey other structures of power while demanding obedience within its own hierarchical structures? Are such groups merely advocating for disobedience to a *particular* hierarchy, rather than to *hierarchy* as a form of power? Are groups actively working for 'system change' or merely looking to change who runs the current system? Perhaps it is time for movements to strive towards inclusive, participatory and co-creational systems of organizing, where objectives are co-created and consensually agreed and thus no one is required to 'obey'.

DIVERSIFYING AND DECOLONIZING NARRATIVES

None of us saw the Paris attacks coming. That single night blew apart our organizing plans, fracturing the months of negotiations and compromise that held together a frail but wide coalition. Groups were frantic to make climate still seem relevant in the context of a radically militarized 'State of Emergency'. The result was that most NGOs hastily added the words '...and peace!' to the end of their slogans, but it still seemed slightly irrelevant to the feeling on the streets.

On the cold morning that was supposed to have been the biggest climate march in European history, an international group of grassroots indigenous activists gathered outside the Bataclan theatre – the main centre of the attacks – and held a powerful healing ceremony to make visible the connections between the attacks and climate change. Dallas Goldtooth of Indigenous Environmental Network said: 'We as impacted frontline communities are quite familiar with tragedy, we understand what it means to have great loss.'⁶ The violence had not derailed them because it aligned with their worldview. This acknowledgement struck a chord, and a short video from this small ceremony because the first media from COP21 to go viral.

Technology is decentralizing storytelling and mobilizing power, leading to a huge increase in the number of communities and individuals who are able to tell, share and enact their own stories on a new scale. This change has favoured the margins, as smaller and more transformative groups are able to engage more effectively in shaping wider movement narratives. In recent years, indigenous and frontline groups have played a consistent role in telling and creating their own stories, pushing a profoundly radical discourse from the edges to the mainstream of the global climate justice movement. Coupled with the movement's growing and widening understanding of power and privilege and 'taking leadership from the most impacted', this trend has been transforming its politics.

Indigenous and frontline experience with centuries-long struggles to defend diverse worldviews is also affecting how the climate justice movement understands the scale and timeline of organizing on climate issues, and is acting as a powerful magnet that pulls mainstream movement discourse towards deep systemic analysis and long-term change. Such a worldview, which places the current crisis inside a deep history of structural injustice, can provide what neoliberalism has been unable to – a coherent view of the world that aligns with reality.

Yet, while mainstream movements increasingly working to raise frontline voices, an important tension between the structures of horizontal movements and hierarchical organizations has repeatedly been shown by organizations' inability or incapacity to engage in meaningful and supportive frontline work. There is a structural contradiction as top-down organizations seek to support bottom-up organizing. Hierarchies are defined precisely by a lack of individual autonomy, since decisions are centralized and taken far away from those directly affected by or doing the work, while meaningful support for frontline work demands precisely the opposite – taking leadership from those who are most affected. In practical terms, this means questioning a long history of imperialism and unexamined privilege, in order to decentralize and share power.

Such structural readjustments are necessary not only for matters of historical responsibility but because indigenous resistance proves not only that 'another world is possible' but that 'other worlds already exist' to challenge the monoculture of neoliberal global capitalism. Winona LaDuke of *Honor the Earth* recently said,

One of our people in the Native community said the difference between white people and Indians is that Indian people know they are oppressed but don't feel powerless. White people don't feel oppressed, but feel powerless. Deconstruct that disempowerment. Part of the mythology that they've been teaching you is that you have no power. Power is not brute force and money; power is in your spirit. Power is in your soul. It is what your ancestors, your old people gave you. Power is in the earth; it is in your relationship to the earth.⁷

A reciprocal worldview, deeply connected with both history and nature, can have great impact on helping and healing the imperialist and extractivist inheritance of mainstream white-led movements.

The Anthropocene means we'll increasingly be hit by the intersection and convergence of natural and human crises; racism, sexism, and imperialism will either be addressed or compounded. If we lose the opportunity to collectively construct a cohesive narrative that places all of these systems in the same shared context, we will never be able to put out these fires one by one. As long as we are divided we will not be strong enough. We need to be constructing cumulative rather than competitive movements. If the climate justice movement is to take seriously its own rhetoric of 'leadership from the most impacted', healing and

decolonizing must begin inside our own movements. This burden of decolonization cannot be placed upon the shoulders of the oppressed, rather it is the privileged who need to deconstruct and democratize their own power. If we do not engage deeply on this inner cultural work, we are destined to create a whole new set of problems as we 'solve' the climate crisis.

At the same time that we were gathered in ceremony outside the Bataclan theatre, another delegation of international indigenous activists were fighting on the streets of London. They weren't fighting the police, but Avaaz and the London People's Climate March organizers who had invited frontline communities to head the march. When they showed up with a banner that read, 'Still fighting CO2lonialism: Your Climate Profits Kill', the march organizers spent the rest of the day trying to minimize their presence – placing large animals in front of them, trying to hold them back, and even calling private security on them. An 'Open Letter from the Wretched of the Earth Bloc...' to the march organizers recorded the experience:

'However, the agreement [we had with you] it seems was contingent upon us merely acting out our ethnicities – through attire, song and dance, perhaps – to provide a good photo-op, so that you might tick your narrow diversity box. The fact that we spoke for our own cause in our own words resulted in great consternation: you did not think that our decolonial and anti-imperialist message was consistent with the spirit of the march. In order to secure our place at the front, you asked us to dilute our message and make it "palatable".'

CULTURES OF CARE

When the winds of Hurricane Sandy abated they left a deep inequality. Those who had means to escape the destruction had done so. Those who didn't had no choice but to stay. The Occupy movement, long criticized for its lack of demands, now had a clear demand: keep people alive. With a scalable decentralized structure already in the movement's DNA, #OccupySandy kicked in before the storm waters had receded.

When I walked into the #OccupySandy hub – at a church in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn – I asked how I could help and was pointed to a growing mountain of black garbage bags piled in the corner and told these donations needed sorting and redistribution. I started opening the bags, trying to apply order to the chaos so that the most needed supplies – warm jackets, blankets, hats and good shoes – could be distributed first. New shipments arrived every few minutes. Other volunteers asked me how they could help, and over the next eight hours we transformed the piles of bags into a neatly categorized warehouse of emergency

supplies. We repackaged bags and dispatches sent them out to Staten Island, the Far Rockaways, Redhook and beyond in loaned vehicles that still had some fuel in their tanks. Above us hung a crude banner that read, 'Mutual Aid, not Charity'.

When I finally left the church, others easily filled my place. The urgency necessitated decentralized autonomy – we all had decisions to make and were trusted to make them as best we could. It was almost two weeks before I saw any governmental organization arrive on the scene.

The climate crisis reflects not just a physical, but also a social and spiritual crisis. To be effective in the Anthropocene we need to be working coherently on all scales at the same time: inside ourselves, inside our groups, inside our communities, and inside our global ecosystem. The increasing individualism of modern capitalism has deeply damaged our collective capacity to respond to changes and many activists respond to the urgency of the climate crisis by pushing past their own limits. This has led to serial burnout that has greatly shortened the lifespan of the first generations of climate activists, crippling the movement's ability to accumulate experiential knowledge.

We are now seeing the trend of 'sustainable activism', moving from the individual to the collective, as ever more movements and organizations are understanding that their personal and collective health is essential to the long-term impact of their work. Some of this work has also grown out of treating the trauma that can come with direct action and physical violence of state repression. The conversation has widened beyond the work of healing personal trauma and towards an understanding of the collective trauma we have all undergone through centuries of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism.

The climate crisis reflects not just a physical, but also a social and spiritual crisis.

This process of decolonization can be seen both as resistance and resilience, both healing and sabotage that can start to deconstruct a toxic system from the inside rather than fighting it as an external enemy or seeking to escape it. Acknowledging we are both part of the problem and of the solution provides a complex but realistic understanding of the world around us – the healing is both internal and external, the sabotage both individual and collective. The interest in restorative work is arising at a time when regenerative agriculture and permaculture are redefining how humans view their relationship to the Earth, reframing human impact as a potentially positive force for the health of ecosystems and reinstating their symbiotic and mutually dependent relationships.

This focus on internal and deep collective health is a notable step for a movement that has traditionally been very good at articulating the thousand things it is against, but not in proposing a convincing alternative that engages with global

capitalism. Addressing Occupy Wall Street at Zuccotti Park, author and activist Naomi Klein declared:

What climate change means is that we have to do this on a deadline. This time our movement cannot get distracted, divided, burned out or swept away by events. This time we have to succeed... I am talking about changing the underlying values that govern our society. ...That is what I see happening in this square. In the way you are feeding each other, keeping each other warm, sharing information freely and providing health care, meditation classes and empowerment training. My favourite sign here says, 'I care about you'. In a culture that trains people to avoid each other's gaze, to say, 'Let them die', that is a deeply radical statement.⁸

One project that has been highly successful in promoting cultures of 'Sustainable Activism' sits in an isolated valley beneath the Spanish Pyrenees. For years, the ecological-inspired retreat centre, Eco-Dharma, has been offering workshops '...to empower individuals and communities to tread a path where committed social engagement goes hand in hand with radical personal transformation',⁹ and

has trained thousands of activists across Europe, many of whom are now offering their own courses and incorporating deep ecology into their own practices. Ecodharma has been so effective not just because of its content but also because of its slow-but-steady holistic approach to activism. Such slow alternatives may not yet be even showing up on radars, but it is in this fertile underground where the seeds of tomorrow are planted.

By switching focus from the productive work of campaigning... towards the reproductive work of cultural change, activism moves ... towards real personal and collective transformational experiences.

This strong focus on process work is crucial as activism begins to challenge the assumption of 'productivism' latent in many western activist movements. By switching focus from the productive work of campaigning, communication and advocacy towards the reproductive work of cultural change, activism moves beyond performance for a public (a political caste, mainstream media or general public) and towards real personal and collective transformational experiences.

To do this, perhaps we can look to the far right, which has been far more successful in recent years than 'protest' movements in enacting radical change. In a post-Brexit Britain, and with Donald Trump as (at the time of writing) incumbent commander-in-chief of the world's largest armed forces, the failure of the political left can perhaps be traced to its inability to provide an exciting vision about a fair and liveable future as part of a coherent narrative of radical change. Without a clear vision in a tumultuous world, is it any surprise that people are looking backwards

towards a brighter future that may be 'great again'? Yet, if we are to provide such a vision and avoid the personality cult of populism, it means that left-wing radicalism must be a process for engagement, rather than a political programme.

By reinterpreting social change as a relational process, movements can begin to embody an alternative future characterized by a culture of care, and model new forms of extra-capitalist relations. In an age of climate crisis, this culture of care takes on a global dimension – and the need for collective care and 'mutual aid, not charity', as articulated by #OccupySandy, will be embedded in every coming ecological crisis. With a shift towards sustainable activism, movements are beginning to 'be the change they wish to see in the world'.

WARNING: HIERARCHY MAY HAVE UNWANTED SIDE EFFECTS

I saw a major change happen as the NGO I was working for, originally started by a few friends, tried to "professionalize" as it grew to become a global player in the climate movement. It broke my heart to see the direction it was headed. Those at the top of the hierarchy added a "Human Resources" department, who – not coming from social change movements – approached the project of managing us with a neoliberal efficiency. This department was set up by those at the top of the organization, and their choices illustrated the lack of confidence in horizontality that tends to characterize those at the top of power structures. This new department implemented a number of sweeping changes, including an annual performance review to determine whether or not one continued at the organization, and on what salary. A nervous sense of precarity crept into the organization – people began to stop voicing their complaints as they themselves felt less secure in their own positions.

Suddenly, open and public discussion about how the organization should run was individualized and hidden. People were asked to individually bring any complaints to HR who would quietly refer them to whoever should hear them. As such, this bureaucratic department completely invisibilized organizational frustrations until everyone felt as if they were alone in their feelings. The result was a loss of any collective space for decentralized horizontal organizing around our own structures – everything had to be channelled through the hierarchy. Results-based activism became how we were evaluated, reinforcing a need for short-term results over slower but deeper movement work. People became nervous about talking about their failures and learning at the organization slowed.

The “culture of care” had been transferred from the workers to a purely bureaucratic and depoliticized part of the organizational hierarchy. Rather than understanding the culture of the organization to be the core of its political project, our capacity to collectively develop ways of working together was relegated to a department that didn’t see structure itself as a political choice. To the HR department, hierarchy was simply the way things were done. The department did undertake consultation processes with employees on issues such as maternity leave, vacation time, etc., but the workers never made the final decisions and the true question of organizational structure was never on any of the Google forms. Any structure in which one must ask permission of those in power to challenge power is trapped inside its own structure.

As global movements bend towards understanding the true depths of the crisis we face, and consequently the true depths of change necessary, we see an emerging gap between groups who merely advocate for, or articulate, an increasingly systemic critique and groups that work to embody, model and practise systemic change through their organizing cultures. Hierarchies are slow to change, are not scalable and break down in crisis. Many movement organizing cultures more closely represent the world we are attempting to dismantle than the world we articulate: rigid hierarchical structures, short-term planning cycles, cultures of overwork and competition.

Hierarchy creates the traditional paradox of any system of power: those who are able to make structural changes are those with the least to gain from doing so,

How can one coherently be advocating for decentralized, democratized and autonomous systems without also striving to embody these same values?

creating situations where a worker’s position is dependent upon pleasing, rather than challenging, the dominant power structures within an organization. Such organizing structures make large, salaried hierarchical organizations a very conservative force inside global movements. This is important because the massive amounts of money, access and capacity that such organizations

bring to global movements act as a powerful weight that is holding movements to ‘activism as usual’ and back from their full transformative potential.

Yet, many of these same organizations herald the need for worker- and user-controlled decentralized energy systems, energy cooperatives and disobedient actions. How can one coherently be advocating for decentralized, democratized and autonomous systems without also striving to embody these same values? Organizations such as 350.org, and other ‘Big Greens’, are increasingly filling an important niche in global movements as they create opportunities and space to pull in new activists through participatory campaigns, training, skill-shares and resource sharing. Yet, as some of the ‘Big Greens’ begin to move their huge resources

to be more movement-facing and collaborative it is important that the seismic differences in their structures be acknowledged and addressed. If a hierarchical organization declares, such as 350.org’s homepage does, ‘We’re Building A Global Climate Movement’, it is important to have a clear vision of how that ‘Global Climate Movement’ will be organized – because the differences between these organizing models cannot be overstated. If such organizations sincerely aim to engage with social movements, they need to nurture democratic organizational structures that better reflect and interface with scalable movement structures.

An immediate priority for all movement organizers should be a process of aligning internal structures to reflect agreed values. The first step is to challenge the organization’s underlying assumptions by making the structure of the organization itself up for debate. If the structures by which groups make decisions cannot be questioned, how can groups expect to create anything but superficial change?

In practical terms, start conversations with co-workers: Should people working at your organization vote on your next Executive Director? Should your annual budget be determined collectively? How should you decide how many hours to work? Asking such questions can transform social change organizations from advocacy groups towards becoming intentional communities that embody real social and cultural change. The onus of achieving structural change does not rest only with those in power, rather it is the urgent duty of all workers inside hierarchical structures to themselves rebuild, reshape and co-create the society in which they work. This internal work should not be seen as separate from the work for transformative change; rather, it must be considered to be the work of transformative change, for maintaining structures not created by their users is preserving a culture of oppression.

CLIMATE CHANGE AS CULTURE CHANGE

‘... just as many machines reset themselves to their original settings after a power outage, human beings reset themselves to something altruistic, communitarian, resourceful and imaginative after a disaster, that we revert to something we already know how to do. The possibility of paradise is already within us as a default setting.’
– Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*¹⁰

As the world dives head-first into the coming centuries of exponential political and environmental instability, movements for social change need to look into themselves – individually and as a movement of movements – to begin to heal the myriad structural injustices that manifest themselves as climate change, and to incubate new relationships with our earth and each other within our own structures of resistance. This process demands introspection and an examination not only of our personal cultural inheritances, but also the urgent need to heal

toxic inherited structures inside ourselves and in our movements. Workers for social change have the responsibility to actively engage in organizing cultures that democratize justice ahead of the coming crises.

Movements are not only spaces of resistance, but they are incubators where future cultures are already being experimented and tested. Our movements' desires to foment alternative futures – encouraging democratic, prefigurative and decentralized solutions – may actually have less to do with solar panels and community gardens than with nurturing scalable and democratic organizing cultures that can be shared with allies, volunteers and partners in ways that improve access to autonomy as we move together into an exponentially tumultuous future.

The deepening transformations of global movements in the Anthropocene hint at a maturing movement culture that is rising to take its place in history, inhabiting its politics and shifting from diverse protest movements towards being a global revolutionary force. But until our movements truly embody the politics they articulate, we will only be scratching the surface of the true depths of change that is so desperately needed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Buckland is an activist who has spent the past 9 years working with diverse actors of the global climate justice movement, primarily as the Global Artist Coordinator with 350.org (2009–2015). He has worked to elevate the role of the arts and artists inside the climate justice movement, by supporting activists in more successfully engaging with artists, and supporting artists in being more strategic with their social engagement. As a writer he has self-published “Breathing Gezi”, a first-hand account of the Gezi Park occupation, and published numerous blog-posts and essays with 350.org, *redpepper.org.uk*, *counterpunch*, *treehugger.com*, *Ejolt Report* and others. You can follow him on twitter @change_of_art and instagram @coloresamor

ENDNOTES

1. While “Anthropocene” means literally “age of human beings” there is also academic support for designating the current period as the “Capitalocene” or “age of capital” to refocus on the impact of the current economic model run by a small sector of humanity, rather than our species as a whole. For more information, see Hamilton, Bonneuil, and Gemenne. 2015.
2. <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/provisional-wmo-statement-status-of-global-climate-2016>
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/oct/27/world-on-track-to-lose-two-thirds-of-wild-animals-by-2020-major-report-warns/>
4. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); Conference of the Parties.
5. <https://ttipgameover.net/blog/en/>
6. www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9irE6q6LtQ
7. www.sacredecology.com/honor-the-earth/
8. <https://www.thenation.com/article/occupy-wall-street-most-important-thing-world-now/>
9. www.ecodharma.com
10. Solnit, Rebecca (2010) *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*. New York: Penguin Books.

This book contains some sample essays from TNI's State of Power 2017 report. Visit www.tni.org/stateofpower2017 to view these other essays/features:

Infographic: Manufactured consent

Corporations don't just shape our politics or economics, they also seek do to the same to public opinion. Which corporations play the biggest role in shaping knowledge and news? What do they fund? Who do they represent?

Power of Porn Cultures

Karen Gabriel

The porn industry globally has become so large that it can no longer be regarded as an underground sideshow. It is rather capitalism writ-large and the way it structures corporate power, labour, migration, consumption, gender, sexuality and increasingly the virtual world has relevance for everyone concerned with social justice.

Mall culture and consumerism in the Philippines

Jore-Annie Rico and Kim Robert C. de Leon

Why are malls booming in the Philippines and what are its implications for our understandings on the nature of inequality, privatisation of public space and the unstoppable tide of consumerism?

White supremacy as cultural cannibalism

Gathoni Blessol

There is a lens that is largely being ignored and in most cases simply eclipsed in the current attempts to imagine post-capitalist futures. This missing lens signals an evasion of the fact that capitalism is born of white supremacist thinking and domination.

The role of human behaviour in generating plutocracies

Deniz Kellecioglu

Mainstream ethics, such as those that paint humans as naturally egoist and competitive, are a principal means by which elites perpetuate power as they encourage us to see the state of the world as the 'natural' order of things, preempting resistance and alternatives. How can we promote instead an emancipatory ethics that draws on the most progressive sides of the human condition?

Gangsters for capitalism: why US' working class enlists

Colin Jenkins

Why does the US working class willingly, even enthusiastically, join to serve in a military that bolsters the very system which undermines and alienates them in their everyday lives?

The art of resistance

In a poetic illustrated short piece, artist and curator Devra Wiseman reflects on what is resistance art.

Culture of the Commons

Interview with Mayo Fuster Morell

Mayo Fuster Morell, responsible for BarCola, a group working on collaborative economy policies within the Barcelona city council, shares her thoughts on how commons-based forms of collaboration can build a more just society.

TNI's sixth annual State of Power report 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. For an online version of the report visit www.tni.org/stateofpower2017



The Transnational Institute (TNI) is an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet. For more than 40 years, TNI has served as a unique nexus between social movements, engaged scholars and policy makers.

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