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Catalyst

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CHRISTIAN G. APPY
is a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and is the author, most recently, of *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (Viking, 2015). He is currently working on a book about the impact of nuclear weapons on American culture, politics, and foreign policy since World War II.

JOHN CLEGG
is a collegiate assistant professor in the social sciences and Harper-Schmidt Fellow at the University of Chicago.

LEV GRINBERG
is professor at Ben Gurion University and author of *Politics and Violence in Israel/Palestine* (Routledge, 2010) and *Mo(ve)ments of Resistance* (Academic Studies Press, 2014)

NIVEDITA MAJUMDAR
teaches English at John Jay College, the City University of New York, and is author of the forthcoming *The World in a Grain of Sand: Postcolonial Literature and Radical Universalism* (London: Verso, 2021).

GÖRAN THERBORN
is a Swedish sociologist, who has been co-director of the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study and professor of sociology at the University of Cambridge. His most recent book, *Inequality and the Labyrinths of Democracy*, is due to appear in 2020.

ADANER USMANI
is an assistant professor of sociology and social studies at Harvard University.

ANISH VANAIK
teaches history at O. P. Jindal Global University in Sonipat, India. His book on the history of real estate in Delhi *Possessing the City: Property and Politics in Delhi, 1911–1947* will be out soon from Oxford University Press, UK.

Editorial

This issue addresses one of the most important developments of our time — the rise of mass incarceration in the United States. It is well known that the American prison population is the largest in the advanced capitalist world, both as a percentage of the population and in absolute numbers. Equally appalling is the racial skew of those in the system, with blacks being massively overrepresented relative to their place in the general population.

For years, the explanation for both facts — the massive overall rate and its racial skew — has focused on institutional and cultural factors. In particular, it has been accepted that a primary culprit is the broader racism of the public, and politicians who capitalize on it, as evidenced in the draconian drugs laws passed in the 1980s.

In a sweeping and ambitious analysis, John Clegg and Adaner Usmani show that this conventional picture is very misleading. While racist attitudes and political brinksmanship have played a role, the fundamental driver of the carceral state has been economic — the collapse of the employment structure in urban areas after the 1960s,

which threw millions of people into long-term poverty, and a balance of class forces which ruled out redistributive reforms to address the economic disintegration.

Once the hub of manufacturing employment, cities fell into decay, with skyrocketing joblessness and high crime rates. As more affluent whites escaped into suburbs, the working-class population, disproportionately black, was left to fend for itself, and became the object of a widening and more punitive dragnet. The implication of this analysis is profound — the only viable solution to mass incarceration is through a massive program of state jobs, social welfare, and economic redistribution.

Clegg and Usmani's article is a shining example of political economy and class analysis put to a burning issue. In his address to a conference in honor of the late Erik Olin Wright, Göran Therborn lays out an agenda for class analysis in an age of oligarchy and globalizing capitalism. As Therborn argues, it is high time to return to a focus on capital and labor as the fulcrum for contemporary capitalism, both in the North and South, and his own brief but very suggestive report on recent trends shows just how fruitful this agenda might be.

It is precisely a disregard for careful class analysis that has handicapped perhaps the largest Maoist revolutionary movement in the world, the Naxalite insurgency in India. Anish Vanaik examines the ongoing frustration of a movement that, on one hand, is now the only wing of Indian communism that presents any challenge to the status quo, but on the other hand, has failed to break out of a very narrow band of the Indian countryside. This is in part because of state repression, but also because of its refusal to acknowledge the realities of a changing Indian capitalism.

Continuing with the international focus, Lev Grinberg argues that the current electoral impasse in Israel expresses the slow but ineluctable fracturing of Israeli national identities, not in spite of Israel's colonial project, but because of it. He examines how the effort to maintain the identity of a Jewish state has backfired over time, releasing

forces that cannot now be contained within the traditional political parameters. And as the United States watches one of its client states implode, its own imperial framework is starting to show the strains of a superpower in retreat.

In a recent book, *How to Hide an Empire*, Daniel Immerwahr offered a fresh perspective of the uniqueness of this American imperial expansion. But Christian Appy argues in his biting review that Immerwahr's work has the effect of obscuring and sanitizing American aggression, rather than helping us better understand it. And finally, Nivedita Majumdar examines *Full Surrogacy Now*, Sophie Lewis's recent title on surrogacy, which seeks to defend the rights of those who labor in it. Majumdar argues that Lewis's book, far from acknowledging the real interests of surrogates, tends more to overlook the dynamics in surrogacy. And its insistence on viewing the institution as a springboard toward abolishing the family is not only unpersuasive, but dangerous.

Mass incarceration is typically understood as a system of race-based social control. Yet this standard story mischaracterizes disparities in US punishment, ignores the sharp rise in violence beginning in the 1960s, and misunderstands the constraints that led state officials to respond with penal rather than social policy. We offer a new explanation for both the rise in violence and the punitive response. American exceptionalism in violence and punishment is explained by the peculiar character of the United States' agrarian transition and the underdevelopment of its welfare state.

THE ECONOMIC ORIGINS OF MASS INCARCERATION

JOHN CLEGG AND
ADANER USMANI

Over the last five decades, the incarceration rate in the United States has exploded. In the 1960s, the United States incarcerated its population at a rate that was comparable to other developed countries. Today, America ranks among the most punitive states in world history — second only to the Soviet Union under Stalin. Black men born between 1965 and 1969 have been more likely to go to prison than to graduate from college.[1] American punishment is thus of unprecedented *severity* — more prisoners per capita than ever before, and more so than any comparable country in world history. It is also characterized by extreme *inequality* — some Americans are much more likely to languish in prisons than others.[2] These are its twin features. What explains them?

1 Becky Pettit and Bruce Western, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration," *American Sociological Review* 69, no. 2 (2004): 164.

2 Note that in addition to inequality across people, there is also great inequality across places within the United States. Because of the extent of local autonomy in the administration of criminal justice, some have argued that the United States is better conceived as a patchwork of 50 or even 3,000 criminal justice systems. Some places incarcerate their populations at close to the European norm; others are more than an

The standard story is that mass incarceration is a system of racialized social control, fashioned by a handful of Republican elites in defense of a racial order that was being challenged by the Civil Rights Movement. "Law and order" candidates catalyzed this white anxiety into a public panic about crime, which furnished cover for policies that sent black Americans to prison via the War on Drugs. It is difficult to overstate how influential this story has become. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, which makes the case most persuasively, has been cited at more than twice the rate of the next most-cited work on American punishment.[3] In a review of decades of research, the sociologists David Jacobs and Audrey Jackson call this story "the most plausible [explanation] for the rapid increase in U.S. imprisonment rates."[4]

Yet this conventional account has some fatal flaws. Numerically, mass incarceration has not been characterized by rising racial disparities in punishment, but rising *class* disparity. Most prisoners are not in prison for drug crimes, but for violent and property offenses, the incidence of which increased dramatically before incarceration did. And the punitive turn in criminal justice policy was not brought about by a layer of conniving elites, but was instead the result of uncoordinated initiatives by thousands of officials at the local and state levels.

So what should replace the standard story? In our view, there are two related questions to answer. The first concerns the rise in violence. Partisans of the standard account argue that trends in punishment were unrelated to trends in crime, but this claim is mistaken. The rise in violence was real, it was unprecedented, and it profoundly shaped

order of magnitude harsher. John Pfaff, *Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration — and How to Achieve Real Reform* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

3 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010). On average, *The New Jim Crow* has been cited around 1,000 times a year since its publication in 2010. David Garland's *The Culture of Control* has been cited roughly 500 times a year since its publication in 2000.

4 David Jacobs and Aubrey L. Jackson, "On the Politics of Imprisonments: A Review of Systematic Findings," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 6, no. 1 (2010): 129.

the politics of punishment. Any account of the punitive turn must address the question that naturally follows from this fact: why did violence rise in the 1960s?

The key to understanding the rise in violence lies in the distinctively racialized patterns of American modernization. The post-war baby boom increased the share of young men in the population at the same time that cities were failing to absorb the black peasantry expelled by the collapse of Southern sharecropping. This yielded a world of blocked labor-market opportunities, deteriorating central cities, and concentrated poverty in predominantly African-American neighborhoods. As a result, and especially in urban areas, violence rose to unprecedented heights.

This pattern of economic development generated a racialized social crisis. But this raises a second question: why did the state respond to this crisis with police and prisons rather than with social reform? Violence cannot be a sufficient cause of American punishment because punishment is just one of the ways in which states can respond to social disorder. Some states ignore crime waves. Others seek to attack the root causes of violence. Why did America respond punitively?

The answer to this question lies in the balance of class forces in the United States. In reaction to soaring crime rates, the American public, white and black alike, demanded redress from the state. Politicians, white and black, pivoted to respond. But the weakness of the American working-class prohibited meaningful social reform. Moreover, due to the persistent incapacity of the American state to redistribute from rich taxpayers to impoverished cities, no sustained, significant effort to fight crime at its roots was feasible. As a consequence, state and local governments were left to fight violence on the cheap, with only the inexpensive and punitive tools at their disposal. Thus, the overdevelopment of American penal policy at the local level is the result of the underdevelopment of American social policy at the federal level. American exceptionalism in punishment is but the flip side of American exceptionalism in social policy.

THE STANDARD STORY

In the standard account, American mass incarceration is a system of race-based social control. White elites constructed the carceral state in order to curry favor with ordinary white Americans who were worried by the changing character of the America around them. Yet there are at least three problems with this view.[5]

First, if American mass incarceration were a system of race-based social control, we should expect to see a rise in racial inequalities in punishment corresponding to the punitive turn (i.e., black incarceration rates should have increased substantially, and white rates much less or not at all). Yet white incarceration increased just as rapidly as black. Most of the growth in the ratio of black to white incarceration occurred in an earlier period of American history (1880–1970), after the end of slavery and during the first Great Migration.[6] Since 1990, it has been declining.[7]

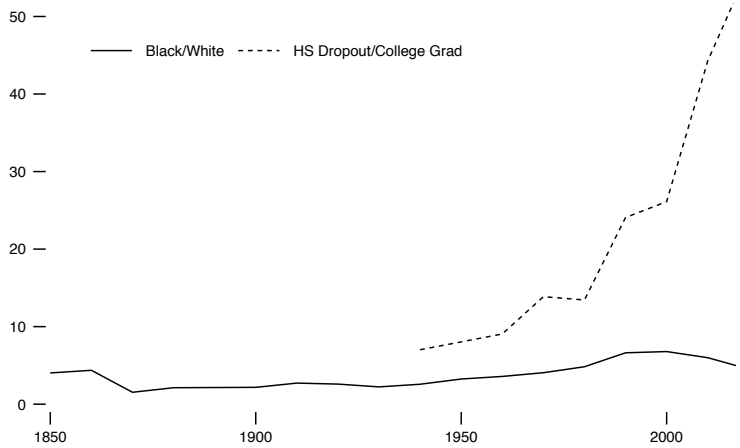
As Figure 1 shows, what *has* risen most dramatically over the last few decades is the disparity in incarceration between rich and poor. The incarceration rate among those with less than a high school education has skyrocketed, while the incarceration rate amongst college

5 We have elsewhere subjected the conventional view to closer scrutiny. There, we discuss the account in more detail, and note several other weaknesses that we do not raise here. See John Clegg and Adaner Usmani, "The Racial Politics of the Punitive Turn" SSRN Working Paper (2019).

6 Christopher Muller, "Northward Migration and the Rise of Racial Disparity in American Incarceration, 1880–1950," *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no. 2 (2012): 281–326.

7 See Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn, eds., *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2014): 58. Figure 1 does show this disparity rising until 2000; it suggests that about half of the rise in the racial disparity occurred before 1970, and half between 1970 and 2000. But here we estimate the incarceration rate by the institutionalization rate of men aged eighteen to fifty calculated from Census samples (Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas, and Matthew Sobek, *IPUMS USA: Version 9.0 [Dataset]*. Minneapolis: IPUMS, 2019), which is not to be preferred to the actual imprisonment data used by Muller and Travis et al. Those data suggest the fall in the racial disparity began earlier, and that racial disparities in the early twentieth century were higher and rose faster than do our data.

FIGURE 1: DISPARITIES IN RATES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION BY RACE AND EDUCATION, 1850–2018

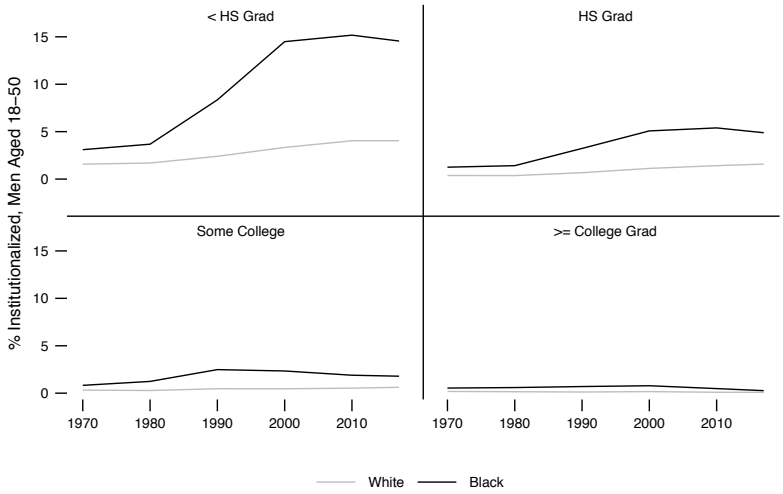


This figure shows trends in two ratios: (1) the ratio of black to white institutionalization rates; (2) the ratio of the institutionalization rates of high school dropouts to college graduates. We use the institutionalization rate rather than the incarceration rate to ensure consistency across IPUMS *Census samples. This has the cost of including the institutionalized population as well as the incarcerated population. For this reason, we follow precedent and restrict our sample to nonimmigrant men aged eighteen to fifty (see Derek Neal and Armin Rick, "The Prison Boom and the Lack of Black Progress after Smith and Welch,"* NBER Working Paper, *July 2014). On the safe assumption that a very small proportion of this population is institutionalized in non-carceral facilities and that this proportion does not vary much over time and by race or education, these data can be used for this purpose.*

graduates (both black and white) has declined (see Figure 2).[8] If white elites contrived mass incarceration to control newly enfranchised African Americans, why has the probability of a black college graduate

8 Some of the increase in this ratio between 1970 and 2017 could be due to selection, since the share of the population without a high school degree declined. As an alternative, we also calculate the ratio in institutionalization rates between men aged eighteen to fifty whose years of schooling put them in the top quartile of the adult educational distribution in any given year and those from the bottom quartile in the same year. Trends in this ratio suggest a delay in the increase in class disparities, but otherwise they yield the same conclusion: it exploded over this period. In 1970 the ratio was 7.41. In 2017, it was 47.9.

FIGURE 2: RATES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION, BY EDUCATION AND RACE, 1970–2018



This figure shows the percentage of men aged eighteen to fifty living in institutions between 1970 and 2017, disaggregated by education and race. Data are from IPUMS Census samples.

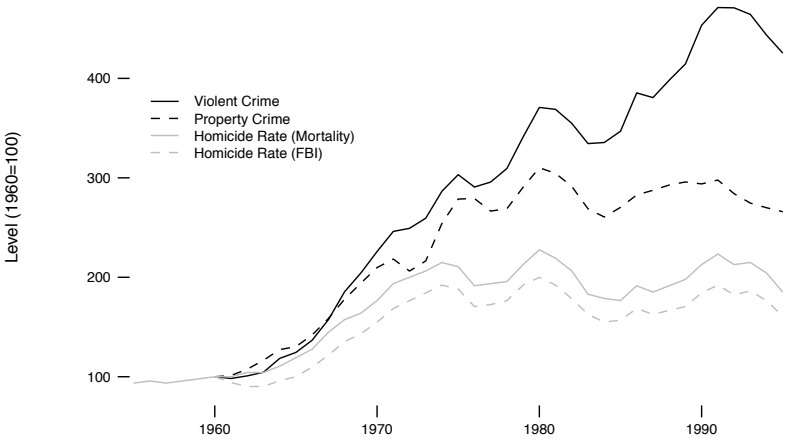
going to prison *halved* over this period?[9] In 2017, a white high school dropout was about fifteen times more likely to be in prison than a black college graduate.[10]

Second, to make the case that mass incarceration was a narrowly political project, the standard story has fixated on the War on Drugs. After all, the view concedes that black Americans have been arrested, charged, convicted, and sentenced for a crime. Proponents of this view

9 Again, we estimate this by the institutionalization rate for men aged eighteen to fifty with a college degree (or more), which was 0.54 percent in 1970. In 2017, it was 0.27 percent. The institutionalization rate for men aged fifteen to fifty drawn from the top quartile of the educational distribution in 1970 was 0.72 percent; the same rate in 2017 was 0.27 percent.

10 The institutionalization rate for white men aged eighteen to fifty without a high-school diploma was 4.05 percent in 2017 (4.05 percent/0.27 percent = 15.1). In 1970, the same ratio was around 3.

FIGURE 3: CRIME RATES, 1960–1995



This figure shows the crime rate over the period of its rise, between 1960 and 1995. These data come from the FBI Uniform Crime Reports, which compiles data on arrests from police agencies. Data for the homicide rate also come from mortality statistics ("Mortality"). As we discuss again later, these data show nearly identical trends over time, though the levels are always higher since some fraction of homicides never result in an arrest.

argue that the criminalization of everyday drug use gave police, prosecutors, and judges the pretext to put blacks but not whites in prison.

By now, the problems with this argument have been widely documented.[11] Only a minority of American prisoners are incarcerated for drug crimes. At all levels of government — federal prisons, state prisons, and local jails — drug prisoners make up no more than one-fifth to one-fourth of inmates.[12] If one counts only the key victim of the standard story — the nonviolent, non-repeat user who has no ties to the drug trade — the figure is somewhere around 4 percent.[13]

11 See Pfaff, *Locked In,* 44–97.

12 In 2019 drug prisoners made up 21 percent of the total incarcerated population. Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019," Prison Policy Initiative (March 2019).

13 See Eric L. Sevigny and Jonathan P. Caulkins, "Kingpins or Mules: An Analysis of Drug Offenders Incarcerated in Federal and State Prisons," *Criminology & Public*

A little less than half of inmates in prison or jail have been convicted or charged with various kinds of violent offenses (41 percent), another 17 percent with property crimes.

To prove that incarceration bears no relation to actual levels of crime, partisans of the standard story commonly claim that crime and punishment are uncorrelated at the national level. Between 1990 and 2008, they observe, the incarceration rate increased. It has since stabilized at very high levels. Over this same period, crime has declined precipitously.

To some, this is evidence that punishment must have nothing to do with crime. But this ignores the extraordinarily significant rise in crime that predated the punitive turn. From 1960 to 1990, as Figure 3 shows, the homicide rate doubled, the property crime rate trebled, and the violent crime rate roughly quintupled. Moreover, those who make this claim commit the mistake of comparing a stock (the total prison population in a given year) to a flow (the rate of crime *per year*). As Figure 4 shows, the violent crime rate *is* positively correlated with the flow of prisoners in and out of American prisons (i.e., the *change* in the incarceration rate).

To note all this is *not* to resurrect old arguments that American punishment is the necessary consequence of American crime. Defenders of the conventional view are right to emphasize that the state's response was political. Most of this essay is devoted to substantiating this claim. But the rise in violence did detonate the punitive turn. Without the rise in crime and the ensuing public panic, the rise in incarceration would not have transpired.

Third, a deeper problem with the standard story is that its protagonists are a narrow cast of national, Republican elites driven by a single aim (to recapture the South from the Democrats). It shares this characteristic with the bespoke left-wing alternative, in which mass incarceration is a conspiracy not of white Republicans but of a

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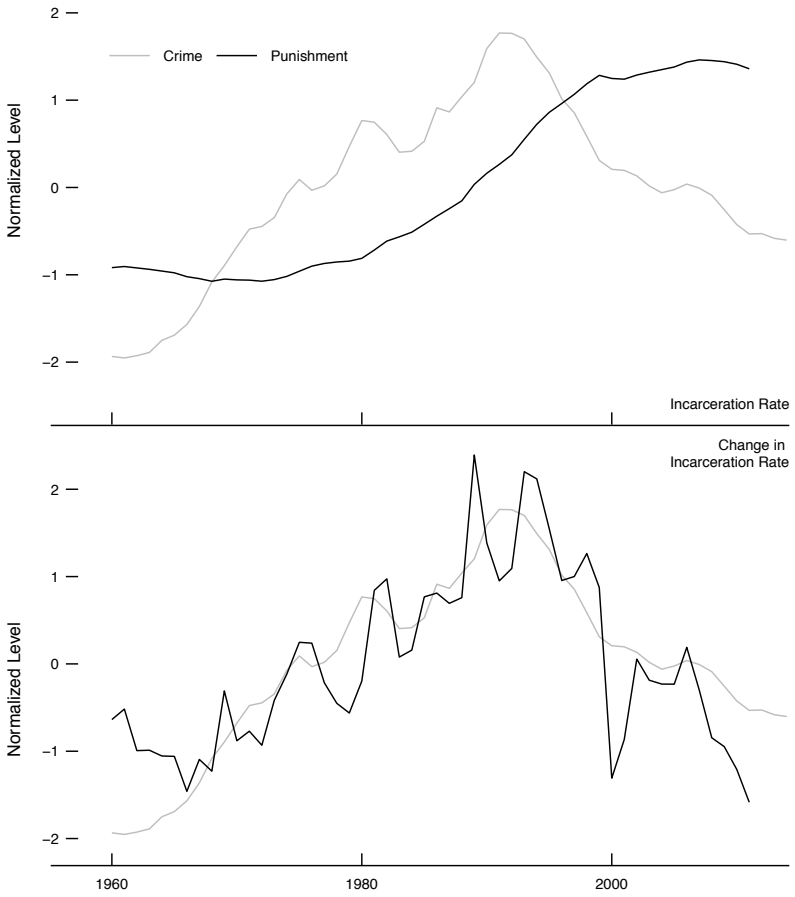
Policy 3, no. 3 (July 2004): 421.

FIGURE 4: LEVELS AND CHANGES OF INCARCERATION AND CRIME RATES, 1960–2010



This figure shows the violent crime rate and the prison incarceration rate from 1960 to the present. These data show that the crime rate is not correlated to a measure of the stock of American prisoners, but that it is substantially correlated to a measure of the flows in and out of American prisons. Crime data are from the FBI Uniform Crime Reports and imprisonment data are from the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

wealthy elite seeking to "punish the poor."[14] The reality is that agency was diffuse. Mass incarceration unfolded in thousands of institutions across the country. These institutions were staffed by a diverse set of actors, all working under constraints set by the political economy of twentieth-century America and subject to an American electorate that was increasingly anxious about crime.

The standard story thus makes the common mistake of blaming a scandalous outcome on a cabal of scandalous actors. In the case of American incarceration, this is an especially egregious error. American criminal justice is distinguished by the degree to which members of local electorates have influence over criminal justice institutions and outcomes.[15] In America, unlike other countries, state or local electorates vote for many of their prosecutors and judges; police officers are governed by elected mayors and sheriffs rather than unelected bureaucrats; and state legislatures make decisions that are elsewhere delegated to civil servants at the center.

In short, the standard story has led us astray. It has done so in three main ways. It mischaracterizes the population that languishes inside American prisons; it ignores the shaping role of violence on the politics of the punitive turn; and it overlooks the decentralized and atypically democratic character of American criminal justice institutions. It is ripe for replacement.

14 See Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2008); Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). For a more structural account, see Ruth W. Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

15 See Nicola Lacey and David Soskice, "Crime, Punishment and Segregation in the United States: The Paradox of Local Democracy," *Punishment & Society* 17, no. 4 (October 2015): 454–81; Joachim J. Savelsberg, "Knowledge, Domination, and Criminal Punishment," *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 4 (January 1994): 911–43.

CRIME

Advocates of the conventional view have suggested that the rise in crime was an invention of some combination of politicians, police, the media, and fearful white citizens. However, crime did rise dramatically in the 1960s. Figure 3 plots trends in homicide, property crimes, and violent crimes.[16] It shows that between 1960 and the peak of the crime wave, the homicide rate roughly doubled, the property crime rate trebled, and the violent crime rate quintupled.[17] There is also evidence that the increase in violence was concentrated in urban areas, with African Americans disproportionately likely to be both offenders and victims.[18]

The rise in crime was in some part the unsurprising result of demographic trends at mid-century. A "baby boom" had occurred in the aftermath of World War II, as couples who had put off having

16 Violent crimes are conventionally defined as those in which victims are harmed by or threatened with interpersonal violence. These include rape, robbery, assault, and homicide.

17 Why should we trust these data? First, and most uncontroversially, there is substantial over-time agreement in the rate of homicide reported by both police and mortality statistics. Concerns about police reporting practices do not apply to coroners, yet both sources report a doubling of the American homicide rate between 1960 and the peak of the homicide wave. Second, while independent data on other forms of victimization are unavailable before the first victimization survey in 1973, after 1973 they trend similarly to police data. This suggests that any biases in the police data are minimal (to the extent they existed at all, they were likely short-lived). To explain a quintupling of the violent crime rate between 1960 and 1995, they would have to be impossibly large, sustained, and far-ranging.

18 While crime also rose in rural areas, it generally rose more in cities. In cities with more than a million inhabitants, homicide rates tripled from 1960 to 1970 (a 202 percent increase from 6 to 18.4 per 100,000), while robbery increased six-fold (a 482 percent increase from 133 to 778 per 100,000). By contrast in small cities and towns of less than 10,000 homicide rates *fell* in the 1960s (from 2.7 to 2.6 per 100,000) and robbery rates increased by only 84 percent (from 13 to 24 per 100,000). See Barry Latzer, *The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2015), 122. Apart from being disproportionately urban, the crime rise was otherwise distributed fairly evenly across America's geography, with some regional convergence. See Steve Cook and Tom Winfield, "Crime Across the States: Are US Crime Rates Converging?" *Urban Studies* 50, no. 9 (May 2013). For a discussion of the evidence on crime and race see the conclusion below.

children during the war raced to start families during the prosperity of the postwar period.[19] This led to more crime for two reasons: (1) most crime is committed by young men, so an increase in the share of young people in the population, all else being equal, should lead crime to increase; (2) a larger birth cohort may face more competition upon labor-market entry, stimulating conflict and demand for illicit forms of income generation.[20] In the US case, this demographic explanation seems to fit the shape of the crime wave, which began with a rise in "juvenile delinquency" in the late 1950s and ended in the "great crime decline" of the 1990s, just when the baby boomers were "aging out" of crime.[21]

But the baby boom cannot explain most of the crime rise. Age-adjusted crime rates show that crime rose considerably among all age groups.[22] Why? Standard answers — a loss of political legitimacy,[23] or the rise of a "subculture of violence"[24] — raise more questions than

19 Most Western democracies experienced a spike in crime in the 1960s, a common trend which may be partly explained by similar "baby booms" elsewhere. Note, however, that the *level* of crime in the United States was generally an order of magnitude above levels in these countries, both before and after the spike. See Manuel Eisner, "Modernity Strikes Back? a Historical Perspective on the Latest Increase in Interpersonal Violence," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 2, no. 2 (2008): 288–316.

20 Richard Easterlin, *Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Easterlin also points to institutions of social control being unprepared to handle the larger cohort.

21 Franklin E. Zimring, *The Great American Crime Decline* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

22 The highest existing estimate is that the baby boom explains 45 percent of the increase from 1958 to 1969. Charles Wellford, "Age Composition and the Increase in Recorded Crime," *Criminology* 11 (1973): 63. More conservative estimates range from 16 to 22 percent. James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein, *Crime and Human Nature* (New York: Free Press, 1985): 426; Steven D. Levitt, "The Limited Role of Changing Age Structure in Explaining Aggregate Crime Rates," *Criminology* 37 no. 3 (1999): 589.

23 Gary LaFree, *Losing Legitimacy: Street Crime and The Decline Of Social Institutions In America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Roth, *American Homicide*; Eisner, "Modernity Strikes Back?"; Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

24 Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti, *The Subculture of Violence: Towards an Integrated Theory in Criminology* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967); Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005);

they answer, not least because they are just as plausibly *consequences* of the crime wave. In point of fact, the rise in violence was incubated by the concentrated forms of deprivation that dotted America's urban landscape by mid-century. These were the result of two peculiar features of American modernization: first, the unique character of its agrarian transition; and second, its distinctive fiscal and political geography, which inhibited cross-place redistribution.

Unlike other countries in the developed world, the United States experienced industrialization without large-scale rural-to-urban migration. Its labor force was not drawn from masses of peasants driven from their land, as in Britain. Instead, its nascent urban industries relied heavily on immigrant labor during the nineteenth century, while family farming continued to grow into the early twentieth century.[25] American industry only began to turn to its rural hinterlands for labor during World War I, and especially after European immigration controls came into effect in 1924. The cheapest homegrown source of labor was the African-American sharecropper in the South, whose living standards had been kept low by Jim Crow segregation and labor-repressive agriculture. The initial movement of rural blacks to cities in search of better-paying jobs contributed (along with the Agricultural Adjustment Act) to the collapse of the sharecropping system in the 1930s. This in turn led to a second and much larger wave of migration in the 1940s and 1950s. Around 40 percent of Southern-born blacks moved North in those decades, but the second great migration also had a counterpart *within* the South, as the African-American population of Southern cities also expanded rapidly.

The best available evidence suggests that this migration contributed to an increase in violent crime.[26] Claims that migrants brought

Latzer, *The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America*.

25 Gavin Wright, "American Agriculture and the Labor Market: What Happened to Proletarianization?" *Agricultural History* 62, no. 3 (1988): 182–209.

26 Derenoncourt provides the most thorough assessment of the causal impact of the migration. Among her outcomes are homicide, race riots, incarceration, and police spending. While all are positively affected by black migration from the South (which

with them "a subculture of violence" do not stand up to scrutiny.[27] But nor do accounts which indict a racist backlash from urban whites and their representatives.[28] The main culprit was structural rather than cultural or revanchist. As we will explain below, American labor and housing markets were in no state to absorb the new migrants. Those migrants had little or no wealth of their own due to the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial exclusion from education, jobs, and homeownership. Even if they had wanted to, city governments were in no position to address the resulting concentration of poverty and unemployment in predominantly black inner-city neighborhoods. Meanwhile basic social services were being undermined by the ongoing reallocation of people, jobs, and tax dollars to growing suburbs. It was primarily these factors that led to the explosion of urban crime rates.

The collapse of agricultural employment in the South was massive. In 1910, almost half of working-age black men in America were employed in the agricultural sector. In 1960, less than 8 percent were. Despite some decades of robust job growth, urban labor markets

she identifies using prior patterns of migration and Southern economic conditions), the effect on crime is the largest and most persistent. Ellora Derenoncourt, "Can You Move to Opportunity? Evidence From the Great Migration," online working paper, last accessed October 2019.

27 There are at least three problems with this thesis. First, we observe no comparable increase in homicide after the first great migration. Second, there are no racial disparities in homicide in the rural South, where this culture supposedly came from (Catherine Cubbin, Linda Williams Pickle, and Lois Fingerhut, "Social context and geographic patterns of homicide among US black and white males," American Journal of Public Health 90 [April 2000]). Third, what evidence we have suggests that recent migrants were *less* likely than Northern blacks to commit crime (Charles Tilly, "Race and Migration to the American City" in James Q. Wilson, ed., The Metropolitan Enigma: Inquiries into the Nature and Dimensions of America's "Urban Crisis" [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967]).

28 This argument, like the subculture of violence one, struggles to account for the absence of a comparable crime wave following the first great migration, which arguably led to a greater white backlash (e.g., the "Red Summer" of 1919). Those who point to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements as the object of the sixties backlash must account of the fact that violence began to rise in the early sixties and continued at high levels long after the influence of these movements had waned.

never replaced these lost jobs.[29] The problem only worsened as the flow of migrants increased, and urban economies began to change. Thus, while the first wave of migrants (during WWI and the 1920s) had largely been absorbed into industrial jobs, the second wave was invariably less likely to find work. Moreover, due to the segregated nature of urban labor markets, employment opportunities for the children of first-wave migrants were undermined by competition from the second wave.[30]

Underlying the declining fortunes of rural migrants was a transformation in urban labor markets that was particularly consequential for unskilled men. In key areas like Detroit, deindustrialization began as early as the 1950s, as industry relocated first to the suburbs and then to the Sunbelt.[31] The loss of key manufacturing jobs was exacerbated by automation and rising foreign competition. Figures 5 and 6 show the share (and change in the share) of the working-age male population living in central cities which was neither employed nor in school, disaggregated by skill level, race, and region. Those who dispute the idea that the rise in crime had economic causes commonly cite the fact that 1950 to 1970 was a time of general prosperity.[32] And indeed, over this period, the unemployment rate was low, as was the percentage of the adult population without a job or not enrolled in school. But as these figures show, national prosperity masked severe and, soon, growing difficulties for unskilled and especially black men in central cities. Around a quarter of low-skilled black men between the ages of eighteen and fifty were neither in employment nor in school in 1960 and the number rose over the following decade.

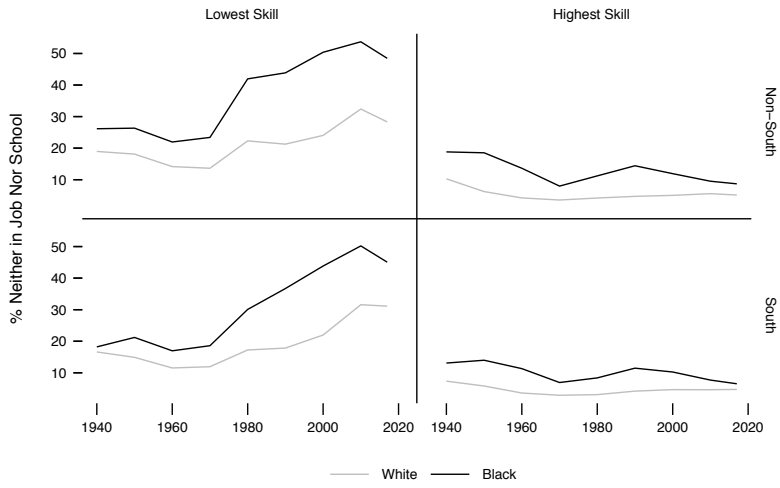
29 Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern, and Jamie J. Fader, "The New African American Inequality," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005): 75–108.

30 Leah Boustan, *Competition in the Promised Land: Black Migrants in Northern Cities and Labor Markets* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016).

31 Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

32 Latzer, *The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America*; Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*.

FIGURE 5: RATES OF JOBLESSNESS, BY RACE, SKILL, AND REGION, 1940–2018



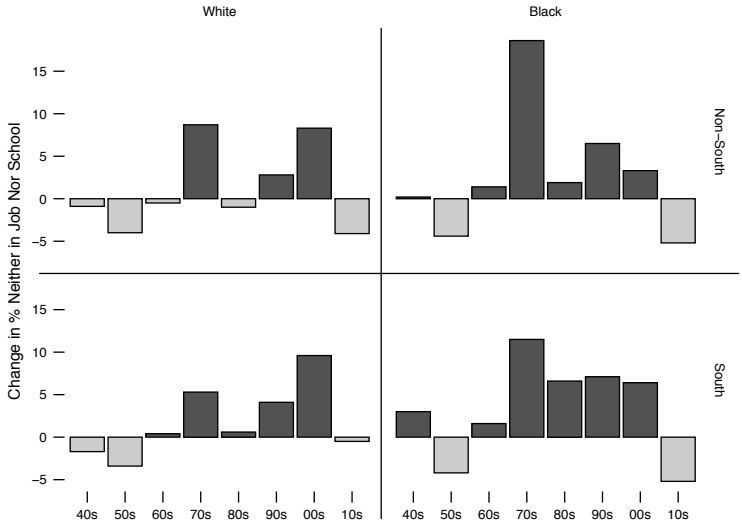
This figure shows the proportion of men aged eighteen to fifty, living in central cities, who were neither in a job nor in school in the census year, disaggregated by skill level and region. "Lowest skill" refers to men whose educational attainment classifies them in the bottom quartile of the adult educational distribution in a given year; "highest skill" refers to men from the top quartile. These data are from IPUMS Census samples.

As the urban economy changed, the social prospects for those who remained in the cities plummeted further. William Julius Wilson provides the standard account of this transformation,[33] but, as our figures suggest, the story he tells begins earlier and is not limited to the Northeast and Midwest. The percentage of low-skill working-age men without a job began to increase rapidly after 1970, and it did so also in the South. While both white and black men were affected, trends amongst black Americans were categorically more severe, such that joblessness would soon become the norm for certain groups.[34]

33 William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

34 In 1960, about 19.8 percent of unskilled, black men between the ages of eighteen

FIGURE 6: CHANGES IN JOBLESSNESS, BY RACE, SKILL, AND REGION, 1940–2017



This figure shows the decade-on-decade change in the share of lowest-skilled men aged eighteen to fifty without a job and not in school, living in central cities, disaggregated by race and region of the country. Note that joblessness begins to increase slightly in the 1960s, and that this increase spans the South and not-South. Data are from IPUMS Census samples.

For many, cities went from being the place one moved to find a job to being the place one left to find a job.

Critically, not everyone was equally able to leave. By the 1960s, as is well known, white Americans began to flee the central city in droves. These decisions are typically attributed to their racist aversions to living alongside blacks. Such aversions *were* commonplace; embodied in restrictive covenants and a violent defense of the "color line." But the growth of the suburbs in this period is arguably better understood as a

and fifty, and living in cities were neither in a job nor in school. By 1970, 21.3 percent were. By 1980, the same figure had almost doubled to 37 percent. And by 2010, a full 52 percent of these men were neither employed nor in school.

case of capital flight, enabled by America's peculiar fiscal geography. In the 1950s federal spending and subsidies redirected investment from cities to suburbs via a boom in highway and home construction.[35] Factories moved to the suburbs to take advantage of the new infrastructure, escape urban union strongholds, and benefit from lower taxes — and many skilled and white-collar workers followed them. Homeowners sought to take advantage of the federal subsidies, but they also moved to avoid the rising property taxes that were to fund citywide social programs won by progressive urban alliances. Thus white homeowners fled not only from areas into which blacks were making inroads, but also from neighborhoods that remained all white.[36] Importantly, many black homeowners also moved, taking advantage of recently won residential desegregation laws.[37] Thus cities became increasingly segregated and poor even as civil rights victories opened up new opportunities for the black middle class.[38]

When these homeowners left the city, they took their tax dollars with them. The loss of revenue starved city-level social services, including education, public housing, and policing. The police, in particular, began to crack down under the strain, compensating for their inability to maintain order (as evinced by falling clearance rates) by exemplary acts of brutality.[39] The result was a vicious spiral: as

35 Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

36 Boustan, *Competition in the Promised Land*.

37 This contributed to a sharp increase in inequality among African Americans. Wilson Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

38 Massey finds that the average dissimilarity index across tracts for twelve major metropolitan areas increased from 77 in 1950 to 81 in 1960 and 83 in 1970 (a high point for the twentieth century). Douglas S. Massey, "Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Conditions in U.S. Metropolitan Areas" in Smelser, Wilson and Mitchel (eds.), *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001).

39 Although we lack comprehensive statistics, the late 1960s appear to have seen a peak of deaths at the hands of the police. Hundreds were killed by police in the decade's urban rioting. One study calculated that the Chicago Police Department alone killed seventy-eight people in 1969 and 1970 (fifty-nine of them African American),

cities hemorrhaged tax revenues, overcrowded schools lost funding, the housing stock deteriorated, and crime rose, the pressure to leave mounted. But the poor (disproportionately black) could not leave. They had no collateral and poor credit, and their access to the suburbs was further limited by zoning restrictions, minimum lot-sizes, and a deliberate lack of public transport.[40] They remained trapped in central cities that were being abandoned by both capital and the state, locked out of the consumption boom enjoyed by the rest of the country.

The result was a rise in violence that was historically unique in its speed and ferocity. Between 1960 and 1980 the US homicide rate had more than doubled to 10.7 per 100,000, the peak for the twentieth century (exceeding the previous peak of 9.7 per 100,000 in 1933). It remained at or around this level until the mid-1990s. These levels of violence were an order of magnitude more severe than anything observed in any other developed country. If crime rates had remained at their 1975–1984 level, the average American would have had an 83 percent chance of being the victim of a violent crime over the course of their lifetime.[41]

Moreover, the explosion of average victimization coincided with high and often rising inequalities in the distribution of violence. Violence rose in rural, urban, and suburban areas, but the rise was concentrated in central cities. Medium to large cities (200,000+) accounted for about half the growth of arrests in the 1960s, including 67 percent of the growth in homicide arrests and 72 percent of the growth in robbery arrests, despite making up only a third of the sample

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one death every 11.9 days. Ralph Knoohuizen, Richard P. Fahey and Deborah J. Palmer, *Police and Their Use of Fatal Force in Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Law Enforcement Study Group, 1972).

40 Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015). Restricting FHA mortgage insurance from poor and black neighborhoods ("redlining") amplified these dynamics. But even without redlining, intergenerational poverty would have denied many the credit or collateral necessary to move to the suburbs.

41 Herbert Koppel, *Lifetime Likelihood of Victimization* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987): 2.

population.[42] Rates of victimization and offending rose for both blacks and whites, but since racial disparities were already high in 1950, the explosion of violence in the 1960s led to unprecedented rates of violence in black neighborhoods.[43] By the early 1970s African Americans made up the majority of both victims and offenders in several categories of violent crime, and homicide had become the leading cause of death for young black men.[44]

Rising urban un- and under-employment, especially for poor black men, together with a deterioration of education and social service provision, meant a reduction in legitimate forms of income generation. At the same time, opportunities for consumption and status attainment in the rest of society were rapidly increasing, leading

42 Arrest data from Uniform Crime Reports include both rural and urban arrests. Crime reports (which the UCR only gives for urban areas) reveal growth concentrated in the larger cities. Cities with more than 200,000 people account for half of all the decennial increase of reported urban crime, 73 percent of the increase in homicides and 80 percent of the increase in robbery, despite making up just over a third of the urban population in the sample. Cities of more than a million (of which there were only six in 1970) account for a quarter of the increase of reported crime and half the increase in robbery, despite making up only 15 percent of the sample. FBI, *Uniform Crime Reports 1960* (US Government Printing Office 1961); FBI, *Uniform Crime Reports 1970* (US Government Printing Office 1971).

43 Racial disparities in homicide victimization were stable over the 1960s (both black and white homicides roughly doubled) but disparities in arrest for robbery, rape, and property crime appear to have risen over the decade, generally peaking in the early 1970s. Gary LaFree, "Race and Crime Trends in the United States, 1946–1990" in Darnell Hawkins (ed.), *Ethnicity, Race, and Crime: Perspectives Across Time and Place* (Albany: State University of New York 1995): 180. The racial disparity in homicide arrests also increased slightly in central cities. Roland Chilton, "Homicide Arrest Trends and the Impact of Demographic Changes on a Set of U.S. Central Cities." in Block and Block (eds.) *Trends, Risks, and Interventions in Lethal Violence: Proceedings of the Third Annual Spring Symposium of the Homicide Research Working Group* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995): 99–113.

44 Reynolds Farley, "Homicide Trends in the United States." *Demography* 17, no. 2 (May 1980): 177. In 1973 victimization surveys identified African Americans as offenders in 67 percent of robberies, 50 percent of rapes, and 29 percent of aggravated assaults, while the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that in 1976 (the first year for which data is available) African Americans made up 54 percent of homicide offenders. Patrick Langan, "Racism on Trial: New Evidence to Explain the Racial Composition of Prisons in the United States." *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 76, no. 3 (1985). We will return, in the conclusion of this article, to these racial disparities, and explore what they do and do not mean.

to additional stigma and frustration for those stuck at the bottom. Finally, the strain on institutions of social control reduced the cost of crime by reducing the risk of getting caught. The net effect of these three changes was to increase the expected returns to illicit means of income generation. Crime began to pay more just as other sources of income dwindled for those who remained trapped at the bottom of deteriorating urban labor markets.

It is easy to see how this could lead to an increase in property crime, but why the rise in interpersonal violence? In part this is because illicit trades (e.g., drugs, gambling, prostitution, etc.) are regulated by violence. That said, at most, about half of the homicides in America's largest cities are related to the illicit economy.[45] The other part of the story is sociological. The collapse of employment led to the collapse of communities, undermining the informal social controls that maintain order under ordinary circumstances.[46] Moreover, both of these changes most affected places in which policing had long been ineffective and brutal. Chronic mistrust and racialized neglect yielded low clearance rates.[47] This further incentivized violence, for people who believe they may be killed with impunity have a strong incentive to resort to preemptive violence.[48] It was the confluence of these circumstances that explains the rise in violence.

To summarize, American cities in the 1960s were characterized by the collision of two sets of facts, one stable and one changing. On

45 Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins, *Crime Is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141. As they also note, illicit trades in other countries are regulated by much less violence.

46 Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," *Science* 277, no. 5328 (August 1997): 918–24.

47 Jill Leovy, *Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America* (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

48 Brendan O'Flaherty and Rajiv Sethi, "Homicide in Black and White," *Journal of Urban Economics* 68, no. 3 (2010): 215–30. O'Flaherty and Sethi demonstrate that when each party knows that the other has little to lose, and faces a low risk of apprehension, expectations of violence quickly become self-fulfilling.

top of an existing pattern of racial discrimination and the economic exclusion of African Americans came the transformation of the urban economy, the continued urbanization of Southern blacks, and middle-class flight. The result was the economic decline of the (central) city, particularly felt in historically black areas, while the rest of the country was prospering. Communities and social services were put under increasing strain, while law enforcement was unprepared for the consequences. The stage was set for an unprecedented rise of violence, which led to the highest homicide rates observed in any developed country in the twentieth century. How America (particularly the American state) would respond was as yet undetermined. We now turn to this response.

PUNISHMENT

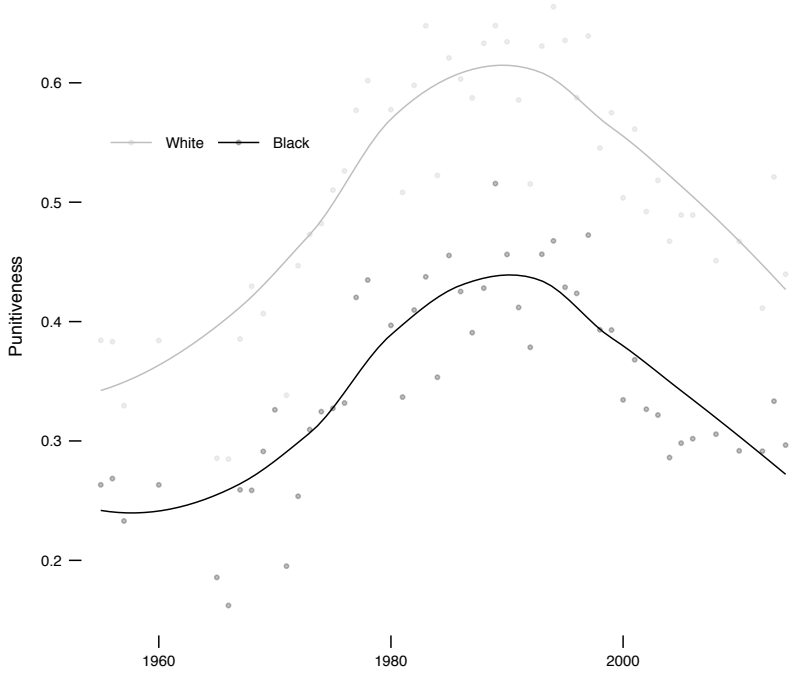
Partisans of the standard story deem the rise in crime an invention of clever politicians. These politicians, the argument goes, used the language of "law and order" to transmute anxiety about the Civil Rights Movement into panic about a fictitious rise in criminal activity. But in the 1960s and 1970s there was nothing for politicians to invent. Crime rose, and it rose to particularly high levels in poor black neighborhoods.

The Public

We know that the public noticed the rise in crime, and responded to it by turning more punitive in its attitudes towards punishment. This point has been made most comprehensively by Peter Enns, who has gathered a large amount of public opinion data from different sources over this period.[49] Previous work on public opinion had studied idiosyncratic questions and often single snapshots in time,

49 Peter K. Enns, *Incarceration Nation: How the United States Became the Most Punitive Democracy in the World* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

FIGURE 7: TRENDS IN PUNITIVENESS BY RACE, 1955–2014



This figure shows trends in punitiveness by race, where punitiveness is defined as the probability that a respondent to a random question from a public opinion poll of the period answers that question punitively. These trends come from roughly 300,000 responses to thirty-nine different questions about crime and punishment, from almost 200 different public opinion surveys administered between 1955 and 2014. Data are from the Roper Center, the General Social Survey, and the American National Election Survey.

but Enns aggregates information from dozens of questions asked repeatedly over this period to estimate the public's punitiveness. He finds that the punitiveness of the American public rose discernibly as crime rose, before falling in the late 1990s as crime, too, began to fall.

To be sure, the vast majority of the American public in this period was white. Thus, a rise in *aggregate* punitiveness is not obviously at odds with the standard story. Enns does show evidence from campaign documents at the time suggesting that politicians were reacting to,

rather than fashioning, the public's views, but one could still object that rising punitiveness might just have been a reaction to the Civil Rights Movement rather than a response to crime.

But, as we have argued elsewhere, there are at least two features of public opinion over this period that do not fit this view.[50]

First, in our own analysis of data similar to Enns's (Figure 7), we find that the rise (and fall) in punitiveness is characteristic of not just white but also black opinion. If the public's punitiveness was nothing but a reaction to the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, it is odd that black Americans, who were the primary beneficiaries of these gains, should also turn punitive. The rise in crime, which hit black communities especially hard (because crime rose to much higher levels) is the more plausible explanation. This interpretation fits recent case studies of black communities in Harlem and Washington, DC, in which it is argued that public panic about rising, high crime rates came to dominate black politics in this same period.[51]

Second, if the standard story were right, over-time trends in white public opinion should mirror over-time trends in the strength of the Civil Rights Movement. As the movement peaked, so should have white anxiety (and thus punitiveness). But these trends do not coincide. Civil rights protests peaked in the late 1960s, declining soon after. The white public's punitiveness, on the other hand, peaked in the mid-1990s, roughly twenty-five years after the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, not long after the height of America's postwar crime wave. This is another reason to believe that crime, and not the conflict over civil rights, drove the public's attitudes towards punishment.[52]

50 See Clegg and Usmani, "The Racial Politics of the Punitive Turn."

51 James Forman Jr, *Locking Up Our Own: The Story of Race, Crime, and Justice in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2017); Michael Javen Fortner, *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

52 White Americans do have noticeably (and consistently) higher levels of punitiveness. In arguing that the Civil Rights Movement did not drive over-time trends in punishment, we are not denying that the long-standing biases of white Americans help explain the state's response. We reflect on this issue in more detail in the conclusion.

Politicians

Observers of the politics of punishment in this period have noted that law-and-order concerns became commonplace among politicians — most prominently among Republicans, but among Democrats too. Historians and social scientists have argued that an emergent law-and-order coalition was cobbled together by politicians with disparate constituencies.[53]

Together, these authors make two major arguments about this period. First, they argue that its protagonists were federal politicians, who engineered the public's punitive turn. In these accounts, it is political entrepreneurs like Wallace, Goldwater, Reagan, and Nixon who catalyzed the racial anxieties of white Americans into demands for punishment. Second, they suggest that where conservatives led, liberals quickly followed. This view is particularly pronounced in two recent books about the period.[54] These authors argue that the liberal agenda was, in the end, not all that different from the conservative one. Both liberals and conservatives endorsed, if only implicitly, long-standing and racist theories about why crime was rising and why it was especially high amongst black Americans. And in response, liberals, like conservatives, clamored only to expand the punitive arms of the state.

On both points, this work overreaches. First, this account gets the causal sequence of the 1960s backwards. The public panicked not

53 Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton University Press, 2017); Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014); Vesla M. Weaver, "Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy," *Studies in American Political Development* 21, no. 2 (2007): 230–65.

54 Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*; Murakawa, *The First Civil Right*. See Adaner Usmani, "Did Liberals Give Us Mass Incarceration?," *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy* 1, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 169–83.

because political entrepreneurs emerged, but because crime rose precipitously. This panic defined the context in which all politicians of this period were operating. Talk of law and order became not just viable, but compelling. And it was in *this* context that the entrepreneurs of the period emerged. As Michael Flamm argues in his history of this period, it was precisely because the American public was growing fearful of crime that the conservative case against liberalism met with such success.[55]

None of this is to dismiss the role of racism in fashioning a new punitive common sense. In selling "get tough" politics to white Americans, politicians profited from racist tropes about black Americans. But note two qualifications. First, as Flamm argues, racism was potent precisely because crime was rising and, especially, because black Americans were disproportionately represented amongst offenders. The racial overtones of political rhetoric succeeded because the white public was panicking about black crime. The public was not panicking about black crime *because* of the racial overtones of political rhetoric. Of course, conservatives pandered, sometimes explicitly, often implicitly, to cultural, moralizing, and racially coded interpretations of these disparities. They rejected the structural interpretations for rising crime and black-white disparities advanced by most liberals of the period. But they did not invent these disparities, or, indeed, invent public attention to them. Second, as Forman and Fortner have both shown, "get tough" politics became political common sense in black communities as well. It is not clear, in other words, that an America shorn of anti-black animus would have been an America without any brand of law-and-order politics. We will have more to say about the role of racism in American punishment at the end of this essay.

Second, while liberals could not avoid responding to people's fears about crime, they initially responded very differently than did conservatives. In the relevant documents of the Johnson

55 Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

administration — the final reports of the Kerner and Katzenbach Commissions, for instance — the liberal view is plain. At root, the enemy is not poorly socialized teenagers, collapsing families, or the pathological choices of the urban poor. The root causes of crime, according to the leading liberals of this period, lay in limited labor-market opportunities for unskilled, young, and especially black men, a predicament made worse by the concentration of these young men in collapsing cities with underfunded public programs and an overstretched, under-resourced, and often abusive law enforcement apparatus.

It is thus no accident that these same documents called on liberals to conceive of the war on crime as a war on these root causes. The report of the Kerner Commission ends with four recommendations to fix urban disorder: expand welfare, expand housing, transform education, and create jobs. The Katzenbach Commission demanded that law enforcement be professionalized, centralized, and aggressively funded, while reminding its readers that the ultimate causes of crime lay in structural inequality. And in arguing this, liberals were right: because the rise in crime was a symptom of the failures of American modernization, its remedy lay in an aggressive expansion of the social-democratic state.

What Success Required

Yet, as this new scholarship on the carceral state emphasizes, liberals *did* fail. Crime rose inexorably in the 1960s, seemingly impervious to a variety of liberal initiatives, and despite almost continuous attention to the issue by the Johnson administration.

To understand liberal failure, one has to first appreciate what success would have required. Consider liberals' choices. On the one hand, they had recourse to the state's punitive arms (police, prisons, and the courts). Both conservatives and liberals agreed that these policies mattered. On the liberal view, however, the crime rate was

additionally (and primarily) governed by a second set of *social* policies: welfare, unemployment, housing, education, and health care. When politicians in the 1960s tried to wage war on the root causes of crime, it was to these tools that they turned.

In the abstract, anti-crime agendas can be usefully classified into the four quadrants that these two dimensions delimit: harsh or hands-off penal policy, paired with expansive or stingy social policy.[56] The conservative position in the 1960s was that the United States needed less social policy (in fact, conservatives attributed crime at least partly to the paternalism of the welfare state) and more punitive penal policy. The liberal argument was that crime required a dramatic expansion of social policy and a modernization of penal policy. What is not often appreciated about the liberal policy agenda is that, to succeed, it required an unprecedented redistributive effort.

This is a critical point, so it bears detailing. In either the punitive or social dimensions, expansion or contraction is generally a matter of dollars spent. This is obviously true of social policy, which mostly consists of redistributing resources, whether in kind or in cash, from rich to poor. But it is also characteristic of penal policy. While there are ways to make police, prisons, and the courts more punitive without spending more money on them (e.g., by cutting programs for prisoners), in general harsher policing, expanded imprisonment, and more efficient courts require more police, more prisons, more judges, more prosecutors, and so on.

Yet the costs of relatively generous social policy will always far exceed the costs of relatively harsh penal policy. The reason for this is simple: penal policy is hyper-targeted. Police arrest only that small fraction of the public that commits arrestable offenses; prosecutors charge that smaller fraction that commits offenses deemed worthy of being charged; and prisons harbor that even smaller fraction of

56 See also Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence* (New York, N.Y: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

the public that is sentenced to serve time. Moreover, contact with the criminal justice system is typically occasional. In contrast, social policy is indiscriminate in both dimensions. To be politically feasible, it must often be universal. Even at its most targeted, all poor people are eligible. And when they are eligible, they are usually eligible for significantly larger fractions of their life: time below the poverty line, while unemployed, if disabled, during childhood, or after retirement.

One will often hear criminal justice reformers argue that it costs $40,000 to incarcerate someone, but only $10,000 to educate a child.[57] The inference is that penal policy is actually *more* expensive than social policy, and thus, that the American state's decision to fight crime with prisons and police has nothing to do with its aversion to redistribution. But while the statistic is correct, the inference does not follow. This is because the denominators are not equivalent. Penal spending is hyper-targeted, because the penal system makes less and briefer contact with the population than does the social arm of the state. And thus, it is much cheaper to build a harsh penal apparatus than to build a generous welfare state.

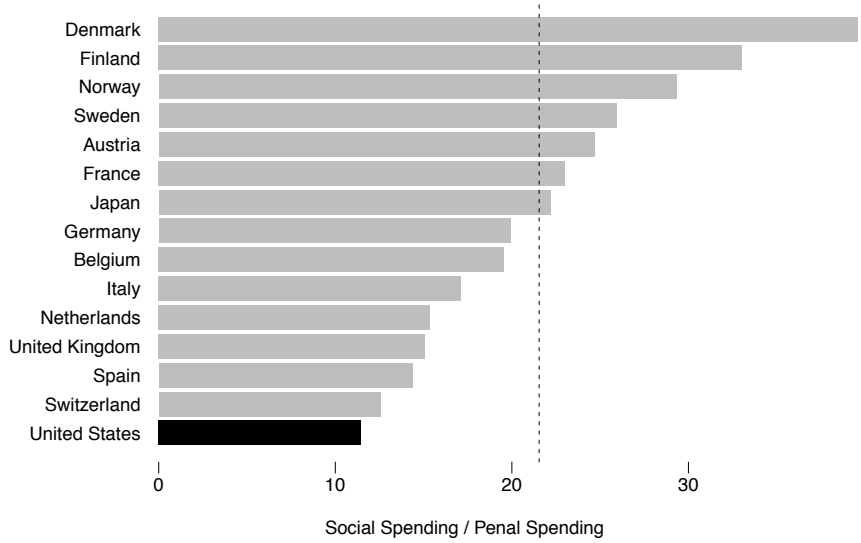
Consider some numbers. The United States combines the harshest penal state in the advanced world with its stingiest welfare state.[58] In the service of mass incarceration, it spends roughly $250 billion a year on prisons, police, and the courts, at all levels of government. This is considerably more than any other state in world history. Yet it also spends upwards of *$3 trillion* on social policy. Even if we count only that fraction of social policy which is spent on the poor (i.e., roughly that fraction which could strictly be tallied as part of the state's war on the root causes of crime), the figure is at least $1 trillion.[59] To wit, the

57 CNN Money, "Education vs Prison Costs," online infographic, last accessed December 2019.

58 See also David Garland, "Penal Controls and Social Controls: Toward a Theory of American Penal Exceptionalism," *Punishment and Society*, 2019; Nicola Lacey, David Soskice, and David Hope, "Understanding the Determinants of Penal Policy: Crime, Culture, and Comparative Political Economy," *Annual Review of Criminology* 1, no. 1 (2018): 195–217.

59 See, for instance, Robert Rector and Vijay Menon, "Understanding the Hidden

FIGURE 8: RATIO OF SOCIAL TO PUNITIVE SPENDING AS A SHARE OF GDP, DEVELOPED COUNTRIES



This figure shows the ratio of social to punitive spending as a percentage of GDP in a sample of developed countries. Data are from the OECD. The classification of social and punitive spending thus corresponds to their definitions.

US government spends at least four and perhaps as much as twelve times more on programs that fight the root causes of crime than on repressing its symptoms.

The point is not at all that the US welfare state is generous. It is well-known that it is not.[60] Rather, the point is that even underdeveloped

$1.1 Trillion Welfare System and How to Reform It" (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, April 5, 2018). This figure is the sum of state and federal spending on all means-tested programs. Because it does not include that fraction of universal spending (e.g. education, unemployment insurance, Social Security, Medicare) that goes to the poor, it underestimates what we are trying to capture here.

60 Alberto Alesina and Edward Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Lane Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

social policy costs more than overdeveloped penal policy. In all other advanced capitalist countries, the ratio of social to penal spending is much higher. As Figure 8 shows, on average, governments in developed countries spend about twenty-two times more fighting the root causes of crime than they do on police, prisons, and the courts. By the OECD's numbers, the ratio reaches almost forty in Denmark; the second-lowest (after the United States) is around thirteen (in Switzerland). The point is that waging an all-out war on the root causes of crime is equivalent to the task of building a large, redistributive welfare state that takes from the rich to give to the poor.

The problem in the 1960s was not even that liberals made no effort in this direction. In fact, liberals were not just verbally committed to policies that Hinton and Murakawa argue they disparaged. They were also committed to these policies in deed. In the 1960s, federal expenditures on social programs grew far more than federal expenditures on police, prisons, and the courts. In 1962, the Kennedy administration's first full year in government, the federal government spent about $13.81 (or 0.37 percent of total spending) per person on punitive programs, and about $837.05 (or 22.5 percent) on social programs (all in 2016 dollars). In 1968, in Johnson's final full year, the federal government spent $17.19 (or 0.36 percent) and $1,367.71 (or 28.8 percent), respectively. In real terms, this amounts to an increase of 25 percent in per capita punitive spending and 63 percent in per capita social spending. And because total spending was increasing significantly over this period, this small increase in per capita punitive spending could equivalently be represented as *a decline* in the percentage of total spending that went to punitive ends of about 2.6 percent (while even in these terms, social spending increased by 28 percent).[61]

These numbers should not be surprising. Many of the major advances in the American welfare state were products of this period (e.g., Medicare and Medicaid, a more generous Social Security

61 Authors' own calculations. Data come from the Census of State and Local Governments, the White House, and usafacts.org.

program, increased federal aid to public education). It is true that the Johnson administration modernized and expanded the state's punitive arms, but in general this was compatible with a genuinely liberal view of the source of social disorder. As the report of the Katzenbach and Kerner Commissions argued, some of the problems of urban crime could be attributed to the fact that existing law enforcement agencies were unprofessional, underpaid, and ignored black victims. In fact, this last complaint was made vociferously by Martin Luther King Jr in a 1965 piece on the Watts riots, writing: "The most grievous charge against municipal police is not brutality, though it exists. Permissive crime in ghettos is the nightmare of the slum family … Because no one, including the police, cares particularly about ghetto crime, it pervades every area of life."[62] Liberals' desire to build a law enforcement apparatus free of these flaws is worth distinguishing from the punitive commonsense that would soon colonize American politics.

Thus, liberals did not fail to imagine what ought to have been done. Nor did they fail to attempt to do what ought to have been done. So why, exactly, did they fail? At root the issue is not one of attitudes or motivation, but *capacity*. The ultimate causes of liberal failure lie outside the state, in the incapacity of the American poor to compel redistribution from the rich. As we argue below, this incapacity was in part conjunctural. The social movements of the 1960s reshaped America, but they sought redistribution from a Johnson administration wedded to imperialist misadventure and to a Keynesian compact that pegged social spending to investor confidence. Yet much more important, we argue, were long-standing incapacities. By the 1930s, America was already well-established as a welfare laggard. The rise in crime that began in the 1960s was the bitter fruit of *decades* of a failed policy response to the problems of American modernization. Ultimately, the explanation of this enduring failure lies in the enduring

62 Martin Luther King Jr, "Beyond the Los Angeles Riot," *The Saturday Review*, November 13, 1965, 34.

constraints on social policy in the United States. And it is here, in these major and abiding limits to redistribution, that lies the key to understanding American mass incarceration.

Guns Or Butter

In the 1960s, left-wing elements inside and outside the Democratic Party were demanding a massive expansion of the welfare state. This was what the crises of the 1960s required, they argued. This is clearest in the exemplary ambitions of the Freedom Budget, which made a federally funded and federally administered jobs program the centerpiece of its policy agenda.[63] But this expansion was not forthcoming, for two kinds of reasons.

First, as the early 1960s turned to the late 1960s, the clout of the two constituencies demanding this expansive social policy, the labor and civil rights movements, were flagging. The labor movement was groaning under the weight of bureaucratization, after having been kneecapped by the McCarthyite attacks of the previous decades. And the Civil Rights Movement never found a way to move, in Bayard Rustin's pithy mandate, from protest to politics.

Their weakness was exacerbated by the structure of the Democratic Party, which was never a social-democratic party on the European model, but a coalition of conservative Southern Democrats and Northern liberals. In the mid-1960s, thanks to the social movements that were bubbling around it, it had mustered something like a social-democratic agenda. But these movements never had more than a tenuous hold on the party establishment itself, which limited severely what they could win.

Second, the Johnson administration worried that redistribution from rich to poor would spook investors. During the boom-time economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson

63 A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, "A Freedom Budget for All Americans: A Summary" (New York, NY: A. Philip Randolph Institute, 1966).

administrations had managed to expand government spending without burdening taxpayers — what Doris Goodwin calls "reactionary Keynesianism."[64] This compact fell apart as the economy began to sputter. In the verdict of Bruce Schulman, Johnson's administration had financed "simultaneous wars against communism and poverty … through a dangerous fiscal sleight of hand."[65] It was only in 1967, several years into both wars, that Johnson finally did ask Congress for tax increases. And when he did, these were mostly to finance the war in Vietnam, in exchange for what Schulman calls "savage cuts in Great Society spending." Social spending was profoundly limited by the demands of the war. Imperialism abroad killed reform at home.

And once the liberal moment of the mid-1960s had passed, any significant expansion of America's social-democratic state was significantly less likely.[66] The labor and civil rights movements declined further. Republican administrations would not even try to fight the root causes of crime, and Democrats' efforts to do so were ever more weak-kneed. The partisan divide on crime thus slowly closed, a trend most visible after the Dukakis debacle and under Bill Clinton in the 1990s. The American welfare state would never grow to do what liberals had hoped but failed to do in the mid-1960s.

A Tale Of Two Exceptions

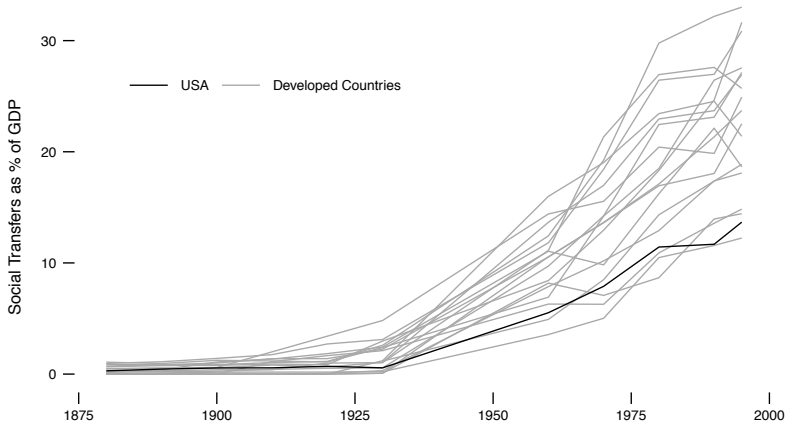
However, the incapacities of the American state were not mainly the result of conjunctural facts about the 1960s. It is tempting to regard this decade as a missed moment, when the federal government failed

64 Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991).

65 Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 2006).

66 This is not to argue that American social programs ceased to grow. As Figure 9 suggests, they did continue to increase in size (as a fraction of GDP). Rather, it is to argue that, with the close of this era, so vanished the prospects for closing the gap to the European model.

FIGURE 9: SOCIAL TRANSFERS AS A SHARE OF GDP, DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, 1878–1998



This figure shows the share of GDP devoted to social transfers in a sample of developed countries, over the course of their development. Data (and definitions) are from Lindert, Growing Public.

to avert mass incarceration. This overstates the case. Less people would be languishing in American prisons had the Left won the battles it lost, but the struggles of the 1960s were not decisive as much as they were illustrative.

By 1960, America was already well-established as a welfare laggard. As Figure 9 shows, the gap between the United States and the rest of the advanced world dates to the first few decades of the twentieth century. This was a period of massive working-class agitation in Europe with no real parallel in the United States. The United States was indistinguishable from other countries in the extent of public social transfers in 1890. In a world with very little redistribution, it spent about 1.3 times what the median developed country did on social transfers (as a percentage of GDP). By 1930, it spent half. This ratio would change very little over the next few decades.[67]

67 Peter H. Lindert, *Growing Public: Volume 1, The Story: Social Spending and Eco-*

As we have argued in this essay, modernization in America had yielded some unique social problems — most notably, the challenge of integrating the Southern, black peasantry into cities that had already passed through an industrial boom, populated by native and immigrant whites. High and rising rates of violence in American cities were a symptom of this problem, exacerbated by the postwar baby boom. These social problems demanded social policy remedies. What should concern us, analytically, is not the specific failure of 1960s liberals to take this path, but the long-standing failure of *prior* and *successive* American administrations to do so. It is the long-run underdevelopment of social policy over the twentieth century that yielded the high violence and harsh punishment that characterizes the United States today.

In short, we are arguing that American exceptionalism in violence and punishment is a symptom of America's exceptional history. America has so many prisoners because its development path yielded some unique social problems, while its political economy prohibits redistribution from rich to poor on the European model. In a sentence, the story of American mass incarceration is the story of the underdevelopment of American social democracy.

The Origins Of Mass Incarceration

Of course, America's carceral state was not constructed during the Johnson years. When Nixon took office in 1968, the incarceration rate was only 102 per 100,000. The seven-fold increase in the rate of incarceration happened subsequently, over several decades. So there is still something left to explain. How does the underdevelopment of social policy explain the metastasis of the American carceral state?

First, one must recognize that this state has not been built by the federal government. It is not the result of any one decision taken by a

nomic Growth since the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

president or Congress. Federal actors may have made some difference on the margins, since they redirected funding, organized research and development, and fought a disproportionate share of the War on Drugs. But most of the federal bills are symptoms rather than drivers of the nationwide punitive turn. States and localities house 88 percent of America's prisoners, employ about 81 percent of American police officers, and spend 79 percent of total money spent on police, prisons, and the courts.[68] Mass incarceration is better understood as the sum of all actions taken at these levels, by a cast of Republican *and* Democratic state legislatures, governors, district attorneys, police officers, and judges.

The failure at the federal level thus matters not because the federal government was the proximate agent of mass incarceration. It was not: neither under Johnson nor under later administrations. Rather, it matters because the persistent failure of the federal government to attack the root causes of crime left the task of managing the rise in crime to state and local governments. In this climate of high anxiety about crime, state and local legislators, mayors, city officials, prosecutors, and sheriffs made careers out of responding to a panicking public.

Of course, one might wonder why local and state governments *all* responded in punitive ways. Could not some of these governments have launched the affirmative, social policy response that the federal government could not muster?

One of the reasons for this is simply institutional. In the division of labor that characterizes American federalism, police, prisons, and the courts are mostly the responsibility of the states and municipalities, while most of the major social programs in American history have been invented and funded at the federal level. When local and state officials were bombarded by panicking electorates, it is no surprise that it was mainly to these tools that they would turn.

However, this is not the whole story. After all, some states and

68 Data on prisoners are from the Vera Institute. Data on police officers are from the Bureau of Justice Studies. Data on punitive spending are from usafacts.org.

municipalities do attempt to craft their own social policies. They can raise taxes and spend in redistributive ways. Thus, another answer is that they were subject to the same constraint that bound the federal government: the absence of a constituency that could force the rich to give to the poor.

But consider, in addition, two other facts that make redistributive policy difficult for states and localities. First, the rich live in certain areas but not in others. Thus, local officials in poor areas cannot raise the kind of revenue that the federal government can. Even if the mayor of Ferguson had the gall to tax and redistribute to fight the root causes of crime in his area, he could never tax San Francisco's billionaires. The perverse consequence of American federalism is that it is those areas in which violence concentrates that have the least resources to fight it at its root. Second, as was evident in the 1960s, the local state is especially vulnerable to the flight of its tax base. The costs of fleeing the federal state are much higher than the costs of fleeing local taxes, since the rich only have to jump across jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., move to the suburbs). This, too, condemns localities to cheap and thus punitive solutions.

RACIAL INEQUALITY

Our argument thus far has explained why incarceration grew and also why America is exceptionally punitive, but we have yet to say very much about inequalities in exposure to police and prisons. Why are certain groups of Americans — and in particular, black Americans — so much more likely to fall foul of America's carceral state? Racial disparities have declined slightly in the last two decades, but even over this period the black-white ratio has never fallen below five. There are few more important questions to pose about American punishment than this one.

One common answer is that these disparities are explained by the biases of police officers, prosecutors, juries, judges, and politicians.

This amounts to the claim that, conditional on having committed an offense, black defendants are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be charged, more likely to be convicted, more likely to receive longer sentences. There is certainly evidence that each of these disparities exist.

Yet, what is relevant is not just whether they exist but how much they can explain. For instance, evidence from federal courts suggests that judges sentence black defendants to sentences that are 10 percent longer than otherwise-equivalent white defendants.[69] One can take this as a rough index of judges' biases, explicit and implicit. But given that the overall disparity in the stock of prisoners is about 500 percent, this would be equivalent to noting that the biases of judges explain only about 2 percent of the total racial disparity in incarceration (10/500 = 2 percent). In fact, our best evidence suggests that biases at every stage, from arrest to sentencing, explain much less of the total racial inequality in punishment than is commonly assumed.[70] One estimate, which compares baseline estimates of offending to disparities in incarceration rates, finds that around 70–75 percent of the black-white disparity in incarceration is explained by the fact that black Americans are more likely to commit criminal offenses.[71]

Here, of course, it is natural to worry that we have no reliable measures of disparities in offending. After all, police reports and arrest records may be prone to racial bias either because police are individually prejudiced (and thus more likely to arrest African Americans)

69 M. Marit Rehavi and Sonja B. Starr, "Racial Disparity in Federal Criminal Sentences," *Journal of Political Economy* 122, no. 6 (December 2014): 1320–54.

70 Robert J. Sampson and William Julius Wilson, "Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality," in *Crime and Inequality*, ed. John Hagan and Ruth D. Peterson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 37–56; Michael Tonry and Matthew Melewski, "The Malign Effects of Drug and Crime Control Policies on Black Americans," *Crime and Justice* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 1–44.

71 Allen J. Beck and Alfred Blumstein, "Racial Disproportionality in U.S. State Prisons: Accounting for the Effects of Racial and Ethnic Differences in Criminal Involvement, Arrests, Sentencing, and Time Served," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 34, no. 3 (September 2018): 876.

or because police departments focus their activities in black neighborhoods (and are thus more likely to come into contact with African Americans). But concerns about racial bias in police data can be mitigated by relying on multiple and independent sources. We know from court records and witness reports, for instance, that the vast majority (roughly 90 percent) of homicides are intra-racial. Arrest records of suspects can thus be reasonably checked against racial disparities (in victimization) derived from coroner's reports. In 1970, for instance, coroners indicate that African Americans were nine times more likely to be murdered as whites, while they were eleven times more likely to be arrested for murder in the same year. By 1980 the ratio had fallen to 5.7 for victimization and 5.9 for arrests.[72]

Furthermore, if cross-sectional disparities in offending between blacks and whites are consistently very large, they are also historically specific. Racial disparities before the twentieth century ran in the other direction. White Americans killed each other at higher rates before 1900.[73] Thus, any explanation of racial disparities in violence must account for their twentieth century provenance, which is but one reason that biological or other racist explanations of these disparities are a nonstarter.

So where do these disparities come from? The arguments of the previous sections furnish an answer. Behind racial disparities in offending lies long-standing inequality in life circumstances. African Americans are overrepresented in crime because they are more likely to live in America's worst neighborhoods, at the bottom of its stretched

72 National Center for Health Statistics, "Table 029: Death rates for homicide, by sex, race, Hispanic origin, and age: United States, selected years 1950–2015" in *Health, United States, 2018* (Hyattsville, Maryland: CDC, 2019). LaFree, "Race and Crime Trends in the United States, 1946–1990." For face-to-face crimes in which victims were able to perceive the race of the offender (which includes most violent crimes) police reports can also be compared to victimization surveys. Here, again, the literature has shown that, for non-drug offenses, these sources are roughly in agreement (Tonry and Melewski, "The Malign Effects of Drug and Crime Control Policies on Black Americans," 6–7; Beck and Blumstein "Racial Disproportionality in U.S. State Prisons").

73 Roth, *American Homicide*, 201–225.

class structure, with few opportunities to escape, and few public resources available for their self-development or safety.

Critics of mass incarceration often ignore crime because they worry that acknowledging it would be to blame mass incarceration on individual choices.[74] But this does not follow. To blame individuals, one must make the additional, nonobvious argument that they are responsible for the antecedent causes of their crime. In a society in which the vast majority of criminal offenders are drawn from the bottom of its class structure and trapped in its worst neighborhoods, this is a risible proposition. Crime is an index of oppression. Blame thus misses the point. It is altogether unfortunate that those who are alive to this oppression would deny its consequences. The Left is not wrong to denounce accounts which blame criminals for crime (or African Americans for their disproportionate representation in the ranks of offenders). Yet nothing in this denunciation requires us to ignore the reality of crime and violence.

This neglect of crime by critics of mass incarceration has costly political consequences. In the absence of serious critical commentary on the issue, conservative common sense has thrived. Most importantly, by leading progressives to misdiagnose the source of racial disparities in punishment, it makes it impossible to wage effective war against them. Racial disparities are mostly not a result of the injustice of biased treatment inside the criminal justice system, but rather the foundational injustice of American racial inequality outside it. The remedy must be equivalently foundational: not merely the retraining of police, prosecutors, and judges, but a redistributive attack on the roots of inequality by race and place.

74 This is particularly true of racial disparities in offending, even the recognition of which is sometimes considered victim-blaming at best, racist at worst (Sampson and Wilson, "Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality."). It is true that such racial disparities are a favorite topic of racists (Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness* [Harvard University Press, 2011]). But recognizing the reality of racial disparities in offending does not make spurious explanations of these disparities any less spurious.

One might argue that racism matters because it has blocked precisely this magnitude of redistribution. Forman suggests this in his recent book on Washington, DC, in which black elected officials failed to win their "all-of-the-above" policy agenda (both social policy and punitive policy) because of the racism of the white establishment.[75] And in fact a host of work notes the unpopularity of American social programs when they are perceived to benefit black Americans.[76]

But this revision does not take the barriers to social policy seriously enough. As we have argued, nonpunitive remedies to American violence demand massive, unprecedented redistribution from rich to poor. In Washington, DC and like cases, what is relevant is not the prejudice of the rich and the white but the powerlessness of the poor and the black. As Stokely Carmichael once quipped, "if a white man wants to lynch me, that's his problem. If he's got the power to lynch me, that's my problem." What African Americans specifically (and poor Americans, more generally) lacked, as the 1960s turned to the 1970s, was leverage over American elites. As the economy sputtered, cities hemorrhaged revenue, states reorganized around powerful suburban constituencies, and the labor and civil rights movements collapsed, the prospects for American social democracy grew ever fainter. In a world in which, somehow, black Americans had acquired new, sufficient leverage, no amount of white prejudice could have stood in their way. Tragically, the same forces that decimated black communities and yielded the rise in violence (deindustrialization, flight of white Americans and many middle-class blacks from city centers) also sapped poor, working-class black Americans of most of their economic and political power.

Given this, how should we think about the causal relevance of race to American mass incarceration? In our view, it matters mostly in ways both less direct and more basic. Race is relevant because it is

75 Forman Jr, *Locking Up Our Own*, 12.

76 Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

our best explanation for the absence of a working-class movement on the American continent, and thus the persistent underdevelopment of American social policy.[77] American slavery and then Jim Crow delayed the proletarianization of African Americans, with the result that they arrived in Northern cities after the first wave of American industrialization, in urban environments in which pivotal, scarce resources (jobs and housing) were hoarded by the first and second generations of established white ethnics. This was an environment destined to yield working-class disunity. Black Americans strove to penetrate well-protected labor and housing markets. It was no surprise that established incumbents would craft caste-based remedies to exclude them. Such strategies were rational, even if suboptimal in the long run.

In this sense, partisans of the standard story are not wrong to link American mass incarceration to American slavery. But they are connected not because slavery established some transhistorical imperative that America be always a land of white domination. Rather, they are connected because the plantation economy tied African-American labor to the land until 1940. Blacks were thus bypassed by America's industrial boom. They are connected also because slavery was largely responsible for an American federalism which assigns law enforcement to those parts of the state least capable of paying the higher costs of redistributive remedies.[78] In the final reckoning, the story of the twin exceptions that have been the subject of this essay starts with this history.

Looking Forward

What is to be done about American crime and punishment today? Remedies run in two domains: criminal justice reform and reforms to

77 Similar arguments can be found in Gary Marks and Seymour Martin Lipset, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2000); Alesina and Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe*.

78 Robin L. Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

social policy. Most of the contemporary discussion has focused on the first. Those on the Left (but also some on the Right) have argued that the criminal justice system has become too overbearing, too harsh, too intrusive, and too punitive. This is undoubtedly true. The American carceral state is degrading and inhumane. Reforms to make it less so — humane conditions of confinement, shorter sentences, easier parole, decriminalization of key offenses, less aggressive policing — are urgently needed.

But there are two important points that the current reform conversation often elides. First, most of the people inside American prisons have committed serious offenses. Overbearing punitive intervention in their lives is an injustice, but so too would be hands-off neglect. A judicious treatment of their problems will require a radical rethinking of the very purpose of the penal system. Sadly, the views of the American left on punishment are often more American than left-wing. Leftists, too, talk of victims' rights, and demand retribution from guilty offenders. These impulses are understandable, but they are also draconian. Those who commit violent offenses are themselves victims of facts beyond their control, whether of inheritance or circumstance. The appropriate response is not to punish or to shame, but to repair and rehabilitate while safeguarding the public.[79] In this process, victims have no position of privilege; they deserve care and compensation for their trauma and loss, but society's debts to them should be paid separately. The specifics might be arguable, but the overall point is that reformers, left and right, have washed their hands of this problem by centering reform efforts on the easy cases (e.g. the nonviolent drug offender). This can actually amplify reigning intuitions about punishment in harder cases, which is where reform efforts will have to reach if they are to be effective.[80]

79 Gregg D. Caruso, "Free Will Skepticism and Criminal Behavior: A Public Health-Quarantine Model," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 32, no. 1 (2016): 25–48; Barbara Fried, "Beyond Blame," *Boston Review*, June 2013.

80 Christopher Seeds, "Bifurcation Nation: American Penal Policy in Late Mass Incarceration," *Punishment & Society*, October 19, 2016, 590–610.

Second, and more importantly, if we are right that the overdevelopment of the American penal state is a symptom of the underdevelopment of the American social policy, meaningful reform is in large part the task of winning redistribution from ruling elites . It will be costly. And there will thus be losers, who will resist it. The end of American mass incarceration is not a technical problem for which there are smart, straightforward, but just not-yet-realized solutions. Rather, it is a political problem, the solution of which will require confronting the entrenched power of the wealthy. In this sense, the task before us is to build the capacities of poor and working-class Americans to win redress from their exploiters. ⊬

Maoists represent the largest and most significant current of revolutionary politics on the Indian left. This essay recaps their remarkable contributions to the history of socialist organizing, but also charts how their perspectives on political economy and strategy have led them into a dead end in the current scenario.

INDIAN MAOISM'S DEAD END

ANISH VANAIK

When Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared in April 2006 that "Naxalism was [India's] single biggest internal security challenge," he was formalizing and giving shape to a brutal counterinsurgency against the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Thirteen years later, the Indian state seems confident that it is succeeding. In April 2018, the Home Ministry reduced the number of districts affected by what they term "left-wing extremism" from over 200 at its late 2000s peak to 96.[1] With much of its top leadership killed or arrested the Maoists, too, have indicated that they are on the backfoot at the moment.[2] The recent change in leadership of the party,

1 There are currently over seven hundred districts in India as a whole, in the mid-2000s there were around six hundred. For data on 2008–11, see "Maoist Data Sheets," South Asia Terrorism Portal, June 23, 2019 and, for data on 2018, see Bharti Jain, "Centre removes 44 districts from list of Maoist-hit area," *Times of India*, April 16, 2018.

2 DJ, "About Changing the Immediate, Main and Central Task According to Changes in the Strength of the Movement," *People's War*, November 2017, 110–111. On the recent surrender of a member of the Central Committee, "CC Circular on Jinugu Narasimhareddy," *People's War*, November 2017, 119–130. Available at http://www.bannedthought.net/India/People'sWar-CPI(Maoist)/index.htm.

from the supposedly more ideologically inclined Ganapathy to the military minded Basavraju, also seems to point to the urgency of the military defense of their bases.[3] We are, perhaps, seeing the end of the third, and most powerful, wave of Maoist recombination since 1967. In order to understand what is at stake for the Indian left, it is crucial to grasp what should be made of the CPI (Maoist) and the thread of revolutionary politics they have represented on the Indian left.

In their broad self-representation and common understanding, the CPI (Maoist) is the most organized and systematic mass force that has stood for three distinctive principles within the history of the Indian left. First, a consistent espousal (in theory and practice) of a revolutionary overthrow of the current ruling class and state. Since its inception in 2004 CPI (Maoist) has, with much justification, claimed that the mainstream left — the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (henceforth CPI and CPM) — has given up on any real commitment to a revolutionary transformation of Indian society. Indeed, this critique of the CPI and CPM has been one of the defining features of the traditions of the Maoists since their break with the CPM in the late 1960s. Second, the identification of the location of that revolution as beginning in India's vast and impoverished countryside, in particular, among peasants. In doing so, the Naxalites outlined a distinctive focus of left-wing organizing. While their theoretical documents still claim that the revolution would be led by the urban proletariat, the progress of the revolution would be through the countryside surrounding cities. Revolutionary practice, therefore, ought to prioritize building a strong base in the rural hinterlands of India. Finally, the preeminence of armed force as a strategy to achieve the revolutionary transformation. The issue of employing violence has a long history within Indian communism, stretching back to the 1920s and perhaps earlier. From 1967 onwards, however, whether in the form of "annihilating class enemies," or as a "protracted

3 Scroll Staff, "CPI (Maoist) appoints military strategist Basavraju as its next general secretary," Scroll.in, November 28, 2018.

people's war," the Maoists have directed time and effort to acquiring and protecting their military capabilities. Any assessment of what is at stake in the forests of Central India, where the CPI (Maoist) is currently taking its stand, must grapple with each of these three elements.

COMMUNISTS, NAXALITES, AND THE CPI (MAOIST): A BRIEF HISTORY

CPI (Maoist) and the "Naxal" groups of which they are one, were a breakaway formation from the CPM. Indeed, the deep roots of the Maoist current within the Indian communist movement can be traced to debates about strategy for the Indian revolution that emerged within communist struggles as early as the mid-1940s.

From the CPI to Naxalbari

The Communist Party of India was established in 1925. Much of its early existence, however, was the fugitive one of an underground organization. It wasn't until 1942, when the Soviet Union joined the Allies in World War II, that the ban on the CPI was lifted. By this point, however the underground CPI had established strongholds in a number of labor and peasant struggles in the country. Among the areas of deepest implantation of Communist activists were the countrysides of Bengal in the east and modern-day Telengana in south India. On the eve of independence, powerful peasant movements — respectively the Tebhaga and the Telengana movements — emerged in these two areas. Both were marked by peasant land occupations and militant struggles against landlords. The eventual withdrawal of both, the first in 1948 and the other, in the face of a brutal repression in 1951, left behind cadre convinced that the turn away from the mass movement had been a mistake. Telengana in particular was an area where CPI cadre mobilized large swathes of the countryside on a program that combined class

and nationalism — opposition to the Nizam,[4] a call to join the Indian nation, and an anti-landlord struggle were harmonized here. From 1947 onwards, the movement had also become an armed struggle. It was here that the earliest articulation of a Maoist line can be found. The Andhra Thesis opposed the insurrectionist and urban-centered line then adopted by the CPI, arguing instead for a path modeled on the Chinese Revolution. It stated in 1950: "Our revolution, in many respects, differs with the classical Russian Revolution; but to a great extent [is] similar to that of Chinese Revolution. The perspective is likely not that of general strike and armed uprising, leading to the liberation of the rural side; but the dogged resistance and prolonged civil war in the form of agrarian revolution, culminating in the capture of political power … Backward communication system, topographic and terrain conditions are exceptionally suited for prolonged guerrilla battles (Chinese way) which lead to the establishment of liberation bases."[5] The armed struggle was brutally crushed by the Indian state, after a panicked Nizam handed over power. This despite the call to join India having been a central plank of the Telengana struggle.[6] By 1950 the CPI swung back to rejecting insurrection and committing to an electoral route to power. A significant minority of CPI activists in Andhra Pradesh (AP) remained convinced, however, that the gains of Telengana had been squandered and a continuation of armed struggle was both possible and desirable.

4 Hyderabad was not formally a part of British India. It was, instead, a princely state under the "paramountcy" of the British. The Nizam was the ruler of Hyderabad where Telengana is located.

5 Cited in Jonathan Kennedy and Sunil Purshottam, "Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 54, no. 4 (2012): 835. Kennedy and Purshottam argue, on this basis, that the Telengana struggles ought to be viewed as the real progenitor of the Maoist current within Indian communism. While there is clearly some justification for this, it should be pointed out that at this stage the Maoists currents remained keen to operate within the undivided CPI. The Naxalbari rebellion, in 1967, however, led to a split away from the CPI tradition altogether.

6 Incidentally, the entire panoply of counterinsurgency measures employed by the Indian state today — the use of paramilitary forces, the use of local militias, extrajudicial killings, and herding villagers into temporary camps — were all in evidence even at this point.

When a split initially occurred within the CPI, it was not directly over these questions of the correct route to revolution in India. The CPM split off from CPI in 1964, arguing for opposition to the national bourgeoisie and therefore a distance from Indian nationalist aims in the India-China war.[7] Underlying this somewhat arcane split, whose continuance to this day is inexplicable in terms of programmatic or strategic differences between CPI and CPM, was the Sino-Soviet split in the global communist movement. The CPM was the pro-Chinese section. Across the country, and especially in AP and Bengal, the more militant activists were drawn into the CPM. The substantive question which had dogged the communist movement — that of revolutionary strategy — remained unresolved. Many radicals had sided with the CPM on the assumption that there would be a rethinking of the near exclusive emphasis on electoral gains. Electoral success, however, appeared to be accumulating. In the Bengal assembly elections of 1967, the CPM emerged as the second largest party after the Indian National Congress, and in alliance with the CPI and a number of smaller parties, stitched together a post-poll United Front that installed the first non-Congress chief minister of West Bengal. The CPM headed the powerful Home Ministry — in charge of the police and internal security in the state.

This was the backdrop to the uprising in 1967 from which the Naxalite movement derives its name. It began in Naxalbari, a village located in Northern Bengal, as a rural insurrection intended to pressure the CPM into a more radical line.[8] Much to the party's consternation, dis-

7 The 1962 war between India and China was over the issue of the border. The Chinese claimed that the current border, fixed by a colonial power, ought not to be respected and a different border, more reflective of historical and cultural circumstances be established. Chinese armed forces, clearly militarily superior, advanced well into territories that India claimed for itself before retreating to the current effective borders.

8 The Maoists are often collectively called "Naxals" or "Naxalites" in recognition of their admiration for this uprising. This admiration functions as a wedge between the CPI-CPM tradition on the one hand, and groups that have adopted a Maoist concentration on peasant struggles. In this broad usage, the term includes parties with diametrically opposed political strategies. For instance, CPI (Maoists) have consistently called for boycotts of election, while CPI (ML) Liberation have, since the mid-1990s, adopted a largely electoral strategy. Both these parties (and a number of others) trace

trict-level leaders and cadre began a series of land occupations and ratcheted up the demands of their peasant organizations. Initially, the CPM leadership, desperate to remain in coalition but also wary of losing active cadre, attempted a balancing act: instructing the police to go easy and trying to mediate between peasant groups and the rural establishment. In 1967, however, the contradictions proved too sharp. A series of clashes between the rural units of the CPM and the police unleashed a wave of repression, sanctioned by the leaderships of both the CPI and CPM. And this was followed by the expulsion of the local-level party leaders who had participated in the insurrections. Prominent among these local leaders was Charu Mazumdar, who quickly emerged as the main strategist of the growing movement. The expelled activists eventually coalesced into a variety of groups, constituting a nationwide vertical rift within the CPM.[9] Here already, there were differences and fractures. By 1969 the largest group organized itself into the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) headed by Charu Mazumdar. Most present-day Naxalites trace their history back to this party. A second group — the Andhra Pradesh Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (APCCR) — was formed by veterans of the Telengana struggle. Convinced of the need to break with the CPM, they nevertheless maintained their independence from the CPI (ML). A third major branch, tracing its criticisms of the CPM to before the events at Naxalbari, coalesced around the journal *Dakshin Desh* and the figure of Kanhai Chatterjee. Eventually, in 1975, they formed the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). This rift — between the Maoists on the one hand and the CPI-CPM on the other — is the more substantive one within the Indian communist movement, one centered on unresolved questions about the strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution.

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their histories to the Naxalbari uprising. I will be using the term Naxal/Naxalite in this broader fashion and the term "Maoist" to refer to those currents which believe in a peasant-driven armed struggle.

9 In no state, however, did a majority of activists join the CPI (ML) or other Naxalite groups. AP, where 40 percent of CPM cadre moved into one of two Naxalite groups was by far the place where the largest proportion of CPM cadre moved towards Naxal formations.

The First Phase of the Maoist Movement 1967–1972

After the initial rapidly suppressed eruption in Naxalbari, insurgencies sprang up in a number of geographically separate parts of Bengal, Bihar, and AP. Rather than being a unified movement, these are best viewed as a series of loosely linked and locally led actions inspired by the initial uprising. Ostensibly coordinating (most of) these movements was the newly formed CPI (ML), led, until his death in police custody in 1972, by Mazumdar. The geography indicates this locally driven character: in 1968–9, the forested tribal belt of Debra-Gopiballavpur in southwest Bengal, was not in practical terms connected to the movement developing in Musahari, Bihar at the same time, or to the slightly later movement among peasants in the plains of Birbhum in central Bengal in 1970–71. That in turn, was only loosely linked to the students' movement in Calcutta in 1970. While the movement which had begun autonomously in Srikakulam, AP moved towards Charu Mazumdar's "annihilation line" by 1969, in Telengana the activists of the APCCR struck out on a different track. By 1971, the CPI (ML) and most of the movements led by it had collapsed — pressured externally by brutal state repression and internally fractured by differences about strategy, theory, and clashes of personality. Given the constitutively local character of the rebellions in the first phase, however, it is not surprising that the scattered seeds of this period could eventually sprout in Bihar and AP.

The political practice of the original CPI (ML) combined fervent evocation of revolutionary spirit with reliance on armed action by small groups of cadre. The subjective dimension was considered the key obstacle to the Indian revolution. In the Naxalite view, it was the absence of revolutionary leadership that was holding the masses back from throwing off their shackles. While the struggle in Naxalbari began as militant land grabs, by the time of its suppression Charu Mazumdar was increasingly prone to emphasise the "annihilation of class enemies" as the centrepiece of the strategy for revolution. It was

described by him as "the higher form of class struggle."[10] This involved the creation of armed squads that would assassinate landlords in the hope that these acts of defiance would spur the masses into revolution.

From quite early on, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also shaped the CPI (ML). Approbation and disapproval by the CCP were centerpieces of factional struggles.[11] The Naxalites also borrowed a vocabulary from the CCP. Srikakulam, for instance, was presented as the "Yenan" of India.[12] Most troubling of all, however, was the borrowing of a piece of theorization from the Chinese Revolution: that India was semifeudal and semicolonial. The revolutionary process, therefore, had to be directed against feudalism and colonialism, with peasants and agrarian struggle becoming the central pillars of a movement led by the working class. In practice, this amounted to an isolation from the urban working classes.[13] Very little emphasis was placed on urban organizing and even those initiatives in this direction were aimed at shifting cadres from the city to the countryside. The initial upsurge at Naxalbari, then, was little more than a proclamation of the existence of a current of militant struggle, critical of the CPI-CPM emphasis on electoralism, and committed to a leadership which would set its sights at a more ambitious horizon. The dominance of romantic imagery and the underdevelopment of analytical perspectives in this phase, however, have ensured that it remains recoverable for a variety of political trajectories.

10 Quoted in Sumanta Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari* (Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 2008), 127.

11 The Chinese Communist party had in 1970 criticized the reliance on assassinations and the neglect of mass activity, but the criticism was suppressed within the original CPI (ML). This became a major bone of contention within ML groups. See Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, 227–231.

12 Yenan, the culmination point of the Chinese Communist Party's Long March in 1935. It became the base area from which the CCP was able to build and launch their future offensives. For the abiding importance of this vocabulary in Maoist practice see Robert Weil, "Is the Torch Passing? The Maoist Revolution in India," *Socialism and Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2011): 27–34.

13 Asit Sen and Parimal Dasgupta, both prominent trade union leaders who were among the founders of the CPI (ML) were soon to be expelled from the party for dissenting from the sole focus on organizing in the countryside.

Dissarray and Reconstitution 1971–1998

The second phase of the development of the Naxalite movement is usually understood as a period of bewildering splintering and degeneration. It is possible, however, to trace the firming up of a Maoist program and some of the most significant interventions in rural class struggle to these years. Shedding the near-anarchistic adventurism of the earlier period, a much more serious development of the Maoist strategic vision was charted at this time.

By now, most Naxalite groups in this period were engaged in some form of mass work. The complete neglect of this in the previous phase was condemned. The imagery of a spark lighting the prairie fire was replaced by rural organizing, the creation of large mass fronts that worked with other organizations, and concrete interventions in ongoing class struggles in the countryside. Rather than rely on spontaneity, the initiative of peasants and landless workers in the countryside had to be developed through patient organizing. So successful was this trajectory that a significant base in cities also began to emerge, at least in AP.

The opposite lesson was also learned by the successors of the CPI (ML): that the technical prerequisites to carry out a military strategy — guerrilla or otherwise — had not been taken into account.[14] Over a period of time, this view congealed into the idea that the Indian revolution would take the form of a protracted people's war. Maoist groups were now more focused on training up a fighting force. They perfected the ability to capture weapons from police and paramilitary forces. They were also able to gain expertise in the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) — partly through learning from other banned outfits that routinely used explosives like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE).

The two key geographical areas of operation during this phase — Bihar and AP — display striking convergences. In both these regions

14 Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari,* 311–312.

the most successful Maoist groups combined elements of over-ground mass mobilization and underground armed struggle. In both areas, opposition to the violence of landlords as well as to exploitative conditions of work were the cornerstones of the struggles.[15] This built up a core support base among landless workers and poor peasants from Dalit and backward castes. In both places, Naxalite parties were seen with genuine regard and affection, not least for their ability to fight and defeat landlord-sponsored militias (Table 1). Indeed, without defeating the armed might of upper castes and landlords, no possibility of retaining the gains won through movements was possible.

TABLE 1: LIST OF MILITIA ORGANIZED BY DOMINANT LANDLORDS IN BIHAR[16]

Name of Sena	Caste Affiliation	Year of Formation
Kuer Sena	Rajput	1979
Kisan Suraksha Samiti	Kurmi	1979
Bhoomi Sena	Kurmi	1983
Lorik Sena	Yadav	1983
Brahmarshi Sena	Bhumihar	1984
Kisan Sangh	Rajput, Brahmin	1984
Kisan Sevak Samaj	Rajput	1985
Sunlight Sena	Pathans, Rajputs	1989
Sawarna Liberation Front	Bhumihar	1990
Kisan Sangh	Bhumihar	1990
Kisan Morcha	Rajputs	1989–90
Ganga Sena	Rajputs	1990
Ranvir Sena	Bhumihar	1994

15 Bela Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 15 (April 9, 2005) and K. Balagopal, "The Maoist Movement in Andhra Pradesh," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 29 (July 22, 2006).

16 Prakash Louis, "Class War Spreads to New Areas," *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 26 (June 24, 2000): 2206.

In the forested, tribal portions of Central and Eastern India, too, the strategy of the Naxalites was rooted in struggles for higher wages and the rights of Adivasis to collect and use minor forest produce.[17] These formed a template of activities that CPI (ML) People's War, a splinter of the original CPI (ML), implemented to great effect in the forests of Northern AP, Jharkhand, and Chattisgarh. In short, this was the period in which Naxalites first rooted themselves in the lives of Adivasi communities.

Alongside these gains, however, two trends were causes for concern. First, the degree of violence by Naxalites against other left groups saw a notable uptick. The splintering of the movement gave rise to turf battles and narrow differences over line often degenerated into horrific and senseless violence.[18] Second, among most Maoist groups, some degree of opportunistic cadre and petty corruption also emerged. This was a by-product of the major means that had evolved for Naxal groups to fund themselves.[19] From this period onward, the key means of funding their operations came from levying charges on petty contractors — to allow them to operate in areas where Naxals were strong. This created myriad opportunities for fraud and defalcation. But by the mid-1990s, a more serious problem had begun to emerge. For reasons rooted fundamentally in the agrarian political economy of this period, Naxalite groups were finding themselves unable to sustain class struggle in the plains of Bihar and AP. At the same time, the costs of internecine disputes and violence directed against them by opponents continued to rise.

Two kinds of responses emerged. From the mid-1990s, CPI (ML) Liberation — with its bases in Eastern India — shifted towards mass,

17 Adivasi (lit. original/ancient dweller) is the umbrella term employed by the various aboriginal and forest communities across the country.

18 Bela Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar" and K. Balagopal, "The End of Spring?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 34 (August 25, 1990).

19 K. Balagopal, "People's War and the Government: Did the Police Have the Last Laugh?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 9 (February 28, 2003).

electoral politics.[20] In contrast, the 1998 merger of CPI (ML) Party Unity and CPI (ML) People's War to form the CPI (ML) People's War Group (PWG) represented the beginnings of a second trajectory — the consolidation of Maoist groups and a reemphasis on armed struggle as the most critical revolutionary strategy. The period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s is usually presented as a time of disarray and disastrous internecine conflict between the different Naxalite groups. There is a deep truth to this. In retrospect, however, it was also a moment in which Maoist groups had had notable successes in establishing a base in the countryside — albeit temporarily held and in regions that were among the most backward in the country. It was also the period in which different groups acquired the forms of expertise and strategic capabilities exercised by the CPI (Maoist) today.

Third Phase: 1998–Present

The establishment of PWG was followed by a merger in 2004 of the Maoist Communist Centre of India and the PWG to create the CPI (Maoist). The merger immediately boosted the armed capacity of Maoist groups and allowed them to develop a region of Central India in which operations could be coordinated and extend freely.[21] The military strategy was now much more firmly to be relied upon. While exact counts are hard to come by, estimates are that at its peak CPI

20 This article will not examine the trajectory of CPI (ML) Liberation. In broad outlines, they have a base in Bihar, a significant and still-growing influence among students at various universities, and punch above their weight in public discussions and social movements based on a few articulate leaders. They have not, however, been able to move towards a significant electoral or organizational presence outside Bihar or in the trade union movement. This was neither the first nor the only group from the ML tradition to have shifted to over-ground politics. It is, however, the most significant.

21 Apart from combining the forces of a number of groups in the region, the new party acted as a pole of attraction to other minuscule groups which have since merged with, or coordinate actions with, CPI (Maoist). The most significant of these include sections of CPI (ML) Janashakthi and CPI (ML) Naxalbari.

(Maoist) had somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 armed cadre.[22] This fighting force is called the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA). The PLGA has 6,500–7,300 guns and expertise in the use of IEDs.[23] It operates across nearly ten million hectares of forest land.[24] A portion of it, the Dandakaranya forest in the southern Chhattisgarh, is considered a Liberated Zone — one in which the Indian state does not operate freely and is dominated by the Maoists. Forests in Jharkhand form the other area of relative strength. Bihar remains an area of operations, though with less organizational capacity. AP and Telengana have been more or less abandoned. The shift in the most important bases also represents a shift towards hills and forests as opposed to agrarian plains as their major theater of operations. The activities of the Maoists are funded largely through contractors and companies operating in their areas of strength. They have successfully raised wage rates for the forest produce sold by Adivasis to petty contractors — most significantly the tendu leaf used to make *beedis*. In turn, the trade of the contractors is organized by the party for which a cut is extracted.[25] While this petty production is their major source of income, the party also derives funds from levies on larger, more identifiably capitalist, enterprises operating in the area.[26] CPI (Maoist) has reaffirmed the characterization of India as "semifeudal semicolonial" and outlined a strategic perspective of "protracted

22 Eric Scanlon, "Fifty-One Years of Naxalite-Maoist Insurgency in India: Examining the Factors that Have Influenced the Longevity of the Conflict," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 6, no. 6 (2018); John Harriss, "What is Going on in India's 'Red Corridor'? Questions about India's Maoist Insurgency," *Pacific Affairs* 84, no. 2 (2011); Gautam Navlakha, "Maoists in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 22 (June 3, 2006). Navlakha also suggests that there are between 25,000 members of militias and 50,000 village-level members.

23 Navlakha, "Maoists in India," 2187.

24 Scanlon, "Fifty-One Years of Naxalite-Maoist Insurgency."

25 Bert Suykens, "Diffuse Authority in the Beedi Commodity Chains: Naxalite and State Governance in Tribal Telengana, India," *Development and Change* 41, no. 1 (January 2010).

26 "Wikileaks India: Essar Pays Protection Money to Maoists in Chhattisgarh," *Economic Times*, September 6, 2011.

people's war." In doing so, this initiative represents the most logical continuation of a strategy framework sketched out in the late 1960s with innovations that nevertheless remain true to the original vision. The rest of this essay will draw up a balance sheet of the successes of the CPI (Maoist) in this phase based on their strategic vision and the political economy from which it derives.

THE STRATEGIC VISION

The strategic perspective of the CPI (Maoist) most clearly distinguishes it from other streams within the Indian Communist movement and this, therefore, is where the assessment should begin. The vision is encapsulated by the phrase "protracted people's war." Its documents argue that the revolution in India must begin, as it did in China, in the places where the state is weak.[27] This is because of the relative weakness of revolutionary forces and because of the prevalence of noncapitalist relations of production. It is only in remote places that guerrilla action by the party can defeat the state's armed forces. A combination of geography — the inaccessible terrain — and political economy — the sharp "feudal" contradictions which allow for the creation of a firm and reliable base — make this possible. Building on the initial success in these guerrilla zones, the expulsion of the state is expected to lead to the creation of secure strategic bases and eventually to the creation of liberated zones, where the state is absent and people's government can emerge. From these zones, recruitment, resources, and increases in cadre will lead to the conversion of a guerrilla army into a standing liberation army. Over a period of time, it is this liberation army that will enable the seizure of power through an encirclement of the cities where the state is at its

27 The material in this paragraph is drawn from the document entitled *Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution*. This is one of the basic documents of the CPI (Maoist) and was created at its inception in 2004. This and all other Maoist documents referred to are available at bannedthought.net

strongest. Given the present weakness of revolutionary forces and the formidable technical strength of the opposing ones, the conflict will be a protracted one. For the foreseeable future, the Maoists suggest, the struggle will be to establish strongholds in the hilly and forested areas. In the plains, because of their accessibility to the state, "power will be … very unstable and … [ebb and flow] in a wave-like manner."[28] Within the guerrilla bases and liberated areas, "New Democratic" tasks will be carried on — prefigurative exercises in people's government, education, and economic justice. It is understood that "Since these areas are politically, economically and socially very backward, the Party should pay special attention to develop the consciousness of the masses and also on the education of the masses."[29] Support for concrete local demands where they fit with general aims is necessary to build up the longer-term vision of overthrowing the Indian state. This is a long-term strategy that places military preparedness at its core and builds elements of mass mobilization around it. The feverish optimism of Charu Mazumdar and the naive imagery of a prairie fire lit by a single match has been firmly set aside. A more hard-nosed improvement in operational capabilities and military training have taken their place. With over fifteen years since the creation of the party, what is the balance sheet of this vision?

One clear outcome, in contrast to the preceding period, has been the abandonment by Maoist groups of mass-based open struggles in the plains areas. In practice, the vision of the protracted people's war has intensified the focus on building areas of strength in the deep forests. One of the direct consequences has been the shrinking of the movement in areas of historic strength — in the plains of Bihar and AP. A concentration on building strength in the forest has, in effect, amounted to a restriction to the forest and an abandonment of some of their key gains in the second phase: a base among agricultural workers, small peasants, and students, and a formidable presence in

28 *Strategy and Tactics,* 66.

29 *Strategy and Tactics,* 65.

the cultural life of these areas. Work in the plains is of minimal importance and the strongholds of the Maoists have now clearly shifted to the forested and hilly parts of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

In the areas they do control, CPI (Maoist) has been involved in establishing a Janatana Sarkar which consists of village- and area-level Revolutionary People's Committees. Among other things, these governments and committees try to introduce better farming techniques, ensure education, rudimentary public health initiatives, and fair wages.[30] The support for the Maoists in the region, however, has come over a prolonged period of organizing and fighting for tribal rights and livelihoods.[31] More recent and most important, however, has been their role in preventing the incursion of mining and extractive industries in these mineral-rich areas. At this point, the Maoists are deeply embedded in the lives of Adivasis in Central India and their struggles for livelihood and respect.[32] It would appear, then, that a base in the plains has simply been swapped for a base in the forests and hills. Has this trade-off been worth it? Has this shift provided a secure base from which to expand into nearby regions? While efforts to expand into relatively remote and thickly forested Orissa seem to have yielded some gains, events in Bengal suggest the opposite. Participation in, and armed support for, a 2008 movement against land acquisition being carried out by the CPM-led Left Front government in Lalgarh — in western Bengal — catapulted the Maoists to prominence

30 More detailed firsthand descriptions of the operations of the Janatana Sarkar can be found in Gautam Navlakha, *Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2012), 131–135 and Varavara Rao, "Janatana Sarkar: An Alternative Model of Development" in *Revolutionary Violence Versus Democracy: Narratives from India*, ed. Ajay Gudavarthy (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2017).

31 Nandini Sundar emphasizes this important role that has been played by Maoists in Chhattisgarh. Nandini Sundar, *The Burning Forest: India's War in Bastar* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2016), 53–63.

32 In this sense, both the "sandwich theory" that Adivasis are trapped between the Indian state and the Maoists, and the reading of the Maoist insurgency as completely congruent to tribal struggles are unsatisfactory. The Maoists are neither instrumentally manipulating Adivasis, nor can it be denied that the long-term perspective is not one restricted to Adivasi emancipation.

in the state.[33] In that instance, the Maoists declared support for their opposition — the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in the elections. Soon after the elections, the TMC directed intelligence operations and targeted strikes against the Maoists that resulted in the suspicious death of the commander of operations in Bengal — Kishenji.[34] Since then, the presence of the Maoists in this Adivasi region has been minimal.[35] Another question that could be posed is: has the new base allowed the Maoists to retreat and advance from plains areas in the wave-like manner they outline? The experience of AP-Telengana is instructive.[36] As has been pointed out above, undivided AP was one of the historic strongholds of the Communist movement, in particular, of its Maoist wing.[37] From the early 2000s, two successive chief ministers of AP authorized tremendous escalations of operations against the Maoists.[38] Prominent among the usual set of counterinsurgency measures was the employment of specially trained police forces — called Greyhounds — who were effectively granted impunity for human rights abuses. By 2007, the Maoists were themselves admitting the serious setback to the movement in AP.[39] By 2010 or so, CPI (Maoist) was in full-

33 Somewhat prematurely, Robert Weil referred to Lalgarh as a Hunan of India. Weil, "Is the Torch Passing?," 32.

34 There were widespread allegations that the official story of killing Kishenji in a gunfight was a fabrication and that he had been arrested, tortured and executed. Despite travelling with an armed squad, he was the only person killed in that operation. Surbak Biswas, "Fake encounter theories surround Kishenji's death," *Hindustan Times*, November 26, 2011.

35 In the most recent general elections, much of this belt has voted for the far-right BJP.

36 In 2014, erstwhile AP was bifurcated into two states — one retaining the name Andhra Pradesh and the other called Telengana.

37 Much of the top leadership of the CPI (Maoist), including the present and former general secretaries, are from AP and Telengana.

38 During this period, two sets of peace talks were organized — though neither came to fruition. In between, the People's War Group nearly assassinated the then–chief minister Chandrababu Naidu. Balagopal, "People's War and the Government" and K. Balagopal, "Have We Heard the Last of the Peace Talks?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 3 (March 26, 2005) tell the story of these events.

39 "Interview with Ganapathy, General Secretary, CPI (Maoist) in the Background of

scale retreat in AP. There are still no signs of a reversal of these losses. In both Telengana and AP the Maoists continue to be on the backfoot, mostly able to carry out occasional spectacular armed action in areas bordering their forest strongholds in Orissa and Chhattisgarh.[40] Very little over-ground work seems ongoing. Regardless of claims to the contrary, the long-predicted revival of the Maoists in Telengana and AP has not manifested.[41] At this point, the lessons from AP are not just about the ability of determined counterinsurgency to push back the Maoists, but that the state has the ability to hold on to these gains in the medium term. Indeed, particularly striking about the current phase of counterinsurgency by the state has been the involvement of the central government in coordinating intelligence and military action. Under the impact of this onslaught, the overall picture points towards an impending encirclement of the Maoists.[42] It does not

the Successful completion of the Congress of the CPI (Maoist)," *People's March* 8, no. 7 (July 2007).

40 In Telengana, reportedly no security forces have been killed since the formation of the state. More activity seems to be happening in AP, though again, these are considered relatively "feeble" efforts at revival. This is according to a website that is closely integrated with the security apparatus: "Maoist Insurgency: Assessment 2019," South Asia Terrorism Portal.

41 "Interview with Ganapathy. See also "About changing the immediate, main and central task according to the changes in the strength of the movement," *People's War: Theoretical Organ of the Central Committee* (November 2017), 102–108. The latter seems suggest that revival in Telengana has been put on the backburner.

42 Based on maps available at South Asia Terrorism Portal, "Maoist Insurgency: Conflict Map." The response of the Indian state to revolutionary movements, from as early as 1948, has been both consistent and brutal. Counterinsurgency has involved state support for militias organized by dominant classes and mass collective violence upon supporters of the Maoists, including extrajudicial killings and evacuating villages and herding villagers into camps. The third element of this counterinsurgency is the use of paramilitary forces. The latter's sophistication and the quality of weapons and technology at their disposal have varied, more or less in step with the military capacities of the Maoists. A particular target of paramilitary forces has tended to be the Naxal leadership. Rather than placing them on trial, the strategy seems to be to employ torture and extrajudicial killings to eliminate key leaders. These are often staged as armed "encounters" — the prevailing Indian euphemism for extrajudicial killings. A relatively minor, but not insignificant, element of the strategy has also been minimal ameliorative measures that generate a flow of funds and, often unrealized, legal entitlements to civilians in areas in which Maoists operate. The most recent period is distinguished from earlier ones, not by the presence of these elements, but by the degree of

appear that their current strategy, viewed in its own terms, has given the Maoists either a secure base of operations for expansion, or the lithe capacity to reappear in different places once they are pushed back from some. Quite the contrary, the loss of long-standing areas of strength — particularly in AP and Telengana — suggests that the current phase, for all the impressive consolidation and growth in numbers of cadre, is nevertheless one of shrinkage.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

The strategic perspective of the Maoists derives from a characterization of the Indian political economy pithily encapsulated in the phrase "semifeudal, semicolonial." It is based on this characterization that the peasant masses have been identified as the "main force" of the Indian Revolution. Paradoxically, as has been pointed to above, the present period has been one in which the Maoists have had to retreat from some of the key areas in which they were leading agrarian struggles. This is perhaps the most important dilemma the party itself recognizes. Holding up this understanding of India's political economy to scrutiny is, therefore, a necessary supplement to the analysis of the strategic trajectory of the party.

The characterization of India as semifeudal recognizes the emergence of minor enclaves of capitalist development. Nevertheless, this is understood to be a weak and dependent capitalism that has "not altered the basic structure of agrarian class relations."[43] Its key markers are claimed to be "land concentration in the hands of a few landlords and kulaks," a swelling of the number of landless agricultural laborers by leaps and bounds, and the prevalence of bonded

coordination and support offered by the central government. Previous rounds of counterinsurgency tended to be shaped much more by state governments. The previous lack of coordination offered Maoists options for convenient retreat. See Kennedy and Purshottam, "Beyond Naxalbari" and Niranjan Sahoo, *Half a Century of India's Maoist Insurgency: An Appraisal of State Response,* ORF Occasional Paper 198 (June 2019).

43 Central Committee (P) CPI (Maoist), *Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution*, 16. All direct quotations in this paragraph and next are from this text, 14–17.

labor. Control over small peasants is exercised through "servitude and personal subordination … to the feudal forces," private armies, and exploitative usury and trade conditions that ensure that extra-economic coercion of various sorts constitute the main means of surplus extraction. The caste system and the most significant prevalent forms of women's oppression are seen as manifestations of feudal social relations. The Indian state, utterly beholden to these feudal classes, is thought singularly unfit to achieve even a modicum of formal equality or democratic functioning. The semicolonial characterization argues that direct British imperialism has been replaced by a concert of foreign powers who engage in the exploitation of the Indian people as a whole. The elements of the big bourgeoisie that have emerged in India as well as the actions of the state are viewed to be in the service of imperial interests. Consequently, the Maoists identify four major contradictions in Indian society: "between imperialism and the Indian people; between feudalism and the broad masses; between capital and labour; and contradictions among the ruling classes." The first two are the most important and, of these, the one between feudalism and the broad masses "is the principal contradiction at present."

In one version or another, the mainstream of the Maoist movement has cleaved to this characterization of Indian reality since 1967. The phrase "semifeudal semicolonial," borrowed from the Chinese Communist Party's characterization of China from 1939, has generated a characteristic set of emphases within the Maoist movement. For one, there is an understanding that the revolution would be a two-phase process, the first of which would establish a "New Democracy."[44] The primary task of this first stage would be to break the elements of extra-economic coercion that retard economic development in the country, and generate a new cultural milieu rooted in the principle of human equality. Improvement of a stagnant agriculture and

44 Nomenclatural differences aside, this seems to differ little, in practice, from the understanding of the CPI and CPM that the first stage of the Indian revolution would establish a People's Democracy.

rectification of a casteist and patriarchal social order are the main New Democratic tasks. In line with this understanding, one of the great strengths and successes of the Maoists has been their strident activism on issues of caste and gender. In both Bihar and AP, the Maoists were at the forefront of anti-caste movements — in cultural terms as well as through land-redistribution efforts. Studies suggest, in fact, that the struggle over *izzat* (respect) for Dalit and lower-caste groups that was the most successful and durable element of their political activity in the 1980s and early 1990s.[45] Women, too, are recruited in large numbers in the PLGA and given prominent positions in the Jananta Sarkar. To be clear, within the party and in the areas of its operation, unpardonable discrimination and violence on grounds of gender and caste do persist. The Maoists have, however, been both sensitive to many of these facets and attempted to act on them, in line with the New Democratic revolution they envisage. Things get more complicated, however, when feudalism is examined in terms of production relations. According to the latest census data, about 65–70 percent of the Indian population resides in rural areas. The distribution of land, however, is tremendously skewed. As Table 2 shows, about 82 percent of rural households are either landless or have only marginal farms. These amount to just under 30 percent of the total area owned. Medium and large farmers, however, while only 2 percent of the rural population, own 24 percent of rural land. Nor is Indian agriculture a particularly dynamic portion of the economy. Given that two-thirds of the population resides in rural areas, only about 17 percent of the Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy is contributed by the agricultural sector.[46] Reports of deep agrarian distress have been regular for over a decade now and there seems

45 Bela Bhatia, "The Maoist Movement in Central Bihar" and K. Srinivasulu, "The Caste Question in the Naxalite Movement," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 21 (May 27, 2017).

46 About 29 percent is in industry (of which 17 percent is manufacturing) and 53.9 percent comes from the service sector, "Press Information Bureau," Government of India, Ministry of Finance, http://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=186413.

that little is being done about it.

TABLE 2: SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS BY SIZE OF LAND HOLDING[47]

Category of land ownership	Percentage distribution of households	Percentage distribution of area owned
Landless (<=0.002 ha)	7.41	0.01
Marginal (0.002-1.00 ha)	75.41	29.75
Small (1.00-2.00 ha)	10.00	23.53
Semi-medium (2.00-4.00 ha)	5.01	22.07
Medium (4.00-10.00)	1.93	18.83
Large (>10.00 ha)	0.24	5.81

For the Maoists, stagnation in Indian agriculture is a direct result of the prevalence of semifeudal relations of production in the countryside. In turn, this underdeveloped agriculture is unable to supply the surplus that would generate a more robust industry-based capitalist accumulation. A program of radical land redistribution would under these circumstances generate three things: the surplus for a higher trajectory of growth in India, a more just distribution of land to most of the rural population and, by attacking the source of their power, the destruction of the political stranglehold of feudal classes on the economy.[48] In short, the classical agrarian question had never been addressed by the Indian bourgeoisie and this accounts for the backward state of affairs that prevail in the Indian countryside.

This characterization of Indian agriculture, however, is hard to sustain. Quite the contrary, the consensus among analysts is that

47 *Household Ownership and Operational Holdings in India,* NSS Report no. 571 (GoI: New Delhi, 2015), 25.

48 "Keval Sashastra Krishi Kranti dwara hi Krishi Sankat se Kisanon ko Mukti Milegi," (pamphlet issued in Feb. 2019), 4. http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/index.htm. The title translates as "It is only through armed agrarian struggle that farmers can escape the agricultural crisis."

capitalism dominates Indian agriculture, though of a sort that hasn't led to appreciable land concentration or proletarianization.[49] Henry Bernstein's judgement that agrarian surpluses have become less important for the non-agrarian economy also seem well borne out for India.[50] Instead, an agriculture with increasingly expensive and marketized inputs and relatively unstable and meager productivity, is combined with an industrial and services sector which has little incentive to develop agrarian productivity — or even large-scale agribusiness.[51]

Upon a longer view, the peasant sector seems to be undergoing a glacial but quite discernible process of differentiation. Among the 75 percent of marginal farmers, for instance, incomes from agriculture are a decreasing portion of their income.[52] Wage work in rural areas, despite being hard to come by, is increasingly important. Petty commerce and retail are another income source of growing significance.[53] Land remains an important resource for these peasants even

49 Jens Lerche, "The Agrarian Question in Neoliberal India: Agrarian Transition Bypassed?" *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, no. 3 (July 2013); Barbara Harriss-White and Alpa Shah, "Resurrecting Scholarship on Agrarian Transformations," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 39 (September 24, 2011), and Deepankar Basu and Amit Basole, "Relations of Production and Modes of Surplus Extraction I: Agriculture," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 14 (April 2, 2011).

50 Henry Bernstein, "Is There an Agrarian Question in the 21st Century?," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 27, no. 4 (2006).

51 Lerche, "The Agrarian Question," suggests that agribusiness growth and corporate agriculture has been a relatively small and restricted portion of the agrarian economy. Nor have they led "a general pauperization of all agrarian classes." He is arguing explicitly against the characterization by Utsa Patnaik, "The Agrarian Crisis and Importance of Peasant Resistance," *People's Democracy* 30, no. 5 (January 29, 2006). A qualified acceptance of Patnaik's position is held by Deepankar Basu and Debarshi Das, "The Maoist Movement in India: Some Political Economy Considerations," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, no. 3 (July 2013).

52 S.S. Jodhka, "Revisiting the Rural in 21st Century India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 51, no. 26–27 (June 25, 2016).

53 In addition, between 50–100 million workers are conducting circular migrations to cities and back. Alpa Shah and Barbara Harriss-White, "Resurrecting Scholarship on Agrarian Transformations," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 39 (September 24 2011): 15.

as it supplies nothing like an adequate income.[54] More and more peasants cling to smaller and smaller plots as a crucial lifeline in an increasingly marketized agrarian economy: the bottom of India's agrarian hierarchy is being swelled by these numbers.

It is in what is happening at the top of the rural hierarchy that the most effective repudiation of the semifeudal hypothesis can be found. Apart from a few and shrinking bastions, old landlords — the only plausible claimants of a dominant feudal class — are relying less than ever on land and agriculture. Indeed, most studies indicate that older landlord families across the country have abandoned land as their main source of wealth, turning to a variety of other rural and urban commercial or financial enterprises, and even salaried work.[55] Equally, forms of social domination and deference have been substantially loosened, often replaced by contractual relations. While caste violence against Dalits and the rural poor remains brutal and horrific, this is often the vengeance of upper and dominant castes against an increasingly assertive Dalit politics and a loosening of economic dependence.[56] Even as agricultural holdings are getting more skewed, this is not manifested in the concentration of land at the top. The old image of dominating landlords no longer holds true.

Even more difficult for the Maoists, however, has been the fact that the place of erstwhile landlords in the rural hierarchy, has often been taken by middle and rich peasants from the backward castes. In fact, empirical analyses have indicated a strategic wall Naxalites have hit repeatedly. In both Bihar and AP, in the late 1970s and 1980s caste-based struggles and class-based struggles were relatively easily reconciled.[57] In both places, as was mentioned above, they had notable

54 Shah and Harriss-White, "Resurrecting Scholarship," 15.

55 John Harriss, "Does Landlordism Still Matter?," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, no. 3 (July 2013). Also S.S. Jodhka, "Non-farm Economy in Madhubani, Bihar: Social Dynamics and Exclusionary Rural Transformations," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 25–26 (June 2017): 18.

56 Anand Teltumbde, *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2010).

57 Bela Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar"; George Kunnath, *Rebels*

successes in confronting landlord violence and empowering Dalit and landless villagers. The presence of armed party cadre and organizers was crucial to emboldening Dalits in their demands and in weathering the violent retaliation that came from upper castes and landlords.

By the 1990s, however, partly as a result of their success, the Maoists were confronting a very different rural scenario. Middle and rich peasants became the major employers of agricultural labour in Bihar in particular.[58] This new circumstance prompted a gradual shift in Naxal strategies, toward deemphasizing the antagonism between Dalits and landless laborers on the one hand and the groups now at the head of the rural hierarchy — the middle and rich peasants who were often from non-Dalit backward castes. In both AP and Bihar armed struggle against the state came to be emphasized and relative peace between workers and the middle peasants who employed them was sought.[59] In both AP and Bihar, this was a period of disillusionment with the Maoists among Dalit groups. Movements organizing Dalits along caste-lines emerged and splits within Maoist parties on the caste question were also manifested.[60] The destruction of the agrarian strategy of the Maoists was not the simple outcome of the state's

from the Mud Houses: Dalits and the Making of the Maoist Revolution in Bihar (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2012); K. Srinivasulu, "The Caste Question"; A. Gudavarthy, "Dalit and Naxalite Movements in AP: Solidarity or Hegemony?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 51 (December 17, 2005).

58 George Kunnath, *Rebels from the Mud Houses,* 31–36. For AP, Jostein Jakobsen, "Disappearing Landlords and the Unmaking of Revolution: Maoist Mobilization, the State, and Agrarian Change in Northern Telengana" in *Social Movements and the State in India: Deepening Democracy?* (eds.), K.B. Nielsen and A.G. Nielsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

59 Abhay, a leader of Party Unity, is quoted by the sociologist Bela Bhatia as suggesting that "However, one disadvantage of wage struggles is that they are often partly directed against small peasants who employ wage labour; this narrows down the support base." Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar," 1549 fn. 26. Kunnath finds something similar: Kunnath, *Rebels from the Mud Houses,* 137–144. K. Srinivasulu points to a similar dynamic, but with greater involvement of the state in support of dominant agrarian elites for AP. Srinivasulu, "The Caste Question." In all these situations, conflicts between people and the state rather than class conflict within the countryside had to be emphasized.

60 K. Srinivasulu, "The Caste Question"; A. Gudavarthy, "Dalit and Naxalite Movements in AP."

determination to crush them. A genuine barrier to further maturation of the movement emerged in the shifting rural political economy.

Confronted by this barrier in the countryside, the Maoists have also found themselves unable to establish a place in the bourgeoning cities and small towns of India. This neglect is of course primarily an outcome of the Maoist strategic perspective. Urban tasks are a distant and secondary matter whose significance will rise in the final stages of the protracted people's war. Conspiratorial and underground work has not been conducive to establishing a wide presence in trade unions or being able to join the struggles of the growing urban working class. In fact, at various points of time, particularly the People's War Group in AP was able to establish a serious foothold in human rights organizations and literary circles. Inevitably, however, the treatment of these mass organizations as feeders for the underground movement or as secondary to armed struggle has provoked protests, splits, and exits.[61] More significantly, the base of the Maoists among urban trade unions is negligible compared to even the mainstream CPI and CPM.

This subordination of mass work — crucial to any urban program — to armed struggle is further compounded by the complete rejection of democratic politics as a potential arena of mobilization. While the criticism of the CPI and CPM as having completely subordinated radical politics to electoral considerations is well grounded, the Maoist rejection of electoral politics even as a means to sharpen and strengthen

61 The instance of AP is usually cited here. The impressive public mobilizations, and public response to the peace negotiations between People's War Group (PWG) and the state in 2004 pointed to the robust presence of PWG in civil society organizations. They also received petitions from numerous social organizations during the process of negotiations. On the aboveground struggles in AP, see K. Balagopal and MK Reddy, MK, "Forever 'Disturbed': Peasant Struggle of Sircilla-Vemulawada," *Economic and Political Weekly* 17, no. 48 (November 1982). On the peace negotiations, K. Balagopal, "Have we Heard the Last of the Peace Talks?" Mention should be made of the mass organization of the then-underground, CPI (ML) Liberation — the Indian People's Front (IPF). Despite splits within it on the usual accusations of manipulation and restraint by the underground wing, Liberation was able to utilize the IPF to launch an overground party. CPI (ML) Liberation now largely functions as an over-ground, mass-political force. On this and other mass organisations in Bihar see Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar."

mobilizations is short-sighted.[62] So much so, in fact, that Naxal groups have a history of a disastrously limited view of electoral forces. We have seen, for instance, the outcome of their disastrous support to candidates of the Trinamool Congress (TMC). In practice, this isolation from the electoral arena of everyday practice has also meant that the Maoists as an organized force have played a negligible role in the central struggle before the Left in India today — against the rise of the fascistic forces of Hindutva. Little besides strident declarations of the BJP and RSS's fascism has been possible for the Maoists.

In practice, the urban reach of the CPI (Maoist) is severely limited. There exists some sympathy for the Maoist cause and a network of safe houses and temporary shelters in cities.[63] The phrase "urban naxal," employed by the current BJP government to arrest and intimidate a variety of urban intellectuals, is rich with irony.[64] The individuals swooped up by the investigations might have varying degrees of sympathy and connection to the party. These are figures of real courage and have been present in joint fronts on numerous issues — from students' movements, to legal support, from building opposition to the mining contracts in Central India, to Dalit questions. But they do not indicate

62 In theory the CPI (Maoist) considers electoral politics a tactical question with strategic importance (I am grateful to Serohi Nandan for this input). In practice, however, in most places they call for a poll boycott and prevent electoral activity. In the few exceptions, as discussed, their actions have been even more counterproductive. As a recent study has shown, where there is an electoral force with ethnic or "subaltern" leadership, CPI (Maoist) seems less able to carry out sustained activity. Kanchan Chandra and Omar Garcia-Ponce, "Why Ethnic Subaltern-Led Parties Crowd Out Armed Organizations: Explaining Maoist Violence in India," *World Politics* 71, no. 2 (April 2019).

63 A number of Maoist leaders — older members of the politburo and central committee — have been picked up from cities where they had come, usually for some kind of medical treatment.

64 In June 2018, five activists — teachers, lawyers, and organizers — were picked up from the cities of Nagpur, Mumbai, and Delhi. They had all been involved in organizing an annual Dalit procession near Pune at the start of the year. The eventual charges brought against them included plotting to assassinate the prime minister. A few months later, in August 2018, five other civil rights activists were arrested as part of the same case. The police allegation against these ten was that they were members and crucial intermediaries for the CPI (Maoist).

implantation in working-class organizations and everyday bread-and-butter struggles. Indeed, as has been widely pointed out, the phrase "urban naxal" has been useful for its imprecision — its applicability to any intellectual activity opposed to the current regime. Rather than a specific attempt to unearth and neutralize Maoist urban organization, the larger purpose seems to be to drive progressive movements of all sorts — the Dalit movement, environmental movements, and others — away from connection to any Marxist left.

The Maoists have no serious base within what they identify as the capitalist portion of the Indian economy. Urban work has repeatedly gone through cycles of efflorescence, breakdown, and retreat. Committed to underground work and insistent on feudalism being the primary contradiction, the Maoists have found it impossible to achieve systematic implantation in the urban sectors of the Indian economy. Thus, the theoretical leadership of the working class in Maoist theory, or even their documents on the urban program, have remained dead letter.

The shifts of the Maoists from the plains of Bihar and AP to the hills of Chattisgarh, Orissa, and Jharkhand, then, should not be seen as a mere strategic retreat. In effect, a substantially different political economy operates in these predominantly Adivasi and forested areas. For one, much lower levels of peasant differentiation prevail in these tracts. Second, the state appears either in the guise of the forest department official, or as land acquisition in order to open up mines and extractive industries. The former is a violently despised department for its exploitative, aggressive, and high-handed approach to administering forest areas and the latter provokes universal antagonism driven by the loss of culture and livelihood. The idea that the current political economy is one that pits the state against the entirety of the people holds true in these parts in a more uncomplicated fashion than it does in others. There is, however, no lever of power here from which to launch even an expansion into the countryside — where a substantively different political economy holds — let alone encircling the cities.

WHY DOES THE ML TRADITION PERSIST?

With a political-economic perspective rejected by most of the current Marxist scholarship on India and a strategic perspective that has led to a dead end, key elements of the Maoists' political analysis of India seem decidedly misplaced. In fact, I have argued above that the consolidation of Maoist parties in the third phase, and their control of forest areas in Central India, obscured a qualitative shift and contraction in the ability of the Maoists to intervene in a politics of revolutionary transformation. The obvious question remains: why, despite these drawbacks, has the ML movement persisted for over fifty years?

A number of answers to this question are plausible. One approach, with undoubted merits, is to point out that the Maoists have tended to find successes in regions that their political-economic and strategic perspectives have had some validity. The parts of Bihar and AP where they were active in the 1980s could reasonably be described as areas in which defeating landlord power through violent struggle was the critical task. Similarly, the forest areas of Bastar — some of the most backward parts of the country — are currently primed for an influx of mining and industrial firms. The polarization of the entire community on one hand, and the state on the other, is real and ongoing. Here objective conditions underlie Maoist organizing successes. The mistaken belief that these could be launching pads to create a broader all-India revolution is well illustrated by the lack of success of the Maoists elsewhere.

In Punjab, for instance, one of the most advanced agricultural regions of the country, despite the long-standing presence of numerous Maoist currents, very little purchase has been found to build up a serious base. Bengal, where the Left Front government carried out limited but game-changing land reforms in the 1970s was inoculated from serious Maoist activity until the CPM initiated land acquisitions and suppressed peasant movements in Singur, Nandigram, and especially Lalgarh in the mid-2000s. Finally, as political scientists Kanchan Chandra and Omar Garcia-Ponce have

demonstrated, where "subaltern-led political parties" precede their presence, the ability of Maoists to create a base has been severely restricted.[65] In regions with more institutionalized democracy or different coordinates of the underlying political economy, the Maoists have, in fact, not been very successful.

A second source of continued strength for the Maoists has been the vacuum left by the rightward drift of the CPI-CPM tradition. The mainstream left remains a crucial presence in large trade unions and in peasant and workers' struggles across the country. However, the perspective of the Left in these movements has been stolidly quietist and compromising. Indeed, since the 1990s, not a single mass movement has been launched and led by the Left on any issue; whether against the momentous acceleration of the capitalist free market after 1991, or the rise of Hindutva after 1992. With the modest horizon of electoral power being its definitive political aim, the mainstream left had long abandoned all space for militant struggle aimed at social transformation. In fact, as mentioned above, in Bengal they even attempted to implement a neoliberal industrialization. Since then, a steady and comprehensive eclipse of the mainstream left has proceeded apace with few signs of recovery or even spirited opposition to engulfing senescence. Maoists have repeatedly been able to rely on the demoralization of communist cadre and a demonstrably resolute commitment to transformative politics. CPM cadre in AP were, of course, the earliest recruits to Naxalite parties in the 1960s. In subsequent periods too, however, Maoists have successfully attracted or outflanked CPI and CPM cadres in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chattisgarh as they have built up their own presence. The steady sclerosis of the mainstream left, then, has formed a second source of ongoing strength for Maoists.

A third source of the longevity of Maoists currents, and most specifically their call for armed resistance, is the culture of violence that pervades rural (and even urban) India. Social movement activists are

65 Chandra and Garcia-Ponce, "Why Ethnic Subaltern-Led Parties Crowd Out Armed Organizations."

regularly murdered for raising even elementary democratic demands, seeking information about mining operations under Indian law, or asking for the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. This is not to mention the depressingly regular reports of caste-based violence, often directed against any expressions of community pride or assertion by Dalits. Most recently, violence against religious minorities has also mushroomed in a number of places across India. These are not always forms of violence that are generated from production relations. Indeed, the reorganization of production relations and declining landlordism have been factors driving these forms of violence. But they also sprout from deeper historical roots. The colonial state never successfully exercised a monopoly on legitimate violence and the Indian state has an uneven record of demilitarizing the countryside. Enforcement of legal norms against the wishes of dominant communities in the countryside has been patchy with local police and judiciary, often linked by community or other ties to offending elites. In short, while production relations have been shifting towards a stagnant capitalism, a culture of violence, often rooted in caste hierarchies, pervades Indian politics. Recourse to violence — both defensive and offensive — is unsurprising in such a milieu.[66] The assumption that armed struggle can become the core practice of a revolutionary transformation does not, however, follow.

66 In this sense, the criticism of Maoists that condemns them for the employment of violent means is beside the point. Some of the successes of Maoists have been underwritten by the use of arms and it is hard to imagine this being the case otherwise. The criticism that the use of violence attracts a lumpen element independent of the political program seems impossible to verify and vaguely grounded. The closely related argument, that the recourse to armed struggle has itself led to internecine factional killings, also seems much less common in the current period of unification. That an emphasis on armed struggle as the primary means of political struggle is a strategic dead-end as has been pointed out above. However, this is less to do with some inherent character of violent means, than with the lack of political possibilities available in the areas of Maoist strength. Moralistic decrying of violent means by critics of the Maoists is as much a mistake as the strident celebration of violent means as the Maoists are themselves often wont to do.

Finally, it should be pointed out that Naxalite forces have been among those within the communist sphere that have most successfully been able to combine issues of status and land-reform for Dalits. In both Bihar and AP, the major gains of the Naxalite movements are, in fact, best understood as the ability to address issues of dishonor and humiliation faced by Dalits and securing material gains for agricultural workers. The gains from Naxalite land reform have, of course, proven more fleeting than the escape from forms of caste subordination in the village. At the same time, the wall hit by the Maoists on this question — of how to unite middle peasant and agricultural workers riven by both caste and class antagonisms — remains an abiding question for the communist movement.[67]

Apart from attracting some of the most dedicated cadre, and launching struggles among the most downtrodden sections of the Indian countryside, the history of Maoist practice has, over the fifty years of its existence, contributed some concrete principles and illustrated some of the unsolved dilemmas confronting the communist movement.

CAN THE ML TRADITION PROVIDE AN ANSWER?

The brief answer is no. While Maoists in the Adivasi belt of Central India have fought a heroic defensive battle in staving of land acquisition in some parts, a downward spiral appears to be in place. The area of operations for the Maoists is steadily shrinking in the face of coordinated attacks by various state and Central government forces. The military odds seem stacked even against their medium-term survival.

This should be a matter of concern for the Left around the country. The Naxal tradition, despite their fractious sectarianism and misconceived analysis, counts among its ranks some of the most dedicated,

67 The inability of the BSP (a party that mobilizes Dalits) and the SP (a party whose core constituency are backward-caste middle peasants) to durably unify for even electoral purposes is indicative that this is a wider problem that has confronted political formations in the Indian countryside.

sensitive, and sacrificing cadre anywhere in the communist movement. The formation has been committed to militant organization of the rural poor and launching struggles against the state and oppressive class forces. Among their historic contributions must be counted a number of state schemes launched to win over their support base in AP, the defeat of the upper-caste militias in Bihar and a critical role in the battle of Dalits for respect in both these states — not to mention their similar and ongoing role among the Adivasis in Central India.

This government is unlikely to even attempt negotiations with the Maoists. All signals point to an eagerness on the part of this regime to carry through a bloodbath. Nor is the experience of the Maoists with negotiations a pleasant one. Historically, the AP government utilized periods of ceasefire and negotiation to ferret out Maoist strongholds and launch definitive offensives once negotiations broke down. More recently in 2010, the AP police murdered the politburo member — Azad — who was engaged in talks with civil society activists as a prelude to future discussions with the state. Prospects of a negotiated settlement seem negligible.

Meanwhile, left forces around the country are at their lowest ebb. Reeling from the election victory of the BJP and a rising crescendo of nationalist hysteria, the CPI and CPM seem paralyzed and the nonparty left minuscule. Nevertheless, the only hope for a just and peaceful resolution is a revival of left forces and, more importantly, an anti-Hindutva movement led by the Left. The major aim of such a movement would be to defeat the fascistic agenda of the ruling BJP. One of its fringe benefits might be that the outright military denouement to the current standoff between the Maoists and the state might be avoided. The appeal of such a movement must be for the Maoists negotiate terms to move towards aboveground organizing and for the Indian state to hold back from the violent solution they are contemplating. So far there no signs of its development.

Thanks to Serohi Nandan and Avishek Konar for their comments.

This paper offers a research agenda for class analysis, meeting the new situation of this century with multidimensional investigations of inequality and with global analyses of capital-labor relations. Particular attention should be given to ecological inequality, the heterogeneity of world labor, and to the symptomatic meanings and political implications of current middle-class discourse, in the Global South as well as the North.

AN AGENDA FOR CLASS ANALYSIS

GÖRAN THERBORN

It was a time when a glade in in the somber forest of capitalism became visible, opened up by the Vietnamese and other anti-colonial movements in the South and by the anti-colonial war movement in the North, by African-American rebellion and the Civil Rights Movement, by the French quasi-revolution in May 1968, the Hot Autumn in Italy in 1969, by the Unidad Popular in Chile, the breakout of feminism. This was the time of insurgent Marxism. Class analysis became a central part of it, searching for the social forces capable of carrying the world through the glade, beyond capitalism. Class cartography was developed in a number of countries. In Europe, the most elaborate efforts were made in West Germany, by a Marxist collective calling themselves *Projekt Klassenanalyse*. Neo-Marxist class theory was first developed by the Greek-French political scientist Nicos Poulantzas, from the Althusserian milieu of novel Marxist theorizing, whose *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales* appeared during the May days in Paris.

This was the time when Erik Olin Wright, in his own words "fell into Marxism," "choosing to stay" after his revolutionary chess film as

a Harvard undergraduate.[1] During his years as a graduate student of sociology at Berkeley in the 1970s he worked out the book, *Class, Crisis, and the State* (1978), which soon became the landmark of Marxist class analysis of the period. Ever since then, in contemporary Marxist class theory Wright's works have towered over the field, progressing through explicitly auto-critical revisions of his basically consistent line.[2]

His major theoretical contribution was his analyses of the multidimensionality of class, through concepts of "contradictory class locations" and of different class "assets," property, authority, skills. It emerged as a solution to the "boundary problem" in Marxist class theory of the time, where to draw the line between the working class and other classes or strata of employees. There was a field of competing definitions, between a broad one basically including almost all employees of capital, and a narrow one of manual workers in material production. Characteristically, Wright did not see this as an either-or problem to be decided by *fiat*, supported by one Marx quotation or the other, but as an empirical ambiguity to be sorted out analytically. He distinguished positions with different amounts of control of the production process and of the labor of others.[3]

He then came to recognize problems with his first version, with the imprecise contradictoriness of the class locations and with its central focus on domination, rather than exploitation.[4] The outcome was a three-dimensional conceptualization of class in terms of "assets," means of production and their ownership or not, amounts of "organizational assets" (organizational authority), and of skills/credentials assets.[5]

Through his international series of surveys of class structure, relations, and consciousness he also made the best, and largest, contribution

1 Erik Olin Wright, *Interrogating Inequality* (London: Verso, 1994), Prologue.

2 Erik Olin Wright, *Class Crisis and the State* (London: New Left Book, 1978), *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985), *Class Counts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), *Understanding Class* (London: Verso, 1995).

3 Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State,* 78ff.

4 Wright, *Classes*, 51ff.

5 Wright, *Classes*, 86ff.

to class cartography. For reasons which I never could bring myself to ask him about, he never published any kind of comparative overview of his sixteen-country surveys, but he did publish a number of interesting, thought-provoking comparisons of Japan, Sweden, and the United States and of Canada, Norway, Sweden and the United States (in *American Sociological Review*, and reported in *Class Counts*, respectively). They included portraits of the different configurations of class consciousness in Japan, Sweden, and the United States, and an original study of the permeability of (asset-based) class boundaries, with respect to friendship, family formation, and intergenerational mobility.

Like many of his peers of the period, Wright wanted to contribute to the reconstruction of Marxism, not just be "drawing from the Marxist tradition."[6] He started out from the Althusserian current in the 1970s then from the mid-1980s was drawn into the orbit of the so-called analytical Marxists around the philosopher G.A. Cohen and, important to Wright, the mathematical economist John Roemer. At the same time, he wanted to establish himself as a Marxist theorist in the shape of a mainstream quantitative American sociologist, in which he succeeded eminently in his survey analyses, and in professional standing.

His last book on class, *Understanding Class*, has an elegiac and conciliatory tone, a book at the end of his times. Instead of Marxist reconstruction, the time of the "Grand Battle of Paradigms" is over, and should be replaced with "pragmatic realism" and an ecumenical "integrated class analysis," and after a formalization of possible working-class–capitalist-class compromise, a "quite dim" prospect, the book ends with a political chapter on "noncapitalist alternatives within the capitalist economy." Darkness is falling, and the glade has disappeared. Wright asked himself and comrades whether Marxist class analysis makes any sense if there is no end to capitalism. I am convinced there is, but it will have to take a different track than we did in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s.

6 Wright, *Interrogating Inequality,* 5.

There was a fatal *rendez-vous manqué* between Marxists in the 1960s and 1970s, between a young generation, graduates of sociology and other social sciences, and an older, much thinner generation of great historians, with Eugene Genovese, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Eric Hobsbawm, and Edward Thompson on the frontline in the English-speaking world, others in France, the Spanish-speaking world, and India. The generations could have learned a lot from each other. They did not, despite occasional intergenerational reading. The main reason was probably disciplinary academic myopia.

Wright actually studied for Christopher Hill at Oxford. Wright believed in theorizing for empirical research, but why he chose mainstream quant-sociology for the latter might also have had something to with what he himself, with almost unique honesty, has called "grantsmanship."[7] While, at least in his books, he never referred to his history stint at Oxford in any concrete terms, he did write, already in the early 1990s that he "found nearly always that I learn more from good qualitative and historical research than from research by quanto-maniacs."[8]

THE RETURN OF CLASS AND INEQUALITY — AND HOW TO APPROACH IT

The twenty-first century has so far seen an amazing return of class into public discourse, primarily in bitter lamentations — in the Global North — of the "squeeze," decline, or "end" of the middle class , and in florid celebrations of its rise and potency, in the Global South. The non-acquiescent working class has become a concern of *New York Times* editorialists. In the United Kingdom, class has become a sociological BBC entertainment.[9] This surge of class does not entail any imminent transition out of capitalism. What it is showing is that class is an important vantage point from which to understand twenty-first-century world society.

7 Wright, *Interrogating Inequality*, 7.

8 Wright, *Interrogating Inequality*, 10.

9 Michael Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century* (Pelican, 2015), introduction.

If class, then, remains an answer, what is the question? It is one answer to two questions. First, why is there abundance and poverty, privilege and misery at the same time? Second, how, by what social forces, can these conditions be disturbed and transformed? The first is the question of inequality, the second is the question of social change. Among the young Marxists of the 1960s and 1970s, Wright was one of the few who took an analytical interest in both questions. Most others took the inequalities of capitalism as so obvious as to be self-evident, like colonial racism, in contrast to those of patriarchy and sexism, the intricate mechanisms of which, feminism taught, had to be laid bare.

Wright produced a thorough class analysis of the US income distribution.[10] Through a long series of regression equations he demonstrated the relative explanatory strength of a simple and truncated class scheme — surveys available included small employers but not the big capitalists. Most interestingly, he showed that even so, class had more explanatory power than the conventional occupational status hierarchy — and that the occupational status groups were distributed across different classes, defined by property and managerial authority. Wright's analysis also dug into the interrelations and interaction of race and sex. His 1994 book, *Interrogating Inequality*, on the other hand, was more a title of a collection of "Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism," than a focused investigation.

After the long quarter-century of neoliberalism and market globalization from around 1980, both questions have returned with a vengeance, not only to polite mainstream discourse in media and academia. They have also become a worry of the intelligent part of the global economic elite, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Economic Forum in Davos.The work of Thomas Piketty[11] and his associates[12] has made inequality the

10 Erik Olin Wright, *Class Structure and Income Determination* (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

11 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

12 Facundo Alvaredo et al., *World Poverty Report 2018* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Uni-

hottest topic of academic economics, while in sociology the bland "stratification" paradigm is gradually losing weight in relation to inequality studies.

The turning points were the cumulating crashes of neoliberal globalization, from the East Asian crash of 1998, via the South American ones in the first years of this century, to the global financial crisis of 2008, and their dramatic social and political effects. From the fall of the bloody dictatorship in Indonesia and the shake-up of Thai politics, via the collapse in total discredit of South American neoliberal experiments from Venezuela to Argentina, to the rising of disturbing protest movements in the very core of capitalism, Occupy, *Indignados*, populism. These movements had a composite and varied social constitution, but they had without doubt a deeply worrying working-class component. The financial crash also highlighted the new gap between ordinary, small-c conservative middle classes and the financial upper class, feeding an international wave of angry, sometimes apocalyptic middle-class writing, with titles like *The End of the Middle Stratum*[13] and The *End of the Western Middle Class*.[14]

How should class in our new century be approached, by Marxists and by all others seriously interested in equality and egalitarian social change? This is no longer a time for paradigm battles, as Wright presciently predicted, but nor for paradigmatic reconciliations and "integration." Pigeonholing theorization is no longer relevant — at least for the time being. Class theory is not on the top of the agenda, neither politically nor academically. On the other hand, there are currently both a wide international intellectual current of concern with economic inequality — which has not yet entered mainstream politics — and broad and diverse international discussions of class, which have already entered into national political discourse in many

versity Press)world.

13 Daniel Goffart, *Das Ende der Mittelschicht*, (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2019).

14 Christophe Guilluy, *No society: La fin de la classe moyenne occidentale* (Paris: Flammarion, 2018).

countries. Hardly since the Papal concern with the emerging industrial working class in Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* [*On New Matters*] of 1891 has there been such interest in presumably left-wing topics such as class and inequality.

I would suggest a two-pronged response from egalitarians to this moment of opportunity-cum-challenge. One, emancipating inequality into a central topic of its own, subordinated neither to class nor to the intersectional victimology of class, race, and gender — not so long ago a major research advance — calling for further analytical development.

Second, taking class analysis into two practical, sub-theoretical directions. One direction should be a focus on patterns of capital-labor relations, starting from a global perspective. Capital-labor relations are at the core of any social science of capitalism, and the salience of class conflict and class consciousness should be treated as crucial empirical questions. We need to get at the global basics of these relations before the fine grain of contradictory or multidimensional class locations. The other direction would be to recognize the social reality of discourse, implying that the current discourses of the "squeeze" (OECD) or "end" of the middle class in the North, and of its "rise" in the South, are not to be dismissed as expressions of deficient class theories, but noticed as significant symptoms of contemporary class relations, worthy of serious critical study.

BROADENING AND DEEPENING THE ANTI-INEQUALITY MOVEMENT

One might now say that inequality studies are becoming something of an academic movement. Study and research programs, centers and institutes, are being launched in a number of continents, countries, and cities, from Helsinki and London to Quito and Johannesburg, from Cambridge, MA to Berkeley, CA, from Moscow to Beijing. Inequality studies are already emancipated and coming into their own, and in sociology "stratification," a static, non-relational concept once imported

from geology, is slowly being phased out. However, so far inequality is overwhelmingly approached in terms of income and wealth to the extent of neglecting or minimizing attention to other dimensions.

The human condition of inequality needs to be broadened, to include other dimensions than the distribution of resources, assets, or "capitals" among humans, resources crucial to humans as social actors. Two other dimensions are also fundamental. One refers to human lives and life-chances as organisms, i.e., to their health and illness, to their life expectancy, in short to vital inequality. The other to humans as persons, as reflective selves, to their conditions of existence in the world, to existential inequality.[15] Vital and existential (in)equality both shape human capability formation, the former to bodily functioning and resilience, motoric and basic cognitive skills, the latter to cognitive and social capacity. Existential (in)equality is decisive for self-formation, of a person's existential (in)security, self-confidence, self-esteem, ambition, capacity of empathy and social attachment. It works through experiences of love or neglect, security or fear, of trust and support or of suspicion and hindrance, respect or contempt, recognition or humiliation. Racism, patriarchy, and sexism are notorious configurations of systemic existential inequality. Crushing poor and/or subaltern people's selves is a major process of inequality reproduction in general.

Broadening the academic interest in inequality means also, of course, connecting academia with the experiences, local studies, and struggles of egalitarian activists and movements, something which comes naturally to many American — Anglo as well as Latin — universities, less so in Europe.

Deepening inequality studies means to dig further into their processes and mechanisms of production — and their reproduction,

15 See Göran Therborn, *The Killing Fields of Inequality*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), and idem, "Stratification Requiescat in Pace: Paradigm Shift From 'Stratification' and Mobility to Inequality," 42–52 in Raquel Sosa Elizaga (ed.), Facing An Unequal World (London: Sage).

operating at both inter-individual and systemic levels, and along the human life-course. Basic mechanisms of production include distanciation, exclusion, and hierarchization as well as exploitation. Processes range from the interaction of parental genetic inheritance and mother's social conditions during fetal development, as studied by epigenetics, to the increasing class gap of life expectancy in contemporary welfare states, or the expanded reproduction of income and wealth inequality in consolidated liberal democracies.

This century's decisive human challenge, climate change and global warming, makes analyses of, and coping policies for, the ecological aspects of vital inequality of crucial significance. Furthermore, studying the inequality of vulnerability and risk, and of the inequality of responsibility for polluting and destroying the world, will have to involve class analyses of climate responsibility, climate change vulnerability, and of climate change politics.

The recent advances in studies of income inequality, first of all by Thomas Piketty and his associates, have also led to discovering the increasing class dimension of carbon emissions. Half of the world's carbon emitting inequality is now between classes within countries, rather than between countries, as compared to a third in 1998.[16] Laudable as it is, there's a snag here. The estimates are consumption-based, and the classes are income groups. But a major part of climate-destroying carbon emissions are produced by the owners and CEOs of mining, industrial, shipping, and aviation corporations. Richard Heede at the US Climate Accountability Institute is a leading detective of the producing culprits. The three biggest cumulative carbon emitters since the 1850s are Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Saudi Aramco.[17] For 1965–2017, 35 percent of all energy-related carbon dioxide and methane emissions in the world were produced

16 Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty, "Carbon and Inequality: from Kyoto to Paris," Paris School of Economics, 2015.

17 Richard Heede, "Tracing anthropogenic carbon dioxide and methane emissions to fossil fuel and cement producers, 1854–2010," *Climate Change* 122 (2014): 229–241.

by twenty corporations, headed by Saudi Aramco, Chevron, Gazprom, and ExxonMobil.[18] With regards to countries, five stand out, in both production and consumption: Australia, the United States, Canada, Luxembourg, and Saudi Arabia.[19]

The new climate endangerment awareness will hopefully bring the inequality of life and death into the limelight, and vice-versa, vital inequality will bring issues of inequality, of conflicting and ecological injustice into the climate movement. The global ecological injustice is fairly widely known: the poor contributed little or nothing to our current planetary condition, but they are the most vulnerable to disastrous climate changes — both to the occurrence of cyclones, flooding, landslides, drought, and earthquakes, and to death from them.[20]

However, as Petra Tschakert has pointed out in a very useful overview article, "the time is ripe to shift our lens from poor countries to poor people," and to realize that "uneven power relations more so than exposure and sensitivity to climate hazards make the poor and disadvantaged … more vulnerable than" more affluent and privileged and powerful groups and individuals across the country spectrum of income levels."[21] For instance, Martinich et al. found that people´s poverty is the main explanation for vulnerability to natural disasters in the four coastal regions of the United States. [22] The weight of economic power relations comes out in the fact that in the Gulf region "over 99% of the

18 Matthew Taylor and Jonathan Watts, "Revealed: the 20 firms behind a third of all carbon emissions," *Guardian*, October 9, 2019.

19 Kristen Wiebe and Norihiko Yamano, "Estimating CO2 Emissions Embodied in Final Demand and Trade Using the OECD ICIO 2015: Methodology and Results," 16 (OECD Science, Technology and Industry Working Papers 05/2016/05).

20 Henrike Brecht et al., "A Global Urban Risk Index," (World Bank Working Paper 6506: 2013); Timothy Gore, Extreme Carbon Inequality, Oxfam (2015); "Special Issue on Poverty and Climate Change," *Environment and Development Economics* 23, no. 5 (2018).

21 Petra Tschakert, "The Role of Inequality in Climate-Poverty Debates," World Bank: Policy Research Working Paper 7677 (2016): 2, 3.

22 Jeremy Martinich et al., "Risks of sea level rise to disadvantaged communities in the United States," *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 18, no. 2 (2013): 169–85, table 1.

most socially vulnerable people [read: lower class] live in areas unlikely to be protected from inundation," in contrast to the upper class "least socially vulnerable," of whom only 8 percent live in areas unlikely to be protected.[23] The heat waves of Chicago in 1995 and in Europe in 2003 both killed primarily the poor, the old, and isolated — and, in Chicago, of course, African Americans. Five-hundred people were killed directly in Chicago, with another seven-hundred premature deaths. In France, there was a de facto massacre, though hardly received as such. Fourteen thousand eight-to-nine hundred died in two weeks, in Europe as a whole thirty-nine thousand in the first two weeks, and for the summer of 2003 more than seventy thousand (above normal death rates).[24]

THE VARIEGATED WORLD OF CAPITAL AND LABOR

A global approach to class may do well in starting out from an expectation of its widely varying salience. First of all, there is history, the very different pathways to modern states and societies. There were four major routes, and some important hybrids of combined paths.[25] Only the European was centered on class in a broad sense, pitting the "Third Estate" of commoners — in Britain soon a "middle class" and from mid-nineteenth century on also a working class — against the aristocracy and the prince. In the European settler countries of the Americas, independence was won against the fatherland, and settler modernity asserted itself against natives and (ex-)slaves. The third route was colonial emancipation, in Asia and Africa, carried by national, not class, movements. Japan managed to find a fourth route, keeping the rapacious colonial empires at bay by a skilful reactive modernization from above, by a mutated gentry transforming the imperial realm.

23 Ibid.

24 Jean-Marie Robine et al., "Death toll exceeded 70,000 in Europe during the summer of 2003," C.R Biologies 311 (2008): 171–78.

25 Göran Therborn, *The World: A Beginner's Guide* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 54ff.

Europe is the only continent where autonomous trade unions have ever organized more than half of the workforce — and the only continent, together with the two specific settler countries of Australia and New Zealand, on which explicit labor parties have ever gained an electoral parliamentary majority.

The class character of Europe was enhanced by its economic development, by its extensive industrial capitalism. In the majority of European countries, industrial employment became the dominant trisector employment, ranging between 40 and 52 percent of employment in the United Kingdom. (This relative predominance to agricultural and services employment never happened in the US or Japan).[26] However, since capital was accumulated and labor exploited and downtrodden on all the populated continents, the capital-labor relations are the core of economic sociology of the whole modern world.

Industrial capitalism is a major pivot both of class and of (in) equality. It developed dialectically, as Marx predicted. Its development included the growth, concentration, and organization of the industrial working class. This class development reached its peak in the 1970s, in most advanced capitalist countries, and constituted a decisive force of the equalization from 1945 to 1980. It seems that there was also a technological aspect to the relative equalization of advanced industrial capitalism, long after its origins in the "dark satanic mills" of the beginning industrial revolutions. The productivity of the assembly line, for instance, could carry decent wages for its low-skilled, non-credentialed workers once labor market and socio-political contexts made it possible for workers to claim a decent wage, as in the famous Detroit auto agreement of 1949.

Now, Europe is a declining force in the world, economically as well as demographically. Is its developed industrial capitalist society, with its possibilities of widespread equalization, to be followed anywhere?

26 Göran Therborn, *European Modernity and Beyond. The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945–2000* (London: Sage, 1995), 69.

In terms of economic history, the answer is no. Contingent socio-political opportunities remain open.

The world as a whole is still far from completing the process of proletarianization into wage-labor, but it does so on a new, much more rugged terrain.

While the world of capital is increasingly interwoven and similarly, by criss-crossing investments, operating with shared methods of accumulation — digital technology, finance, and real estate — a global executive labor market, and a common lifestyle of exuberance, the world of labor remains very differentiated, although the particular clarity and easy awareness of class in Europe is being muddled by deindustrialization. On a world scale, employees and employers together only make up 57 percent of the world's economically active population: 54 percent employees and 3 percent employers. One-third of the world's workforce are self-employed, of whom the 30–31 percent living outside the "high income" countries are typically street vendors or casual laborers. Ten percent are family helpers. In the high-income countries, employees amount to 86 percent of the economically active; in sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia 25–26 percent. In Southeast Asia, employees are about half of the economically active population, in Latin America and East Asia about two-thirds.[27]

For these 40 percent of the working world in what the ILO calls "vulnerable employment," meaning nonwage labor, the door of an industrial exit is closing. Industrial employment — manufacturing, construction, mining — has stalled in the world, at a level between a fifth and a fourth of the global labor force, 22–23 percent.[28] Manufacturing employment halted globally already in the 1990s, with a decline in East Asia.[29] While industrial society in the United States and Japan culminated at 36–37 percent of total employment, in the United

27 ILO, *Status in Employment* (IIlostat2018), www.ilostat.org.

28 ILO, *Employment in Industry* (Ilostat 2019), www.ilostat.org.

29 UNCTAD, *Trade and Development Report 2016*; Dani Rodrik, "Premature Deindustrialisation," NBER Working Paper 20935 (2015).

Kingdom and Germany around half of total employment, and in the least industrialized countries of Europe a third, in the rest of the world it will never reach that share. It will stop at between a fifth and fourth of employment, and in China slightly higher but below 30 percent.[30]

Instead of widening industrial formalization and standardization of work, working conditions, and workers' rights, the emergent economies of the twenty-first century are offering persistent "informality," labor without rules and rights. In India this informality comprises about 90 percent of the workforce. In Latin America, informality still characterizes about half of all work, and is rising in several countries after the end of the more egalitarian development tendency of the first ten to fifteen years of this century.[31]

The postindustrial labor markets of advanced capitalism — where industrial employment is down to 18 percent in the United Kingdom and manufacturing employment below 10 percent — have experienced a general and rather well-known polarization between skilled, highly paid jobs, and low-skilled, low-paid ones, usually so far with the conservative skewedness towards the former. They are also being informalized in their own way: only a third of OECD workers are currently covered by collective agreements.[32]

In the 1980s, many German sociologists were concerned with an imminent end of jobs and made the "crisis of the society of work" the theme of their 1982 congress.[33] In the current decade, predictions and estimates of large job losses from automation and artificial intelligence have been made. An estimate by Oxford experts of almost 47 percent of US jobs being "at risk" of automation[34] was widely interpreted as a prediction that half of all jobs in the United States would disappear. But

30 ILO, *Employment in Industry* (Ilostat 2019), www.ilostat.org

31 World Bank, *World Development Report 2019*: *The Changing Nature of Work* (2019).

32 OECD, *Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work* (2019), 20.

33 *Krise der Arbeitsgeselschaft ?* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1982).

34 Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?"2013.

the estimates offered have kept varying widely, ranging between 7 and 47 percent for the United States, and between 6 and 55 percent in Japan.[35] The OECD, in its 2019 *Employment Outlook* thinks of probably 14 percent of jobs at high risk of termination.[36] The continuous increase of employment in the high-income countries since 2000 (and the 1980s) — except for the employment destruction by the financial crash of 2008, which it took three years to repair — indicates that the historical experience of the industrial revolution is still valid (at least) for the first two decades of the twenty-first century: Technological innovations and advance, while ending many low-productivity jobs, tend to lead to more jobs.

What is more certain, and already here, is the impact of the new digital technology on the conditions of labor: more insecurity and more surveillance. The digital platform businesses are trying to do away with employment contracts and rights altogether. How far they will succeed is still an open question. On labor markets they are still a small niche phenomenon, but in China it is estimated they will control 30 percent of labor by 2028.[37] Constant digital monitoring and surveillance of employees is becoming standard, with Amazon warehouses often described as examples of such horror.

On the side of capital, we have to acknowledge a new vigor, with two main drivers: financialization and the digital technological revolution. Important here is that the two are intertwined. Financialization today does not mean the reemergence of a rentier economy, foreboding a capitalism in decline, nor a divide between a sedate class of bankers and producing technical entrepreneurs, as in England between the City of London and the manufacturers of the North. Stock-market capitalization connects financial gamblers and digital entrepreneurs. As of the time of this writing, the world's six largest corporations by stock market value are all digital corporations: Apple, Amazon, Alphabet,

35 World Bank, 2019.

36 OECD, *Employment Outlook 2019*.

37 Ling Yucheng, Sun Yat-sen University, oral presentation at 2019 CASS Forum in Kunming, September 22, 2019.

Microsoft, Facebook, and Alibaba — five American and one Chinese company. And the six wealthiest men of the world made their wealth on the stock market as digital entrepreneurs.

Instead of rentier capitalism, there is a recent argument about the emergence of a "meritocratic" capitalism,[38] or "liberal meritocratic capitalism"[39] ruled by achievement-driven workaholics bred by wealthy parents investing expensively in exclusive elite education for their brood, from infant day care to prestigious universities.[40] Before becoming a designation of the contemporary US economy, the phenomenon surfaced as a modern Asian culture of pedagogy in *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* by Markovits´s Yale Law School colleague Amy Chua.[41]

The enormous, raw economic power concentrated in the new corporations has been well illustrated by analyses of the cost structure of Apple's iPhone, analyses rather similar from the US business magazine *Forbes* to the Third World Tricontinental Research Center. The latest is from the latter, investigating into the cost structure of iPhone X: in everyday language they are components bought 37 percent, manufacturing (wages of workers and profits of subcontractors) 2.5 percent, and profits for Apple designers and shareholders 60 percent.[42] (The *Forbes* calculations for iPhone 7 were even more extreme).

FIFTEEN YEARS OF FAME FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

The middle class was mostly a nonclass in Marxist class theory and class history, although its boundary to the working class was a concern,

38 David Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap* (London: Allen Lane, 2019).

39 Branko Milanovic, *Capitalism, Alone* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2019).

40 Cite Markovits 2019 here, give full info.

41 Amy Chua, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (London: Penguin, 2011).

42 Tricontinental, November 18, 2019, thetricontinental.org/wp-content/upload/2019/09.

and Wright´s contradictory locations and three-dimensional asset distributions were grappling with it. Marx himself saw it as a passing early- to mid-nineteenth-century phenomenon. In the liberal master narrative, the middle class was the permanent carrier of liberalism. The twentieth century was, in the Global North, the working-class century, the social reference point not only of the class-conscious labor movement but also of its critics and enemies — the Pope, conservative writers like Ernst Jünger, the fascists, and the Nazis.

In class terms, the twenty-first century is being announced as a middle-class century, or, alternatively, as a century of middle-class preoccupation. However, the middle class arrives, not as a theoretical problem, but as a political issue. Around the latest turn of century a new, middle-class era was announced in the Global South, most importantly in China and India, where it corresponded to a major shift of political economy.

The anonymous preface of a major scholarly contribution from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences presented its *The Rising Middle Classes in China* thus: "China's rapid economic growth has led to a rapidly growing middle class. Especially since the century of capitalism, the size and scale of China's middle class have clearly grown. … In the socio-political sphere the middle class is constantly making its voice heard, and its stance will decide the direction of Chinese society." The sociologists interested in the new class formation also had to defend its political usefulness against attacks in the aftermath of 1989. A middle-class society was something very different from the Maoist "worker-peasant" society, and 'a famous sociologist' of the time pointed out 'Socialist China cannot allow a 'middle class' to appear'. … Middle class theory exists in the West to cover up the issue of class conflict."[43] The most convincing argument in defense was that "in any society the middle class is the most important force for maintaining

43 Li Chunling (ed.), *The Rising Middle Classes in China* (Beijing: Paths International, 2012), 6.

social stability."[44] By 2001, the theoretical battle was won. In China, the middle class then soon became a central component of an egalitarian vision, in the midst of galloping inequality, of "'an olive-shaped structure' where the middle class is the main social group"(ibidem).

In India, the very influential early retired businessman turned bestselling writer Gurcharan Das exclaimed in 2000, "The most striking feature of contemporary India is the rise of a confident new middle class . … Whether India can deliver the goods depends a great deal on it." Das is here quoted as a vignette to a perceptive analysis of the new middle-class discourse in India by Leela Fernandes. Her central argument "is that the rise of the new Indian middle class represents the political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalization,"[45] which had a political breakthrough in India in 1991, with seeds from the 1980s.

In other parts of the Global South, the arriving new middle class was mainly conceived in consumption terms, as the emergence of discretionary consumers, and as such of new business markets. In 2011, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America all published major reports on their respective continental middle classes.

The Southern literature was largely written against the background of the accelerating economic growth of the 1990s or the first decade of the twenty-first century. The somber Northern lamentations have mainly been composed in the shadow of the 2008 financial crash and its enduring effects — middle-class recession and accelerating inequality.

The OECD has put out a grim overview of the middle class in the Global North.[46] It highlights the halt of upward mobility, the decline in population share of the income-earners between 75 and 200 percent of the median, the growing gap between the median income

44 Li Quang, quoted in Chunling, 2012, 8.

45 Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xviii.

46 OECD, *Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class* (2019).

and the average of the top 10 percent, and that more than one of five middle-income households spend more than they earn.

Several European authors focus on the disappearing of middle-class society as a sociological reality and as a cultural norm or model, viewed as an effect both of widening economic inequalities and, above all, of tendencies of cultural dissolution.[47] The "Western middle class" has lost its status as "the cultural referent," "incarnating the American or European way of life," particularly through the cultural and economic destruction of its "popular base [*socle populaire*]."[48] While like the others also pointing to growing economic inequality, Goffart adds another dimension, succinctly summarized on the cover of his book: "Surveillance capitalism changes the rules of the game in state and economy. A handful of internet corporations occupy the public space and pushes [*drängt*] the working middle into digital serfdom."[49]

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx tells his German readers about his analysis of English capitalism, *De te fabula narratur,* this story is about you [and your future]. The Southern writers on the rising middle class would do well reading the Northern middle-class stories. Under prevailing political economy they are describing the continuation of the middle-class story, not into "olive-shaped" societies but into ever steeper pyramids. Between 1980 and 2014, the middle 40 percent of India saw their income grow at half the size of the income of the national average. The income share of the top 1 percent is back at its level in colonial times, just before World War II.[50] The McKinsey consultancy has recently reported of China that "within the burgeoning middle class, the upper middle class is poised to become the principal engine of consumer spending over the next decade."[51]

47 Louis Chauvel, *Les classes moyennes à la derive* (Paris: Seuil, 2016); Goffart, 2019; Guilluy, 2018.

48 Guilluy, 2018, 78, 82.

49 Goffart, 2019, back cover

50 Alvaredo et al., *World inequality*, 127ff.

51 Dominic Barton at al., "The Rise of the Middle Class in China and Its Impact on the Chinese and World Economies," McKinsey & Company, June 2013.

The alert Chinese sociologists (in Shanghai) have just launched their first post–middle-class project, on China´s superrich. The hopeful of the North, like the OECD Secretariat, or the South, who expect a good society from middle-class aspirations, with "intolerance of corruption" and "trust in others" should read Snigdha Poonam's recent amazing book about the Indian Dreamers, the young middle-class aspirants who run sophisticated online and call-center scams, from selling fake education and jobs to extorting money from elderly Americans by threatening them with the Inland Revenue Service.[52]

The middle-class hype, North and South, should be taken symptomatically, as expressions of processes of development. In the North, most important is to realize and recognize that the prevailing middle-class literature is a critique of the ongoing increase of inequality. It is not a discourse of a middle class threatened from below, by workers' unions and state handouts to the poor. It is about a class being abandoned, left behind by a previously admired economic leadership and lifestyle model. In other words, it is an objectively progressive discourse, despite its occasional apocalyptic self-pity. It indicates a sizable potential base for progressive taxation of the rich.

The field of work is another meeting ground of the Left/labor movement and the salaried middle class. There is a growing contradiction between, on one hand, the middle-class professionalism of teachers, health personal, public service employees, civil servants, and on the other, the increasingly invasive capitalist-managerial notion of labor for profit. The latter is, and should be, an affront to every true professional, to her pride in learned expertise, to her ethics of objectivity and service, and to her joy in the intrinsic value and fun of her work. The beginning digital revolution of the labor market is likely to hit the professions as well as the mass of white-collar employees hard.

Thirdly, widespread middle-class environmentalism is already clashing with the accumulation drive of real estate developers, ruthless extraction corporations, and producers of pollution of all kinds.

52 Snigdha Poonam, *Dreamers* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

However, the relationships of the middle class to the working class, the precariat, and the poor remain delicate, as well as important issues to the Left. French developments since the 1980s show the dangers. From the right-wing turn in 1983 of the Socialist-cum-Communist government of François Mitterand, the Socialists became a party of the educated middle class, and the Communists, who swallowed the turn to the right, became irrelevant to the working class, and collapsed. The xenophobic Front National became the first party of French workers — the only one perceived to be standing up for (French) workers — and myopic middle-class environmentalism engendered the massive, ideologically confused but genuinely popular Yellow Vests movement.

In mainstream US and UK media the "working class" has returned to the limelight, but as a scarecrow of Trump followers and Brexiteers. So, any Left that stops at the lower boundary of the middle class is doomed, not only morally but also politically.

Recent years have delivered some lessons on how to tackle the middle class from an egalitarian perspective. One comes from Brazil: don't do as the Lula-Dilma governments did, i.e., redistributing income only among the bottom 90 percent of the population. The *Bolsa Família* was in many ways an extremely efficient social policy, lifting the poor at very low cost, and so were raising the minimum wage and expanding higher education for previously excluded classes. But when the commodity boom ended, the indebted consuming middle class felt that it had paid for the poor. And it is true that reduced inequality in Brazil had not been paid for by the enormously rich top 10 percent but by what might be called the middle class,[53] who therefore could be mobilized, even for a thug like Bolsonaro. Tax the rich, not the middle class.

In the United States, but also in parts of Europe, France for instance, what has been called the working class is now included in the middle-class complaints. While dubious to a social historian, this is not to be quarrelled about by contemporary egalitarian politicians and activists, nor should blue-collar irritation over white-collar

53 Thomas Piketty, *Capital et idéologie* (Paris: Seuil, 2019), 1099.

perks be allowed any prominence. The task is to develop a common employee or wage-labor culture of rights and of the dignity of work.

Climate and environment issues have always to be addressed with ecological inequality and a class analysis of climate change responsibility and vulnerability in mind. That is the difference between the banker-president Emmanuel Macron and people on the Left.

A societal responsibility is part of middle-class ideology. Like all grand self-affirmatory ideologies, it has been less practiced than preached. On the other hand, it is obvious that societal responsibility must include a consideration of people below the middle-class condition, the precariat, the unemployed, the poor, and oppressed minorities and immigrants. Decent conditions and open channels of mobility for the latter are also essential for the realization of another middle-class core value, security.

In short, twenty-first century left-wing politics will require a proactive middle-class policy.

CLASS PROSPECTS

So, worldwide, we have workers in the South trapped in preindustrial work and working conditions, or in quasi-industrial rights-less "informality," and workers in the North, fragmented, polarized, under surveillance. At the other pole, we have capital richer and more globally powerful than ever, and dynamic at that, in new digital tech business and in spectacular real estate development projects. The Southern middle classes got their fifteen years of fame in the beginning of the twenty-first century, a bit like the middle classes of post-Napoleonic Europe two centuries ago. But the current Northern middle-class literature indicates a less than shining future for them, a middle-class abandonment by an ever-richer upper class.

We are indeed living in grim times of increasing inequality and exploitation, and of a drastic weakening of the labor movement, the very center of much of twentieth-century social progress. If the above

analysis is more or less correct, strong labor movements are unlikely ever to rise from the Global South.

However, would it be rational, and scholarly, not just morally abdicating, to view this situation as stable or as located on a steady trend into the future? I think not.

First of all, let us not forget that the disadvantaged of today are, on the whole, much more resourceful than those of a century ago, much less abjectly poor, much healthier, more knowledgeable of the world, much less crushed by racist, sexist, and other ideologies of inherent inferiority and worthlessness, and, often, with access to media of mass communication.[54]

As the most intelligent faction of the global capitalist class has acknowledged at least since 2015 in Davos, this accelerating accumulation of wealth and power into the 1 percent is very risky, likely to provoke resistance and rebellion from large parts of the left-out 99 percent. So far, few politicians have listened to the enlightened bourgeoisie, but they are likely to harvest what they have not sown.

Current capital power is likely to be disrupted also by two other global processes, of unpredictable consequences. One is the new geopolitical dynamic of globalization, succeeding the brief interlude of the 1980s to 2008, of market-driven (politically facilitated) globalization, after the twentieth century one of political globalization, from the Russian Revolution to the end of the Cold War. The United States is apparently not to going to accept the rise of China, and this is going to disturb the world economy in unpredictable ways.

The second change of global parameters is the challenge of climate change. It is now driven by a generational movement of unprecedented global scope. The solutions have to deal with a number of conflicting interests under a common planetary cloud, national and international, industrial, class and regional. All these conflicts will bear upon and question the privileges of the 1 percent.

54 A dramatic example is former "Untouchables" of India who are now, as *Dalits*, both allowed to and capable of forming state governments.

In the twenty-first century, labor will have to find new means of expression and of demands, alongside and beyond trade unions and labor parties. Both pre- and post-industrial mobilizations and organizations will arouse the downtrodden. The "damned of the earth" of this century may not become revolutionary in the twentieth-century sense. But they are likely to be more rebellious, more aware that "another world is desirable," and perhaps possible. In the face of coming riotous demands, parts of the capitalist upper class may look back at the times of industrial capitalism and its class compromises of binding collective agreements and respectful reformist labor parties with some nostalgia. In short, in comparison with the central class areas of the past century there will be less trade unionism, less labor party reform, and more social riots, more nonclass identities of labor resistance, and more political populism of various kinds. But, however framed, the class capital-labor nexus is most likely to remain at the core of social conflict — and therewith the continuing relevance of class analyses.

At the time of writing, in late 2019, large parts of the world are in social turmoil. Not counting exclusively politico-national conflicts, like in Hong Kong and Catalonia, or an upper/middle-class–rooted protest in Bolivia, there are large-scale socioeconomic protest moments in Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Haiti, Ecuador, Chile — all egalitarian, but with very diverse sociocultural and ideological coloring. Significantly Islamist in Pakistan, clearly secularist in Iraq and Lebanon, less pronouncedly so in Algeria, poor people's populist in Haiti, with a strong indigenous leadership and organization in Ecuador, with an ecumenical classical left-wing culture in Chile, socialist and feminist. Everywhere, with the exception of Ecuador and its decisive Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, organizations were secondary to the movement, mobilized on social media. Students, both secondary school and university, unemployed youth, urban poor provided the vanguard troops, but there were also crucial labor unions, both local ones such as that of port workers of

Valparaíso, and national confederations, even if small, like FUT in Ecuador and CUT in Chile, and there were professional organizations, of teachers and university professors, of lawyers and medics. This may well have been a rehearsal of times to come. So far, in early November the outcomes have been promising, a clear but delimited regime backdown in Ecuador, significant concessions and possibly a big shakeup of the whole neoliberal system of inequalities and privatizations in Chile. The other confrontations are still going on with no outcome in sight, but the movements have already proved their resilience, in Algeria more than others.

ENVOI

In his posthumous last book, *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century*,[55] Erik Olin Wright gave a valuable pointer to another future, a multifaceted erosion of capitalism, a parallel to capitalism´s own emergence from the secular erosion of feudalism. He was a pacifist rationalist; the world is neither. Capitalism is unlikely to "erode" peacefully and gracefully, its eventual disappearance is more likely to resemble its surge to power, in welters of wars and complex political and social conflicts. After the closure of the revolutionary cycle from 1789 to 1949, the challenges of planetary warming will be the first test of the survivability of capitalism. ⊬

This article is based on a paper presented at a memorial conference for Erik Olin Wright held in Madison, Wisconsin on November 2, 2019.

55 Erik Olin Wright, *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Verso, 2019).

This article analyzes Israel's electoral deadlock through the lens of its settler-colonial project. It looks at how the ruling elite's secular but supremacist national identity disintegrated over time, giving rise to a number of antagonistic communities, which have increasingly become harder to bring together into a viable coalition.

SETTLER DISUNITY: EXAMINING ISRAEL'S POLITICAL STALEMATE

LEV GRINBERG

The stalemate of Israeli politics after two consecutive electoral rounds in 2019 (April and September) brought to the surface a hidden aspect of Israeli society and politics: the intercommunal hostilities are not only between Jews and Arabs, but also between different Jewish subcultural communities. These inter-Jewish hostilities are the consequence of the colonization of Palestine by European Jews and the social construction of a secular-European Jewish supremacist national identity.

TWO ELECTORAL ROUNDS[1]

The first electoral round in April 2019 sparked very heated dichotomist tribal debates around Benjamin Netanyahu's corruption and the controversial question of whether he can function as a prime minister

1 At the time of writing, it isn't clear if there will be a third round or not. Netanyahu is pushing for a third round, in order to get popular legitimation after his indictment, however the idea of a third round is very unpopular and might lead to very low turnout.

during his trial, in the case he will be indicted.[2] After twenty-eight days, the time the law allocates to PM candidates to form a coalition, Netanyahu announced his failure and forced a new round of elections, preventing his rival, Benny Ganz, from using a legal option to try to form a coalition under his leadership. Netanyahu was expecting that the power of his party and potential partners would increase from sixty seats to sixty-one, the minimum necessary for a majority in the Israeli Parliament. However, these parties actually lost five seats, creating an even more complicated stalemate.

In the second round the electoral campaigns significantly changed, which in turn triggered heated debates within and between the pro- and anti-Netanyahu blocs. The result was that Netanyahu's party and his partners (called the "right-wing" bloc) lost five seats; however, the anti-Netanyahu bloc increased only by two seats (from fifty-five to fifty-seven).[3] In both rounds a small party representing the Russian-speaking voters, led by an extremely hawkish leader, Avigdor Lieberman, emerged as the breakeven party. Similar to the previous round of negotiations, Lieberman declared once again that he will not take part in Netanyahu's coalition, rejecting his partnership with the religious parties and demanding the establishment of a National Unity Government, formed mainly by the two big parties and his own party, Israel Beyteinu ("Israel is our home"). Apparently, nothing changed, and the same stalemate was reproduced.

The second round, however, uncovered deep tensions within Israeli society between various hostile social groups. These internal hostilities are what is behind the stalemate after two electoral rounds, as well as the tensions expected to emerge after the establishment of a new governmental coalition.

2 By tribal I mean a type of mobilization based on cultural and communal identity boundaries, not on political debates and attitudes.

3 I systematically put the terms "Left" and "Right" in quotation marks due to my critical view of these denominations in the Israeli context. As I will try to show here, these terms symbolize two hostile tribes, and not different political attitudes. For an expanded discussion of tribalism, see Lev Grinberg, *Mo(ve)ments of Resistance: Politics, Economics and Society in Israel/Palestine 1931-2013* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 301–303.

Towards the second round, the parties participating in the elections have lightly changed. Following the results of the first round held in April 2019, the smaller parties teetering on the brink of extinction sought to save themselves by joining forces with the larger parties. These changes took place in both blocs. Moshe Kahlon's centrist Kulanu party (four seats) became part of the dominant party, Likud (thirty-five seats); the New Right party, which failed to reach the 3.25 percent minimum threshold to be represented in the Knesset, morphed into the Union of Right-Wing Parties (five seats), from which it has recently split towards the April elections. This union helped the extreme right-wing parties to gain two more seats (seven total), but Netanyahu's new list lost seven seats (receiving a total of thirty-two). The ultra-Orthodox parties were confident of their constituencies and succeeded in maintaining their sixteen seats.[4]

On the other side, the opposition parties underwent quick mergers. The parties representing the Arab-Palestinian citizens, Balad-Ta'al (four seats) and Hadash-Ra'am (six seats), reunited in the Joint List, which had a much better performance in the 2015 elections (thirteen seats), and succeeded to reproduce their previous achievement. The "left-wing" Meretz teamed up with Ehud Barak (former prime minister) and Stav Shaffir, to form the Democratic Union, increasing their representation from four to five seats.[5] The Labor party succeeded in maintaining its six seats by joining up with Orly Levy's new party Gesher (a split from Lieberman's party and from the previous Netanyahu coalition). Levy did not pass the election threshold in April. Kahol Lavan, which became the main alternative to Netanyahu's ruling party, was confident enough of their power that they didn't join other parties, and lost only two seats in the second round (falling from thirty-five to thirty-three), summing up the block they lead to

4 A small change took place in the division of power. While both parties won eight seats in April, in the September round the Sephardic Shas won nine seats and the Ashkenazi party Yahadut HaTora won seven.

5 Stav Shaffir left the Labor Party after losing primary elections to Amir Peretz.

fifty-seven seats. Kahol Lavan was a new list organized around the candidacy of the ex–chief of staff Benny Ganz for prime minister, and several individuals and groups which teamed up towards the elections. The most salient partners are Yesh Atid (a "center" party)[6] and Telem, a group organized by the ex–chief of staff and Likud Minister of Security Moshe Yaalon. As I will show hereafter, these parties were called by the media and the pollsters the "center-left" bloc, despite the fact that they didn't have a leftist political platform. They joined forces with one goal, replacing Netanyahu. The combination of the complete rejection of the "chief" of the "Right" and the secular European background of the leaders made them an automatic tribal "Left" party, and indeed, they succeeded to attract the tribal vote of the "Left." The internal tensions and different approaches within Kahol Lavan prevent the formation of an alternative governmental coalition to Netanyahu and his partners.

The obvious tension within the "anti-Netanyahu" bloc is the deep difference between the Palestinian citizens of Israel, represented by the Joint List, and the Zionist and Jewish Supremacist positions of most of the members of the other parties in the "center-left" bloc. However, the attempts of party survival in the second round brought to the surface another, long-simmering tension between the veteran secular European elites and those who want to represent long-oppressed communities in Israel, primarily Mizrahi Jews. The Jews called Mizrahim are those that migrated to Israel from Arab and Muslim countries (and their Israeli-born next generations), whom were marked as the Jewish "other," and were discriminated by the dominant were discriminated against by the dominant European elites who were in power during the first thirty years of Israel. These were the elites of the labor movement, who built the institutions and structures of a colonial settler state in conflict with the local Arab population and a Jewish supremacist regime, which continued the discrimination of Mizrahi Jews until today. In reaction to this discrimination, most of

6 For a more extended description, see the final section of this article.

the Mizrahi Jews identified since 1977 with the "Left" wing,[7] which developed a Jewish inclusive version of national identity.[8]

The question of who could appeal to this specific right-wing electorate set off a debate between Meretz and Kahol Lavan on one side, and the new Labor-Gesher joint party on the other. It was the first time that two Mizrahi politicians, both of them of Moroccan origin, dared to lead an independent political party (except the ultra-Orthodox Shas), and even dared to refuse teaming up with the secular Ashkenazi Meretz. This tension, I'll try to show here, is the outcome of the historical construction of the Israeli national identity and the political arena, including the "Left-Right" divide. In order to analyze the complex composition of Israeli society and polity, and the absence of political alternatives, I'll proceed here to elaborate a brief historical analysis of the Israeli social and political arena.

THE FALL OF THE ASHKENAZI ELITE

Following the derailment of the Oslo Accords in 2000, the very original critical sociologist and public intellectual, Baruch Kimmerling, published a political essay in the form of a short book describing the downfall of the Ashkenazi secular elite that had ruled Israel since the first days of the state.[9] His argument was that these were the Zionist settler elites who constructed the Israeli national identity and shaped its political institutions.

Kimmerling defined the founders of the pre-state Zionist institutions, and later of the State of Israel, as Ahusalim: a Hebrew acronym of Ashkenazi, secular, veteran, socialist, and nationalist, inspired by the English acronym for the North American settler elites, WASP.

7 Asher Arian & Michal Shamir, eds., *The Elections in Israel 1992*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995); Avraham Diskin, *Elections and Voters in Israel*, (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 1988) (Hebrew).

8 Yonatan Shapiro, *The Road to Power*: *Herut Party in Israel* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991).

9 Baruch Kimmerling, *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishers, 2001) (Hebrew).

Similar to the European elites in the United States, the European Zionist elites invented the collective Israeli identity in their image: secular, modern, European. They established the ruling Mapai party, controlled the economy, and dominated Israeli culture. All other groups that made up Israeli society were subjugated to the primacy of the secular Ashkenazi elites.

The Palestinian Arabs who remained within the borders of Israel in 1948 were excluded from the Israeli collective identity as "minorities", and were discriminated against by the definition of the state as a Jewish state.[10] Anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox Jews, who rejected the idea of reducing Judaism to a national identity, were included as Jewish citizens, although they were exempt from military service, a source of constant envy and anger of Jews serving in the military. The Jews who migrated from the Arab countries, mainly after 1948, were marked as Mizrahim, the "other" of the European elites, and expected to assimilate in the Israeli-style melting pot.[11] It is important to emphasize that only the Jews from Arab countries were expected to abandon their culture, which represented an apparent contradiction: "Arab Jews."[12]

Parallel to the publication of the Hebrew political essay Kimmerling also published an academic book in English, where he elaborated the sociological theory of his political essay.[13] He expanded his original

10 See Elia T. Zureik, *The Palestinian in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1979); Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).

11 For a detailed analysis of the composition of the Israeli society and the different levels of inclusion see Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

12 This culturally repressive attitude was sharply criticized by Mizrahi scholars. See Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19–20 (1988): 1–35; Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (London: Routledge, 2010); Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

13 Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

theory of settler society during the pre-1948 era,[14] including also the indigenous Palestinian population and the Jewish immigrants within a comprehensive settler-colonialist theory. Jewish immigrants from Arab countries were sent to settle in peripheral areas of the new state, replacing the Palestinians, who were displaced and converted into refugees during the 1948 war, and not only compelled to suppress their Arab culture.

According to Kimmerling, the secular-European collective identity failed to contain the various groups that compose Israeli society, and it broke down into seven subcultural communities: secular Ashkenazim, religious-Zionists, the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox, Mizrahim (Jews from Arab and Muslim countries), Jews from the former Soviet Union, Palestinian Arabs, and Ethiopian Jews. According to my analysis the container of the internal tensions among Jews was the hostility towards the Palestinians. This explains why the Israeli collective identity started to disintegrate immediately after Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords in 1993.[15] The inter-Jewish hostilities have sharply increased since 1993, and towards the end of the decade, Kimmerling argued, Israel could be described as "a multicultural society without multiculturalism."[16] The end of secular Western hegemony over Israeli identity and the disintegration of the society into hostile subcultures was, however, the result of long-range historical processes, and three different events that had taken shape in Israel over the last fifty years. The following account builds on Kimmerling but is less structural in orientation. It is based on eventful sociology and path dependency, attributing a crucial role to the sequence of events and the actions and reactions of political actors.[17]

14 Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socioterritorial Dimension of Zionist Politics* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1983).

15 See Lev Grinberg, *Politics and Violence in Israel/Palestine: Democracy vs. Military Rule* (London: Routledge, 2010).

16 Baruch Kimmerling, "The New Israelis: Multiple Cultures without Multi-culturalism," *Alpaim* 16 (1998): 264–308 (Hebrew).

17 For an historical overview of events that shaped the Israeli society and polity, follow-

The first of the key events was the expansion of Israeli borders in 1967 and the emergence of a messianic, settler religious Zionism, that sought to settle the entire "Land of Israel," replacing the historical role of the labor movement as the pioneers of settler expansion. As opposed to Labor's secular settler ideology, the religious Zionists developed an alternative strategy for the establishment of a settler society anchored on a religious-messianic ideology and an alternative collective identity. It is important to emphasize here that both ideological tendencies are Jewish supremacist — their main debate was around the legitimate borders of the state.

The second change took place following the fall of Labor in 1977, and the attempt by Mizrahi actors to build a political power autonomous from the Likud party, which attracted the majority of the Mizrahi vote. This attempt started with Tami in the 1981 elections, and crystalized in the 1984 elections with the establishment of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, which reached its peak in 1999 with seventeen Knesset seats.[18] This was a very salient achievement compared to the nineteen seats of the Likud party that year, under Netanyahu's leadership.

The third event that significantly changed the composition of Israeli society and the political arena was the mass immigration of Jews from the former USSR in the early 1990s. Unlike immigrants from Arab countries, these new immigrants were accepted into Israeli society without demanding their assimilation into the melting pot, or forcing them to abandon their culture from their home countries. Being European the dominant Ashkenazi elites expected that the new Russian immigrants would be a counterweight to the growing demographic weight of Mizrahim. Indeed, the Russian-speaking migrants maintained their culture and language, becoming a distinct, non-assimilated subculture. In 1996 they already had their autonomous political party and joined Netanyahu's first coalition government.

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ing the power relations between political elites and the resistance of various subjugated class, ethnic, and national groups, see Grinberg, *Mo(ve)ments of Resistance*.

18 See Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel* (2010); Yoav Peled, ed., *Shas: Challenging Israeliness* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Haharonot, 2001).

The dissolution of an Israeli collective identity in the nineties was seen by many social scientists and pundits as the "end of the Zionist ideology," while Zionism was interpreted as identical to the culture of the Ashkenazi elites.[19] This process led to the strengthening of the so-called "sectorial parties," representing the culture and interests of various groups in Israeli society, while the power of the two big parties, Labor and Likud, sharply declined during the 1990s.[20]

THE EMERGENCE OF THE "LEFT-RIGHT" TRIBAL HOSTILITIES

In 1981, Prime Minister Menachem Begin (Likud) defeated his contender Shimon Peres (Labor) by one seat (forty-eight to forty-seven) in an election cycle that, for the first time in Israeli history, saw the establishment of a "left-right" tribal dichotomy. I view tribalism as a discursive strategy used by political leaders aiming for the recruitment of supporters based on a sentiment of belonging to "people like us," all while sowing hatred for and fear of members of "other" tribes, and mainly fearing and hating the "chief" of adversary tribes. In certain political contexts the use of this discourse may be very convenient to political parties, as tribal mobilization based on hate and fear facilitates the evasion of substantive policy debates, while reframing the election as a battle of "us versus them." Tribalism may be used not only in dual dichotomist situations; however, when it emerges between two polarized social groups it is very effective in closing the political space to alternative political options. If you are not with "us," you are with "them." In such dichotomies, the closure of political space is

19 See my critique of this interpretation of Zionism by various social scientists as "yearning" for the old times of the Ashkenazi secular rule. Lev Grinberg, "Crumbling or Yearning Israeliness?" *Theory and Criticism* 25 (2004): 249–56.

20 The peak of their power was 95 (out of 120) in 1981 (48 *Likud* and 47 *Labor*). In 1992 they shrunk to 76 (44 and 32) and in 1999 they had together 45 seats (26 and 19). All other parties represented subcultural communities, usually called "sectors." For a discussion of this fall see Grinberg, *Politics and Violence in Israel/Palestine* (2010), Chapter 7.

especially effective, since there is no possible political center, because the debates are not about policy but about identity. This worked very effectively in 1981, closing the space to alternative political identities: "leftists" hated Begin and "rightists" hated Peres.

The social groups represented by the "Left" are the European secular elites, who are usually middle and upper classes with academic degrees. The "Right" appeals to Mizrahim, lower classes, traditional and religious citizens. The tribal "left-right" political arena excludes the Palestinian Arabs, not only in the occupied territories, but also the citizens within the pre-1967 borders. Both "Left" and "Right" have different mythical national self-images, which are inconsistent with the actual policies of their parties when they are in government. The "Left" views itself as a peacemaker, despite the fact that the Labor Party and its political partners were the ones who institutionalized the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights and launched the settlement enterprise during 1967–77.[21]

Meanwhile, the "Right" views itself as the protector of the entire Land of Israel, although Menachem Begin was the first leader who signed the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979.[22] Accordingly, the Likud government led the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and dismantled the settlements there. Moreover, the "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" agreement also recognized the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and agreed to establish a temporary Palestinian administration in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for a period of five years.[23] The agreement was not implemented at the time, although it did serve as the basis for the Oslo Accords signed between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat.[24]

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21 Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006).

22 Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, *https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-egypt%20peace%20treaty.aspx*.

23 "Camp David Accords: The Framework for Peace in the Middle East," Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, *https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/framework_for_peace_in_the_middle_east*.

24 Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process, 1977–1982: In Search of Legit-*

It is my interpretation that the formation of Rabin's coalition in 1992, and the Oslo Accords soon thereafter, was the turning point behind the dismantling of the traditional "left-right" dichotomy divide, contributing to the disintegration of the Israeli collective identity during the 1990s. But this identity — and here I differ from Kimmerling — had not been built around a secular European imagination, so much as around the ubiquity of military service and the need to fight against the "eternal," ahistoric and apolitical, "Arab enemies." After signing peace with Egypt, the Palestinians remained as the "glue" that held together the various components of Israeli society. The moment Arafat and Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn, Israeli identity began to splinter, along with the traditional "left-right" divide. In my research of the "peace process," I also argued that the internal disintegration of the 1990s can explain the rebuilding of national Jewish solidarity solidarity by constantly renewed hostile rounds since 2000.[25]

PARTIES FOR EVERYONE — EXCEPT MIZRAHIM

The weakening of the "left-right" tribal dichotomist mobilization during the 1990s raised the question of who will represent the Mizrahi voters. As mentioned above, in 1999 Shas increased its power from ten Knesset seats to seventeen, appealing to the lower-class religious Mizrahi voters, previously supporters of Likud. However, Shas succeeded in penetrating the political arena while avoiding a Mizrahi identity, and emphasizing their belonging to the ultra-Orthodox religious community. Toward the 1999 elections, however, four salient nonreligious Mizrahi leaders attempted to participate in the reshaping of the post-conflict political arena by joining new political formations. Two of them were former senior Likud ministers who resigned from Netanyahu's government and quit the Likud:

imacy for Peace (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

25 See Grinberg, *Politics and Violence* (2010).

David Levy (Foreign Relations) and Yitzhak Mordechai (Defense). In addition, within the Labor Party emerged Amir Peretz and Professor Shlomo Ben Ami. Yet those Mizrahi politicians did not form alliances with one another, opting instead to join parties dominated by Ashkenazi elites. Mizrahi autonomous power, it turned out, was the only one among many collective identities considered illegitimate. All other subcultures had their own autonomous parties: there were Russian, ultra-Orthodox, Arab, and religious parties. The Mizrahim, however, were severely criticized whenever their representatives stepped out of line. It is my assertion that every Mizrahi leader knew that teaming up with another Mizrahi politician means a certain political death.

Although tribal mobilization has been on and off in various electoral campaigns, the rejection of autonomous political Mizrahi leadership as illegitimate continued. It was strikingly evident in both rounds of the 2019 elections, when the rejection of Mizrahi autonomous leadership became salient. In the first round the Labor party lost eighteen seats (from twenty-four in 2015 to six) following the election of a new Mizrahi leader, Avi Gabbay. The tribal mobilization in support of Kahol Lavan, an instant party organized mainly against the "chief" of the "Right," was more appealing to them. However, the debate that broke out in the second round, following the alignment between two Mizrahi leaders, Amir Peretz and Orly Levy, and their decision not to join Meretz, brought to the surface the tribal tensions, which remained somehow hidden in the first round.

The "left-wing" party, Meretz, was publicly praised for joining forces with the former prime minister, Ehud Barak — despite Barak's destructive role in the derailment of Oslo during 1999–2001, and the dismantling of the Labor party during his partnership within the Netanyahu government during 2009–2013.[26] Meanwhile the union between the two Mizrahi political leaders, Amir Peretz and Orly Levy, was roundly condemned across the "Left," and became the most

26 For a comprehensive account of the Barak administration, see Raviv Drucker, *Harakiri: Ehud Barak and The Failure* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2002).

salient and vehement debate. Levy organized her Gesher party after splitting from Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, in 2016, when he joined Netanyahu's government, and dedicated her parliamentary work to social issues, appealing to Likud peripheral voters.

Amir Peretz has been the chair of the Labor Party since 2006, when they got nineteen seats, the second force in the Knesset and major partner of PM Ehud Olmert's Kadima government, serving as Minister of Security. After a disastrous second Lebanon War, Peretz was forced to resign, and towards the second round of 2019 he was reelected. Assuming that most "left" tribal voters have already abandoned to Kahol Lavan in the first round, he proposed to try to mobilize peripheral Mizrahi voters that support the "Right," attempting to break the tied results between the blocs in the first round. In order to do so, he teamed up with Levy's party, Gesher, and rejected joining Meretz (a party with a strong secular Ashkenazi profile). This decision, however, was too much for the "left" tribe.

The moment he tried to break with the traditional tribal "left-right" dichotomy, Peretz was accused of secretly plotting to join a Netanyahu-led coalition on the day after the election. Peretz's intention was to appeal to the voters of the "Left" with a political and socioeconomic agenda, as he did in 2006, detaching his party from the elitist images of the "left" tribe. In response, he was immediately subjected to suspicions of being a "traitor," who will join the chief of the "left-wing" tribe. Peretz was on the defensive all the way to election day, and had symbolically shaved his signature moustache in order to announce, "Read my lips, I am not joining Netanyahu." By doing so, he did not convince the suspicious, but he lost credibility with potential swing voters from the "right," because he surrendered to the Ashkenazi "left" pressure.

The emergence of Mizrahi leadership is a threat to the "left-right" dichotomy, which is very convenient in order to continue appealing to voters while evading the need to present agreed-upon political platforms. Mizrahi identity is seen as a threat both to the "Left" and the "Right" precisely because it is an alternative to both versions of the

nation. It can suggest a more inclusive collective identity than both the secular European Israeli identity of the "Left" and the religious-nationalist identity of the "Right." A potential new Israeli identity based on Mizrahi culture is capable of holding together what are considered dichotomous contradictions in terms: Arab-Jew, religion-secularism, modernity-tradition.[27] By doing so, it becomes an inclusive alternative identity for all Israeli subcultures. This is the main reason, I will argue, that autonomous Mizrahi leaders are under unprecedented attack by members of the Ashkenazi elites, neglecting the possibility of building political identities differently in an inclusive discourse of all social groups.

The tribal discourse and the lack of inclusive collective identity is the main cause of the stalemate after two rounds of elections. While Peretz and his party called for an inclusive coalition without boycotts — neither of ultra-Orthodox parties nor of the Union List of Arab parties — significant parts of the "center-left" rejected his proposal.[28] Some rejected a shared government with the Arab parties, while others rejected cooperation with the ultra-Orthodox parties. The so-called "center" parties are even more stuck, rejecting both partners.

THE STALEMATE: THE EMERGENCE OF THE TRIBAL "CENTER"

Although Kahol Lavan had an unprecedented success for a list with an almost completely politically unknown leader,[29] they failed to

27 Grinberg, *Mo(ve)ments of Resistance*, 312.

28 In his speech immediately after the announcement of the election results Peretz declared: "I want to be loud and clear: we must not boycott the *Joint List* … the Israeli society needs to heal from ten years of Netanyahu rule. There is no healing without love, and there is no healing with boycotts and polarization … we must not boycott the ultra-Orthodox either," (my translation), *https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5591813,00.html?fbclid=IwAR0U65CK--b2V4mRGalUGDuez7c-QVqnUqV5RHzMeXXueDj9vwPTifLdgsq0.*

29 Precedents to build similar formations around military "center-left" generals took place several times. In 1977 Dash got fifteen seats, and in 1999 the "center" party got

gather sixty-one seats without Israel Beyteinu, similar to Netanyahu's block. This was the conjuncture when Avigdor Lieberman could appear as the "hero" savior of the veteran secular Ashkenazi elites. After rebuffing Netanyahu's offer to join the ruling coalition following the April elections, Lieberman has become the key actor able to decide who will form the next coalition. He remained in the same position after the second round.

The Russian vote was decisive in the elections during the 1990s, siding once with Netanyahu and twice with Labor.[30] However, following the Second Intifada in 2000, Russian voters turned to more hawkish attitudes, siding with the Likud. Lieberman started his independent political career in 2006, and towards the 2009 elections he turned hatred of Arabs into his main strategy for mobilizing voters. It was that hate and incitement that won him fourteen seats in the Knesset, making him the central partner in Netanyahu's coalition.

Since then, however, Netanyahu has learned to use anti-Arab racist discourse far better than Lieberman, forcing the latter to search for a new kind of hatred that could mobilize his voters. After the first round in 2019, he found it in demonizing also ultra-Orthodox Jews — a singular feature of the tribal "left" — which will likely bring him more Knesset seats than the five he got in April. Indeed, he won eight seats by demanding the establishment of a secular National Unity Government with Likud and Kahol Lavan.

Tribalism, as I have argued before, is not a political position — it is a form of political mobilization that is premised on animosity. Here is the tribal source of the political stalemate in 2019: the "Left" tribe hates mainly ultra-Orthodox Jews and messianic settlers, while the

six seats. In 2006 Sharon and Peres established Kadima, and got twenty-nine seats, although they were very well-known political leaders, and were followed by significant parts of Likud and Labor.

30 In 1992 they didn't organize their own party. This migration wave started in 1989, and in 1992 their impact was with the vote for Rabin. Towards 1996 they already organized a party, led by Nathan Sheransky, getting six seats, and they joined Netanyahu's coalition. In 1999 they joined the Barak coalition.

"right" tribe hates mainly Arabs and their "leftist collaborators." In order to build a place for the "center" despite the tribal dichotomy, a group of politicians developed a discourse of double hate of both, "left" and "right," namely rejecting ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arab citizens as potential government partners. This new tribal "center" strategy emerged as the second political force in the 2013 elections (Yesh Atid), and they joined Netanyahu's 2013–2015 coalition, demanding the exclusion of the ultra-Orthodox parties.[31] Yesh Atid joined the group of generals and ex-Likud members that organized the Kahol Lavan list towards the 2019 elections, in order to present an alternative to Netanyahu. After the first round Yesh Atid strongly supported Lieberman's demand to exclude the ultra-Orthodox parties from future coalitions, and this became a central tension within Kahol Lavan. Parts of Kahol Lavan reject joining the ultra-Orthodox parties, and others reject joining the Arab Joint List.

In this situation, given that the inclusive coalition suggested by Peretz was rejected, the only option is Lieberman and Yesh Atid's demand to form a joint coalition with Kahol Lavan and Likud. The only remaining obstacle is Netanyahu, who was already indicted, and the only way to stay in politics is to get the nomination of prime minister. This is the only legal option to keep his immunity, and he is trying to do everything he can to pressure all potential partners to accept his leadership, including forcing a third electoral round.

In order to prevent a third round the most likely outcome is the formation of the so-called National Unity Government, led by the main parties of the "center-left" and "left" tribes. Such a government, however, will uncover the hidden fact of Israeli politics: that there is

31 The charismatic leader of Yesh Atid, Yair Lapid, followed in the footsteps of his father, Tommy Lapid. The elder Lapid organized his party Shinui towards the 1996 elections, getting six seats. In the 2003 elections Shinui got fifteen seats and joined Sharon's government, excluding ultra-Orthodox parties. Shinui vanished toward the 2006 elections, with the emergence of Kadima, Sharon's party. Kadima's power shrunk in 2013 to six seats, and joined the Labor Party towards the 2015 elections. Most of the voters of the Kadima-Labor list in 2015 (twenty-four) voted Kahol Lavan in 2019.

no political difference between the so called "center-left" and "Left" except for their tribal mythological images. Such a coalition, if formed, is expected to continue the military repression of the Palestinians and the austerity of neoliberal economic policies. The worse scenario is the formation of an extreme right-wing coalition, if Lieberman decides to join them, before or after a third round.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 stalemate is not necessarily bad news, because it has pushed tribal nonpolitical mobilization to its extreme form. Internal tensions within the next government are expected, and the disappointment of civil society with the political parties too. The combination of disappointment with the government and internal divisions among the elites may lead, eventually, to civil society organization and protest.[32] In other words, a National Unity Government imposed by the tribal "center" may lead to the politicization and mobilization both of Palestinians and parts of Israeli Jews. Tribal mobilization is the outcome of a deeply divided society in several cultural communities unable to face the destructive implications of the settler-colonial project, and a Jewish supremacist regime. Moreover, it is the result of the continued reluctance of the European elites to recognize Arab, Mizrahi, and religious cultures and communities, and their attempt to maintain their hegemonic power. Stalemates, however, sometimes produce new openings, ideas, actors, and coalitions. Unfortunately, the most effective way to close political spaces is through violence — a distressing constant in the Israeli political dynamic, a disgusting and well-known Israeli repertoire. ⊬

32 For a comprehensive explanation of this argument see Grinberg, *Mo(ve)ments of Resistance*, 45–50.

In his recent book, *How to Hide an Empire*, Daniel Immerwahr defines empire as territorial annexation, arguing that the subject has been ignored. However, as this essay argues, his framing of the subject greatly restricts and sanitizes our understanding of US imperialism. Many of the most pernicious assertions of US overseas power are ignored, minimized, or even justified and celebrated as by-products of international trade and globalization.

EMPIRE LITE

CHRISTIAN G. APPY

DANIEL IMMERWAHR

How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019)

When you arrive at the end of a four-hundred-page book called *How to Hide an Empire* you probably don't expect to find this question: "So does all this mean the United States can be classified as an empire?"[1] Is there really any doubt? Surely by now the subject has been driven into the open and its motives, deeds, and effects fully exposed and explored. If so, the reader could breathe a sigh of relief, assured that the question is merely rhetorical, a setup for the grand finale, the book's last, and apparently unambiguous, sentence: "The history of the United States is the history of empire."

In truth, however, author Daniel Immerwahr, a professor of history at Northwestern University, gives us a book with ambiguities and

1 Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2019), 400.

definitional constraints that make his conclusion far more hedged than it may seem. He raises the "is the United States an empire?" question at the end in order to distinguish his own narrowly couched usage of the term from others. "Most often," he claims, empire "is used as a pejorative, as an unfavorable character assessment. Empires are the bullies that bat weaker nations around. It's not hard to argue that the United States is imperialist in that sense."

Maybe so, but that's not the argument or the definition Immerwahr puts forward. Rather, he claims, "*empire* is not only a pejorative. It's also a way of describing a country that, for good or bad, has outposts and colonies. In this sense, *empire* is not about a country's character, but its shape. And by this definition, the United States has indisputably been an empire and remains one today."[2] What do we make of these perplexing sentences?

HOW TO HIDE GLOBAL IMPERIALISM

Does Immerwahr oppose critics of US imperialism who define it as the effort to dominate other people and places not just by seizing territory but by asserting every sort of power? Not exactly. After all, "pejorative" "assessments" of imperial "bullies," as he colloquially puts it, are pretty easy to pull off ("it's not hard"!). Yet Immerwahr wants to focus exclusively on "colonies and outposts," apparently because he thinks US imperialism "in that sense" is less well understood, or because he wants to stick with a definition that is "indisputable." Moreover, he prefers to describe (not assess) the "shape" of *empire* — and the use of italics suggests that his definition is the real McCoy. But he never explains how a territorial empire can be acquired and maintained without revealing a great deal about the "country's character." Isn't old-fashioned colonialism one of history's signature examples of state bullying? For Immerwahr, whether the US empire

2 Immerwahr, 400.

is "good or bad" is not the central question. Nor is it essential to identify the central motives that animate it, or the institutions that most powerfully drive it, or its most pernicious consequences. The goal of this book is to have us understand that the United States has been, and remains, a territorial empire and that "territory *matters*."[3] No longer, Immerwahr argues, should public understanding of US history focus only, or almost exclusively, on the "logo map" (a term coined by Benedict Anderson) of the forty-eight contiguous mainland states. It must also encompass the former territories of Alaska and Hawaii along with the Philippines (though only from 1898 to its formal independence in 1946), Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the American Virgin Islands, the northern Marianas, and some 800 overseas military bases. When considered together, he calls this "the Greater United States," borrowing the term from old textbooks and maps that used the expression in the years just after 1898 when the United States seized most of its overseas colonies.

A reader unfamiliar with the literature of US foreign policy might take this mapping of empire as evidence of a new and much more expansive treatment of the subject. But in fact, it excludes far more imperial history than it includes. Of course, books should be evaluated on their own terms as well as by the subjects and arguments they exclude or reject. However, Immerwahr's omissions — enabled by his strict territorial definition of empire — are profoundly significant because they conceal many of the most toxic manifestations of US imperialism and inhibit our ability to formulate a truly global analysis of American power. Among the subjects left out: hundreds of overseas military interventions (including the Korean and Vietnam Wars), the economic exploitation of poorer nations and the effort to establish global capitalist hegemony, the overt and covert overthrow of foreign governments, the CIA's attempts to sabotage scores of foreign elections, the persistent and pervasive US commitment to counterrevolution, and the economic and military support of allies

3 Ibid.

and proxies (many of them dictatorships). It's not that Immerwahr is unaware of these manifestations of imperialism. "As a doctoral student," he "read countless books" about "the wars, the coups, the meddling in foreign affairs" and in one paragraph he ticks off some of the examples of imperialism just mentioned.[4] Yet, "nobody ever expected me to know even the most elementary facts about the territories." That may be, but isolating the territories from the larger global projections of US overseas power does as much to hide the American Empire as the "logo map" of the forty-eight states.

A CRACKLING NARRATIVE OF COLONIALISM

The first half of the book, "The Colonial Empire," begins with "the detonation of the North American settler bomb" and the "extraordinary *de*population of the land's indigenous inhabitants" and takes us to World War II in the Philippines and the death of more than a million Filipinos.[5] That's a lot of ground to cover and Immerwahr embraces the challenge with a prose style the flap copy aptly describes as "fast-paced" and "crackling." Each short chapter is crafted around a few illustrative figures and stories and often ends with a twisty revelation or literary rim-shot. For example, in the ten-page second chapter, "Indian Country," we move from the "demographic catastrophe" that by 1800 — through disease and violent conquest — reduced the native population by perhaps 90 percent, to the Trail of Tears in the 1830s, to the creation of an "Indian Territory" that the federal government "successively whittled down until it had been reduced to its southern tip, present-day Oklahoma." Then Immerwahr offers a one-paragraph description of a 1931 drama called *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Cherokee playwright Lynn Riggs with a "defiant ending" in which the characters "refuse to cooperate" with a federal marshal because

4 Immerwahr, 14–15.

5 Immerwahr, 36.

they are — quoting the play — "jist plumb full of Indian blood." Then comes the reveal. *Green Grow the Lilacs* was appropriated by Rogers and Hammerstein for their wildly popular musical *Oklahoma!* The adaptation completely excluded any reference to "Indian blood," or, for that matter, any mention of Indians whatsoever. It's a compelling point that punctuates the way American popular culture often whitewashes history (sometimes quite literally), but you can't help noticing that Immerwahr adds little more to our understanding of the native people and cultures of the Western Territories.[6]

The US war of aggression against Mexico (1846–48) receives only passing mention, a striking omission since it resulted in the seizure of roughly half of Mexico's land and paved the way for US possession of the entire continent. It was also a harbinger of future aggressive wars on foreign soil and sparked a remarkable level of opposition (albeit often on the racist grounds that incorporating people of color would threaten white supremacy — an argument that would surface again among anti-imperialists in 1898). In *A Wicked War*, historian Amy Greenberg credits anti-war opposition to the Mexican War with limiting the territorial ambitions of expansionists like President James Polk who sought to take *all* of Mexico.[7]

Greenberg also includes ample evidence of the racist brutality that drove settler colonialism. For example, in a stunning battlefield report to the secretary of war, General Winfield Scott wrote: "Our militia & volunteers, if a tenth of what is said to be true, have committed atrocities — horrors — in Mexico, sufficient to make Heaven weep, & every American, of Christian morals, blush for his country. Murder, robbery & rape of mothers & daughters, in the presence of the tied up males of the families, have been common all along the Rio Grande." Despite Scott's "horror" over his troops' savagery, this was the same man, Greenberg writes, who ordered the systematic bombardment

6 Immerwahr, 44–45.

7 Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

of Veracruz — "smashing homes, churches, and schools indiscriminately" — and who denied an appeal that women and children be allowed to evacuate the city.[8]

In place of that bloody chapter of American imperialism, Immerwahr offers one called "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Guano but Were Afraid to Ask." This chapter contains its own brutal story, but you'd never know it from the jokey title, a play on the name of a blockbuster sex manual published in 1972. Guano — bird dung — is an effective fertilizer, a product badly needed by many nineteenth-century farmers, particularly in the eastern United States where crop yields had dropped dramatically due to "soil exhaustion" (primarily a lack of nitrogen). Knowing that there were mountains of calcified guano on small islands in the Pacific and Caribbean oceans, Congress passed the Guano Islands Act of 1856 by which any unclaimed, uninhabited island with guano on it could, "at the discretion of the President, be considered as appertaining to the United States." On the authority of that law's passive and euphemistic language, the United States seized nearly one hundred islands.

The workers who mined the guano had, according to Immerwahr, perhaps the worst job of the nineteenth century. "It offered all the backbreaking labor and lung damage of coal mining, but to do the job, you had to be marooned on a hot, dry, pestilential, and foul-smelling island for months. Respiratory disease, causing workers to pass out or cough up blood, were common."[9] The African Americans lured with false promises to work on the island of Navassa near Haiti, for example, were exploited like convict laborers and physically tortured for any disobedience. This history is little-known and represents one of Immerwahr's most original contributions. The guano islands go unmentioned in most books on US foreign policy (including Walter LaFeber's pathbreaking 1963 study of the economic underpinnings of late nineteenth-century imperialism, *The New Empire*) and receives

8 Greenberg, 134, 170.

9 Immerwahr, 53.

only a one-line reference in George Herring's thousand-page *From Colony to Superpower*.[10]

The guano islands history might have been linked to other corporate and state efforts to acquire foreign raw materials and markets. After all, as the "Greater United States" raced to become the world's richest economy by 1900, it was not hesitant to cross boundaries, always seeking an "open door" for its own capitalist growth even as it excluded Chinese immigrants and imposed tariffs on foreign goods. Yet Immerwahr keeps his coloring inside the lines of US territory. Moreover, the ordeal of the guano workers gets overshadowed not only by the silly chapter title, but by its final whirlwind pages about the German-Jewish chemist Fritz Haber. Haber made guano mining virtually obsolete by inventing a process for synthesizing ammonia, the basis for an "infinitely expandable" source of fertilizer.

Although Immerwahr makes no mention of the negative environmental consequences of this scientific fix, he does tell us that Fritz Haber went on to invent the chlorine gas that was used by Germany in World War I. "In a delicious historical irony," Immerwahr writes, "the man who saved the world from starvation was also the father of weapons of mass destruction."[11] There is a lot to object to in this statement (did starvation end?), but the use of "delicious" in any reference to chemical warfare is especially disturbing, even more so when we next learn that Haber also presided over the development of the insecticide Zyklon A, which, when slightly modified, became the Zyklon B that was used in Hitler's gas chambers. All of this culminates with our discovery that the maiden name of Haber's suicidal wife, Clara, was Immerwahr and she was a distant relative of the author: "Her cousin Max was my great-grandfather."[12] We are given no clue as to why these stories are included. Perhaps the author was worried, as he puts it, that "the story of the guano islands may seem trivial"

10 George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776 (Oxford History of U.S. Foreign Relations)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 257.

11 Immerwahr, 58.

12 Immerwahr, 58.

and needed to be ginned up.[13] Also, as you read on it becomes clear that Immerwahr is fascinated by connecting dots, even when the line between them does not have much explanatory significance.

The brisk account of the wars of 1898 in Cuba and the Philippines is much more conventional fare and the star of the show is indicated by the title — "Teddy Roosevelt's Very Good Day." It might just as well be called "Cuba's Very Bad Day" since its revolution against Spain was on the verge of victory when the United States intervened and prevented genuine Cuban independence, first by imposing a military occupation and then by ending it only when Cuba accepted the terms of the Platt Amendment which gave the US military bases the right to veto any treaty between Cuba and another country, the right to supervise the Cuban treasury, and "the right to intervene for … the maintenance of government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty." Property is the key word, especially given President McKinley's concern about the $50 million in US investments on the island.

Immerwahr alludes to the Platt Amendment but doesn't name it or discuss its larger consequences for US foreign policy. That's a telling omission because it became the template for US relations throughout Latin America in the decades to come. It's long forgotten in the United States, but in many parts of the Caribbean and Central America it is still known as *plattismo*, shorthand for US imperialism by threat, proxy, and military intervention. Because Immerwahr restricts himself to territorial empire he does not take us down the "Cuban path" by which the United States gained what it wanted without the bother of establishing colonial rule — in the case of Cuba, as the author acknowledges, ownership of "its sugar fields, its mines, its tobacco industry, its banks, and much of its land."[14] The same could be said for many other countries.

Immerwahr also soft-pedals the imperial impulse that drove the

13 Immerwahr, 56.

14 Immerwahr, 113.

United States to war in Cuba. President William McKinley, he claims, "succumbed to popular sentiment and agreed to war."[15] As historian Louis A. Pérez Jr makes clear in *The War of 1898*, although there was indeed a great deal of public enthusiasm for "Cuba Libre," McKinley intervened in order to *prevent* Cuban liberation. His war message says nothing about Cuban independence but rather calls on Congress "to secure in the island the establishment of a stable government, capable of maintaining order and observing its international obligations."[16] Moreover, the United States sought to disarm and pacify the Cubans as much as the Spaniards: "The forcible intervention of the United States … involves … hostile constraint upon both the parties to the contest," McKinley added. Without a firm understanding of US opposition to Cuban independence, Fidel Castro's words in 1959 are incomprehensible: "This time the revolution will not be frustrated! … It will not be like 1898, when the Americans came and made themselves masters of the country."[17] The key point is this: not only does Immerwahr ignore many cases of naked US imperialism, but he often sanitizes the episodes he does describe.

Immerwahr makes a sharp distinction between lands under direct US jurisdiction and the many other places where the United States achieved (or sought) economic hegemony and political control by proxy. In fact, the line is often blurry. In both Cuba and the Philippines, the United States acted as a counterrevolutionary power, ruling indirectly in one, and colonizing the other. Some of Immerwahr's most critical writing comes with his account of the US counterinsurgency in the Philippines which dragged on until 1913 despite Theodore Roosevelt's claim that it ended in 1902. War-related Filipino deaths probably exceeded 775,000, compared to 4,196 Americans. US tactics

15 Immerwahr, 67.

16 Louis A. Perez Jr *The War of 1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 19.

17 Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 90.

included the burning of villages, the forced relocation of the rural population into fortified camps ("reconcentration"), the torture of suspected rebels (most notoriously with the "water cure," a version of what is now called "waterboarding"), the racist demonization of the Filipinos as "gugus" (perhaps a precursor of "gooks"), and the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians.

All of these brutal counterinsurgency practices were carried out or supported by the United States in many other places (Vietnam most obviously), but those dots are not connected (other than a brief reference to "gunboat diplomacy").[18] Moreover, rather than linking the Vietnam War to a long history of counterrevolution and colonial and neocolonial policies, Immerwahrs expresses surprise that the United States didn't "even *try* to annex" Vietnam, one of its "Cold War adversaries."[19] This is presented as a sign of restraint, as is the claim that "if it truly wished," the United States could have "visited the same fate" on Vietnam as it did on Japan. Let's just remind ourselves that Vietnamese revolutionaries did not regard the United States as a "Cold War adversary" but as an imperialist aggressor seeking to deny them national unification, independence, and self-determination. The United States dropped five million tons of bombs on Vietnam (more than twice the bomb tonnage the United States dropped in World War II) and was responsible for the killing of three million Vietnamese in its failed two-decade-long effort to prop up an unpopular authoritarian regime in Saigon. It's unimaginable that an effort to annex Vietnam could have been any more brutal or effective.

POPULAR RECEPTION

Perhaps now is the time to mention that *How to Hide an Empire* has received substantial, and mostly positive, media attention, a great and unusual tribute for a work by an academic historian. You can

18 Immerwahr, 114.

19 Immerwahr, 264.

poke around online for five minutes and find a few dozen books about US history with "empire" or "imperialism" in the title, but very few, if any, have made such a splash. In addition to reviews in major publications, Immerwahr did a lengthy interview on "Democracy Now!" with Amy Goodman and Juan González and was praised for his "stunning new book." That show also quoted (as did the positive *New York Times* review) what may be the most radical passage in the book: "At various times, the inhabitants of the U.S. Empire have been shot, shelled, starved, interned, dispossessed, tortured and experimented on. What they haven't been, by and large, is seen."

Because *How to Hide an Empire* contains a good deal of material that might be incorporated into a more thoroughgoing critique of US imperialism, reviewers may see it as more revelatory than it is. Consider, for example, a chapter discussed at length on "Democracy Now!" with yet another smile-seeking title — "Doctors Without Borders." It features Dr Cornelius Rhoads, who went to Puerto Rico in 1930 to study anemia (caused by hookworm) and treated his patients like experimental animals. Without consent he denied treatment to some and induced disease in others. Writing to a Boston colleague, Rhoads dropped this bombshell: "What the island needs is not public health work, but a tidal wave or something to totally exterminate the population … I have done my best to further the process of extermination by killing off 8 and transplanting cancer into several more."[20] Any evidence that might prove definitively whether Rhoads actually killed eight patients was destroyed or remains undiscovered, but his behavior was obviously abhorrent in either case.

The damning letter, found by a hospital employee before it was mailed, was widely circulated by Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party. With the island in an uproar, Rhoads quickly fled back to the United States where he became a celebrated pioneer in cancer research and director of both Manhattan's Memorial

20 Immerwahr, 144.

Hospital and the Sloan Kettering Institute. On the mainland, few people knew or cared what he had done in Puerto Rico. Nor did anyone raise objections to another troubling line in his resume — his tenure as chief of the Chemical Warfare Service during World War II when he oversaw the experimental gassing of some 60,000 US troops (many of them Puerto Rican).

In the 1950s, Puerto Ricans were further abused by mainland researchers when they unethically tested early and more dangerous versions of what became, in 1960, the FDA-approved birth control pill. These examples are important and shocking, but hardly exceptional. US scientists and doctors in that era and beyond engaged in many unethical experiments on the mainland and overseas. Recall, for example, the infamous forty-year Tuskegee Syphilis Study in which (among dozens of unethical practices) African American were allowed to suffer with the disease so its effects could be examined even after penicillin had been found to provide a cure. In 2003, historian Susan Reverby discovered that one of the Tuskegee researchers, Dr Charles Cutler, had previously conducted a federally-funded 1946 study in Guatemala in which he infected prisoners, mental patients, and soldiers with gonorrhea and syphilis.[21] Several subjects died as a result and many others may never have received treatment.

The medical exploitation of Puerto Ricans was dreadful, but it is presented without pointing us to a larger consideration of state and institutional practices in the US empire.

THE BENIGN RENAMING OF IMPERIALISM

The second half of the book takes us from World War II to the present and it is here that we can most clearly identify how Immerwahr's focus on territorial annexation as the heart of imperialism excludes many

21 Susan M. Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Sushma Subramanian, "Worse Than Tuskegee," *Slate*, Feb. 26, 2017.

of the most troubling manifestations of US overseas power that would be included in a sufficiently critical analysis. Just as disturbing, the territorial empire is celebrated for dramatically downsizing just as other forms of domination are galloping ahead only to be dismissed as mere by-products of "globalization," "development," "modernization," "international trade," or the fallout from the Cold War or the Global War on Terror. Imperialism thus defined becomes increasingly obsolete and benign.

Part II is called "The Pointillist Empire," a metaphor borrowed from painting style made famous by postimpressionist George Seurat who used small dots of color to form recognizable images. In the years after World War II, Immerwahr's map of the "the Greater United States" becomes a work of pointillism — hundreds of small dots that promise to reveal a coherent image of empire but ultimately looks a bit like a partially solved connect-the-dots puzzle. The internal organs and muscles that hold it all together are left largely to the imagination.

Immerwahr is drawn to the idea of imperial "points" because he believes it best represents the US territorial empire as it moved from "decolonization" to "globalization." He is a bit awestruck by both phenomena. He highlight the first transformation with a dramatic statistic. At the end of World War II, in 1945, the United States had jurisdiction over 135 million overseas people (most of them in occupied Japan and Germany), a greater number than the 132 million who lived on the mainland. This reality "brought the United States to the dizzying heights of imperial possibility."[22] As the most powerful nation in the world, it might have made the biggest land grab in history. "Why not conquer the globe?" Instead, the United States "won a war and *gave up* territory."[23] It "set free" the Philippines (1946), ended its occupation of Japan and Germany (1952, 1955), and granted statehood to Alaska and Hawaii (1959).

22 Immerwahr, 315.

23 Immerwahr, 229.

Impressed as he is with this territorial downsizing, Immerwahr acknowledges that it was not the result of "altruism." He cites two major explanations. First, "the war fueled a global anti-imperial resistance movement that put up major impediments to colonial empire." With the colonized world everywhere in revolt, the cost of maintaining direct control was soaring, a drain on lives, money, and reputation. High Commissioner to the Philippines, Paul McNutt, sent alarming postwar reports of economic and political turmoil in which a turnover of power would put the country in the hands of "those who served the [Japanese] enemy." Yet, he cautioned, "All Asia, the billion-people Orient, will be watching us in the Philippines" to see if the promise of independence would be honored or reneged upon. Immerwahr concludes that with "no law or army forcing it to do so, the United States was letting its largest colony go. And it was doing this, remarkably, so as not to look bad in the eyes of Asians."[24]

That may have been a factor, but hardly the only one. As Immerwahr himself makes clear in his more fully developed second explanation for decolonization: "Fighting and winning the [second world] war had taught Washington the art of projecting power without claiming colonies."[25] Here again, as in the earlier brief discussion of the "Cuban path" we seem on the verge of a new and broader definition of imperialism beyond annexation. Yet, Immerwahr again pulls back from the full significance of the subject. He provides no analysis, for example, of the economic, military, and political mechanisms that allowed the United States to maintain power in, and extract great profits from, the Philippines after "independence." There is not a single reference to Ferdinand Marcos who ruled the nation with an iron fist for twenty-one years with the blessing and support of five US presidents (including nearly $2.5 billion in aid during the years of martial law, 1972–1981).

24 Immerwahr, 238.

25 Immerwahr, 315.

Immerwahr's spotlight on formal decolonization and the claim that the United States "nudg[ed] its European counterparts to abandon their empires" obscures the intense US opposition to progressive and revolutionary movements in the Global South whether they be anti-colonial, nationalist, communist, or a mix. In Indochina, for example, the United States supported the French war to reconquer and preserve its colony and by the end of that eight-year bloodbath Uncle Sam was bankrolling nearly 80 percent of the cost. By that point, of course, whatever hope the Vietnamese revolutionaries took from Filipino independence had long expired and the United States was regarded as a neocolonial imperialist and "look[ed] bad" in the eyes of many other Asians as well.[26]

Indeed, precisely at the postwar moment when the United States was doubling down on imperialist efforts to dominate world markets and geopolitics, Immerwahr focuses our attention on the advent of "empire-killing technologies" that "weaned the United States off colonies." The "synthetic revolution" — a "Fritz Haber-style solution" — allowed the United States to produce almost anything it needed without relying on foreign sources. "Secure access to raw materials — one of the chief benefits of colonization — no longer *mattered* that much." Immerwahr's enthusiasm for scientific and technological innovations is sometimes breathless: "The replacement of colonial rubber with synthetic rubber was a sort of magic. Yet it wasn't the only rabbit that chemists yanked from their hats. What's extraordinary is how many raw materials the United States weaned itself off during the war. Silk, hemp, jute, camphor, cotton, wool, pyrethrum, gutta-percha, tin, copper, tung oil — for one after another the United States found synthetic substitutes. Throughout its economy, it replaced colonies with chemistry."[27] This, of course, suggests that the United States had once depended on its colonies for all those products. Yet earlier in the book Immerwahr concluded: "The

26 Immerwahr, 229.

27 Immerwahr, 270–71.

colonies had their uses: as naval bases and zones of experimentation … But colonial products weren't integral to the U.S. economy."[28]

Perhaps the United States was weaned off the global economy? Well, no. Immerwahr concedes that some raw materials still had to be found overseas. But those could be "safely sourced through international trade … even when it comes to oil, flare-ups of naked imperialism have been rare and haven't ultimately led to annexations."[29] What about the US war in Iraq, certainly an example of prolonged and naked imperialism if ever there was one (and with oil as a central driver)? With "annexation" the essential measure of Immerwahr's *empire*, all other evidence of imperialism is just given another name — trade, globalization, the Cold War, or the War on Terrorism. As for the 1953 US overthrow of Iran's Mohammad Mossadegh for nationalizing his nation's oil, that was apparently too minor a "flare-up" even to mention (despite the decades of blowback against the United States it sowed). The CIA's 1954 overthrow of another democratically elected leader, Jacobo Árbenz of Guatemala, receives one sentence (with Árbenz unnamed). There, too, economic factors were essential. When a land reform act took some property away from the massive holdings of the United Fruit Company, the Eisenhower administration announced the arrival of a "communist beachhead" in Central America and moved forward with the covert operation.

Immerwahr lists copper as one of the products the United States was "weaned" off, yet two major US mining companies, Kennecott and Anaconda, dominated the Chilean copper industry. When the government of Salvador Allende decided to nationalize the country's copper, Kennecott and Anaconda (along with Bank of America, ITT, Pepsi-Cola, and half a dozen other major firms) pushed the Nixon administration to get rid of the newly elected president. In 1973, their wish came true. As Stephen Kinzer concluded in *Overthrow*, his study of US-sponsored regime change since the late nineteenth century,

28 Immerwahr, 158.

29 Immerwahr, 276.

"the United States repeatedly used its military power, and that of its clandestine services, to overthrow governments that refused to protect American interests. Each time, it cloaked its intervention in the rhetoric of national security and liberation. In most cases, however, it acted mainly for economic reasons — specifically to establish, promote, and defend the right of Americans to do business around the world without interference."[30]

Immerwahr may well be correct that science and technology "diminish[ed] the value of colonies," but it seems only to have enhanced the US appetite for asserting global hegemony. The same could be said for the other characteristics of the "pointillist empire" — the proliferation of communications, logistics, the English language, and international industrial standardization (everything from screw threads, to rifles, to aviation, to the stop sign). In some passages, Immerwahr seems to view these transformations as the unequivocal result of American power. He notes, for example, the "stupefying privilege the United States enjoyed in the realm of standards. It could force other countries to adopt its screw thread angle in the name of international cooperation. But it was never bound by those imperatives itself."[31]

Once again, we are being shown some ways imperialism without annexation works, only to have Immerwahr undermine any such conclusion. His most characteristic take on the subject of globalization is that the United States may have "led the way," but the world and its billions of consumers (the global marketplace) were decisive, as if the whole process were a voluntary game of follow the leader. "In industry after industry, the world tuned itself to the United States." While all "standards reflect power, the real compulsion rarely comes from the state. It comes, rather, from the community."[32] This sounds a bit like Thomas Friedman in *The World Is Flat*, marveling at the genius of the consumer- and techno-driven marketplace. Even the

30 Kinzer, *Overthrow*, 3.

31 Immerwahr. 313.

32 Immerwahr, 312, 328.

English language has reached dominance not because it was "imposed from the top down" but because "it emerged from the bottom up." Yet once again Immerwahr contradicts himself. As for the dominance of English on the internet, Immerwahr tells us it was "the result of free choices" and two sentences later writes, "They use English because there is no other viable choice." In other words, Immerwahr wants it both ways — to acknowledge US "power" and "predominance," but to conclude that globalization is really a remarkably fluid and open playing field. Yet power is distinctive precisely because it can compel people to do things not just by coercion but by inculcating the view that manipulated and limited "choices" are freely made.[33]

MILITARY BASES GAVE US THE BEATLES?

Immerwahr turns in the end to a consideration of "baselandia," the 800 or so US overseas military bases. "Small specks of land acquired special importance in the twilight of formal empire. The global tide of decolonization washed most imperial arrangements from the map, but it left a few nooks and crannies, nearly all small islands."[34] Here again Immerwahr sticks to his territorial definition of empire as if the exercise of military and economic power anywhere else does not constitute "imperial arrangements."[35] Even so, a serious consideration of military bases might lead to a wider discussion of the motives and consequences of US imperialism. After all, just such an approach was central to the work of Chalmers Johnson, a leading critic of twenty-first-century US imperialism. His magisterial "blowback trilogy" defines the "empire of bases" a central instrument by which the United States seeks to assert itself as the "new Rome."[36] For

33 Immerwahr, 327, 331.

34 Immerwahr, 343.

35 Ibid.

36 Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), *The Sorrows of Empire; Militarism, Secrecy,*

Johnson, overseas bases are part of a much larger project to achieve global dominance. Most obviously, they promote "militarism, the inescapable companion of imperialism." Yet, their function is as much economic as military. As Johnson writes in *The Sorrows of Empire*, "the empire [of bases] supports the military-industrial complex, university research and development centers, petroleum refiners and distributors, innumerable foreign officer corps whom it has trained, manufacturers of sport utility vehicles and small-arms ammunition, multinational corporations and the cheap labor they use to make their products, investment banks, hedge funds and speculators of all varieties, and advocates of 'globalization,' meaning theorists who want to force all nations to open themselves up to American exploitation and American-style capitalism."[37] For Johnson, who died in 2011, imperialism was destroying democracy and leading the United States toward dictatorship.

That is indeed a pejorative assessment, and not one Immerwahr shares. For him, these "small specks of land" are not instruments of imperialism, but broadcasters of American standards, culture, and economic development, a US-led globalization that is presented as a mash-up of positive and negative consequences.[38] Yes, foreign military bases can alienate and abuse local populations but they also inject lots of cash and inspire entrepreneurship. "Enterprising young men [like the founders of Sony] living cheek by jowl with the U.S. military get their start by imitating what they see around them."[39]

In the final pages of *How to Hide an Empire*, Immerwahr claims his approach to the subject is vital because "territory *matters*." He offers a few examples of why: "World War II began, for the United States, in the territories. The war on terror started with a military base. The birth

and the End of the Republic (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), and *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

37 Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, 26.

38 Immerwahr, 343.

39 Immerwahr, 368.

control pill, chemotherapy, plastic, *Godzilla*, the Beatles, *Little House on the Prairie*, Iran-Contra, the transistor radio, the name America itself — you can't understand the histories of any of these without understanding territorial empire."[40]

It's a curious list, an idiosyncratic hodgepodge of topics, all with some apparent link to "the Greater United States." But what kind of link? Did territorial imperialism cause or create these events, products, and cultural discourses? The connections cited are real, but Immerwahr does not demonstrate that they are essential or decisive. Yes, the birth control pill was tested in Puerto Rico, but surely it would have been invented regardless. Yes, some of the support for the Contras in the 1980s was coordinated from one of the old guano islands, but so what? The CIA had countless options. Or take the Beatles. Immerwahr makes the intriguing point that the musical culture of 1950s Liverpool was influenced by the presence of thousands of American servicemen fifteen miles to the east at Burtonwood, the largest US Air Force base in Europe. But without evidence he makes an astonishing claim. "Burtonwood's significance would be hard to overstate," he writes. With their "pockets bulging with dollars," American servicemen flocked to Liverpool clubs to hear British bands cover popular American hits. The Beatles were one of those bands and, according to Immerwahr, it "owed its very existence to the U.S. military."[41] You don't have to be a musicologist (or an anti-imperialist) to realize that this causal connection is overstated and unconvincing. And even if it were true, does that offset or vindicate the vast bloodshed, misery, and human dislocation caused by American imperialism?

And how is our understanding of the "Global War on Terror" dependent on a knowledge of US bases in Saudi Arabia? Yes, as Immerwahr points out, Osama bin Laden was enraged that in 1990 his native country allowed the United States military to desecrate the Islamic holy land with its massive military buildup preceding the Persian Gulf

40 Immerwahr, 400.

41 Immerwahr, 357–59.

War. But that's just one fact among dozens that would be a part of any reasonable interpretation of 9/11 and the US response to it. Not only did al-Qaeda have many other grievances against the United States, but the architects of the so-called War on Terror had been pushing for greater US militarism in the greater Middle East long before the attacks of September 11, 2001. To say that all of this "started with a military base" is a classic example of reductionism.[42] History is not a set of fun facts.

THE DOTS REMAIN UNCONNECTED

In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, Immerwahr said that while drafting the book, "I seriously sent my agent a note: 'Godzilla, the peace sign, 9/11, military bases …' then in all caps with like eight exclamation points, 'IT'S ALL CONNECTED!!!!!!!!' That was exactly the feeling I was getting, that feeling of strange and obscure details suddenly revealed to be important." *How to Hide an Empire* is full of gee-whiz enthusiasm of this sort, and many readers may find the "connections" entertaining. Unfortunately, under scrutiny they often prove facile or insignificant, especially when considered alongside the enormous challenge of developing a coherent interpretation of the motives, conduct, and consequences of US imperialism.

Even more disturbing is the possibility that readers will regard Immerwahr's narrow and, in many ways, benign description of American empire as an exhaustive treatment of a far more complex and dangerous reality. If so, the book's title might be unwittingly literal: *How to Hide an Empire*? Shrink it to a set of small overseas territories and outposts, tell an entertaining set of stories, with "good or bad" consequences, and ignore the imperial colossus that continues to seek, albeit with declining success, global hegemony.

42 Immerwahr, 400.

In *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family*, Sophie Lewis calls for a defense and generalization of surrogacy, not just as a form of labor rights, but as a prefigurative move toward abolishing the family. But Lewis's recognition of surrogate labor is only partial, and a fuller appreciation of the issues involved would yield a much more ambivalent attitude toward the practice. Further, I suggest that the call to replace the family with communal child-rearing is not only dubious, but likely to do considerable harm.

LABOR, LOVE, AND CAPITAL

NIVEDITA MAJUMDAR

SOPHIE LEWIS

Full Surrogacy Now

(London: Verso, 2019)

Is a commercial surrogate selling a womb, a baby, or a service? Does it matter? Should children "belong" to their parents or to the community? In *Full Surrogacy Now*, Sophie Lewis addresses these questions as part of her reflections on a subject on which progressives are far from united. Lewis is strongly critical of the practices of commercial surrogacy but rejects the call for banning the industry. Calls for ban, she argues, are aligned with the anti-abortion politics of the Right. Instead, Lewis would like to treat surrogacy as any other labor issue and advocates for enhanced rights for surrogacy workers. In her ideal postcapitalist world, where children would be collectively reared, surrogacy would simply mean the care for others.

Lewis embeds her defense of surrogacy in a deeper view about the family. She feels that one of the goals of the Left should be to abolish the family, and far from being a source of oppression, surrogacy offers

a path to the family's dissolution. The conventional parent-child relationship in capitalism is an assertion of ownership — of the parent(s) over the children. It persists, she seems to believe, because of the family's functionality for capitalism. It is in families that the next generation of workers is produced for capital, and parents, mostly women, provide caring labor gratis for the employer class. There is nothing natural about this, and it is fundamentally oppressive, not just for women, but also for the children.

In an ideal world, Lewis avers, children would be parented by multiple adults who would do so out of choice and not because the children "belong" to them. As a model, she looks to the practice of oppressed groups in history. So she cites the example of the enslaved, who, because they were denied the opportunity to "own" their children, developed practices of communal child-rearing, with multiple adults taking responsibility for their care. She considers current-day commercial surrogates as similarly oppressed. Her idea is that precisely because certain populations do not enjoy the privileges that accrue with the structure of the family, they are able to envision a liberation from the implicit oppressiveness of the family structure. Hence, far from abolishing surrogacy, it ought to be generalized.

While raising urgent ethical and political questions, *Full Surrogacy Now* largely fails in its argument. Lewis uneasily straddles the descriptive — the brutalities of the surrogacy industry — and the normative — post-capital, post-family commune. Even though several critics have focused on her critique of the family, that's not the most problematic aspect of the work. Rather, it is her belief that the path to liberation from patriarchy and capital goes through a further commodification of social life — and hence, by deepening capital's incursion into domains protected from it hitherto — for this is what her recommendation of commercial surrogacy amounts to. And in this, she fails to make her case.

PREGNANCY AS LABOR

The foundational premise of Lewis's defense of commercial surrogacy is that pregnancy is a form of labor, like any other. The fact that it is typically unpaid and affinal does not alter the fact that it still is labor. The commercialization of surrogacy turns that labor into a commodity. The womb, she holds, works just like the "voice boxes of call-center workers, the muscles of athletes, or the eyeballs of those on the smartphone assembly line."[1] And because it is a laboring activity — "uterine work,"[2] she calls it — it should be recognized and rewarded accordingly, not abolished.

Now, there is no doubt that there is considerable labor involved in pregnancy. Does it follow from this that we can regard it as work, much as any other form of exploited labor in capitalism? Should we have no more hesitation in commodifying it, and arguing about its economic value, as we do about garment workers' wages? Lewis seems to take the view that the surrogate parent is exploited no less than is the garment worker, and thus, the goal should be to condemn and minimize her exploitation, not to ban the labor itself. Let us for the moment set the exploitation issue aside and simply agree that there are ample grounds on which to condemn the treatment of surrogates. Beyond that, are the different kinds of labor comparable?

Surrogacy contracts by their very nature dig deeper into the woman's autonomy than do most other forms of exploited labor. First of all, in most contracts, the surrogates' right to abort the fetus is often seriously curtailed; even more, that decision is often transferred to her employers, giving them partial control over her person. It's true that surrogates choose to take on the work, just as a factory laborer chooses to be a wage laborer. But while the laborer at least has the right to walk away from the job, once the surrogate's choice is exercised, there are severe restrictions on her exit options. The contracts allow

1 Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now* (London: Verso, 2019), 82.

2 Lewis, 129.

for broad intrusions into a woman's body and freedom including the agency's right to medically treat the woman in all manners deemed necessary. Surrogates are often confined for the nine-month period of gestation with restrictions on movement and visitation rights. These restrictions are built into surrogacy contracts in a way that is not found in waged labor. While it is certainly possible to imagine contracts that would be more attentive to surrogates' rights, the very nature of the exchange will inevitably call for limits on such protections. Since the process is intended to culminate in the production of a healthy baby, the normal process of "quality control" in the production process cannot but place severe restrictions on the surrogates' freedoms, in a way that is unnecessary in other forms of commodified labor.

But that isn't even the main problem. Maybe we could find ways of protecting the rights of the surrogate, much as with any other protected labor in a democratic society. The real specificity of surrogacy resides in the relationship between the worker and her "product." The archetypal relation is one of profound alienation, as Marx explained. In capitalism, the worker has no real connection to the good she works upon. It even stands over her as an external force, as a source of her oppression, and it is not unusual for workers to consciously sabotage its production, and even its quality. But not so with surrogacy. The delivery of the product is typically a source of deep despair.

As highlighted in a BBC report,[3] surrogates are sometimes not even allowed to lay their eyes on the babies they produced, inducing at times such a wrenching sense of loss and grief in surrogate mothers that it persists for years after the event. Lewis herself draws our attention to the silent tears of the surrogate in the documentary, *Google Baby*, as the newborn is whisked away even as the surrogate lies prostate after her caesarian surgery. Another surrogate in the documentary is shown to part with twins she had birthed and spent three weeks

3 Geeta Pandey, "India surrogate mothers talk of pain of giving up baby," *BBC News* Chennai, August 15, 2016.

caring for, including breastfeeding before the arrival of the parents, leaving the viewer to wonder about her emotional well-being. No doubt the experience of such distress is uneven, but it is recognized as a significant aspect or hazard of gestational labor.

This is the key to the qualitative difference between work in general and pregnancy as work. A garment worker does not shed silent tears at the loss of a blouse that she produced with her labor. Lewis admits that on one point, and only on that point, she agrees with surrogacy abolitionists — it is that "surrogates *are* selling a baby in a sense ... [they] are not paid in full until live progeny has swapped hands."[4] But where she differs from the abolitionists is in "inferring that therefore, they are selling the labor power that produces a baby, labor which then evanesces in that baby's "still moving, still growing flesh."[5] Instead, Lewis maintains that when "surrogates' concrete labor is commodified, it congeals in the form of a creature,"[6] and they are paid the price of their concrete labor in the production process.

The equivalence that Lewis draws between gestational and other kinds of labor unwittingly reinforces a notion that works against women. Her position that the gestator's contribution to the creation of a baby is severed at birth and has no relation with the baby's "still moving, still growing flesh" is premised on the idea that parenthood is determined on the basis of genetic contribution — sperm and eggs — alone. This is largely the same view embedded in current legal practice. The courts have refused to recognize surrogates' claim to parenthood because they are not genetically connected to the baby. As Debra Satz notes, this "inattention to women's unique labor contribution [by the courts] is itself a form of unequal treatment. By defining women's rights and contributions in terms of those of men, when they are different, the courts fail to recognize an adequate basis for women's

4 Lewis, 82.

5 Ibid.

6 Lewis, 83.

rights and needs [thus placing] an additional burden on women."[7] In other words, the legal concept of surrogacy severs gestational labor from the definition of parenthood and in so doing reinforces the traditional notion of women as incubators.

Lewis strangely discounts the implications of the fact, which is also central to her own argument, that in addition to their eggs, women also contribute nine months of gestational labor to the baby's birth. This gives the woman a connection to the newborn that is above and beyond the mere transfer of genetic material. In refusing to recognize the specificity of women's gestational labor, and thereby the emotional violence of commodifying that labor, Lewis is only reinforcing the interpretation sanctioned by current legal practice. Now Lewis might object, arguing that her reasoning for this is somewhat different. She does say on several occasions that her motivation stems, at least partly, not from views about pregnancy per se, but from an objection to all proprietary definitions of parenthood, especially those based on genes. So the reason it is OK to take the child away from the surrogate is that much like genetic parents, a surrogate mother should not have any special ownership rights over the child anyway. But, whatever its merits might be, surely an expansive ideal of parenthood cannot be based on an *exclusion* of the gestating woman from its domain. It is one thing to say that children should not be the exclusive property of their biological parents, and that there ought to be a wider penumbra of relations that attach to, and enrich, the child in her maturation. It is, however, quite another to assert that the wider community has first rights to the baby, and the parents will be granted access upon its pleasure. But this is what it means to defend the practice of taking the child away from the surrogate mother.

As a last resort in defense of surrogacy, Lewis observes that occupational hazards notwithstanding, "waged gestators … are not calling

7 Debra Satz, "Markets in Women's Reproductive Labor" in *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale: The Moral Limits of Markets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131.

for destruction of the industry that exploits their labor."[8] In other words, the surrogates themselves seem to be content with their lot. But this is a strange argument coming from a progressive writer. The simple fact that some workers object to the abolition of their occupation can't possibly count as a justification for continuing it. Workers often protest to it, not because they actually desire that labor, but because they have no better alternative to it. To take their protests as the reason to continue it isn't the same thing as respecting their wishes — it amounts to taking advantage of their desperation.

A good example of this dynamic is the ban placed on manual rickshaws in Kolkata in the early 2000s. The Communist Party in power deemed the practice of laborers physically pulling the rickshaw to be a degrading and highly exploitative occupation. There is no doubt that it was both of those things. And yet, at the time, the rickshaw pullers protested against the ban. Now, it happens that they were also represented by a union. The union's take on the matter was to support the protests — but not because they took the workers reaction to be a vindication of the occupation. It opposed the ban only because of the state's grossly inadequate program for providing alternative employment to the laborers impacted by the legislation. Anwar Hussain, an executive member of the All Bengal Rickshaw Union, explained that "if the government comes forward with an acceptable rehabilitation package for all of the 23,000 people involved in the trade, we shall support the removal of rickshaws from Kolkata."[9] For the labor leader, the real issue is not whether the job is inherently demeaning — it is — but the protection of the workers.

For Lewis to submit the surrogate's own willingness to undertake the work as somehow evidence for its desirability, is not just mistaken, it aligns with the more common right-wing defenses of some of the worst labor practices. True, when workers call for a legalization of

8 Lewis, 129.

9 Shaikh Azizur Rahman, "Ban fails to remove rickshaws from streets," *The National,* December 16, 2008.

their labor, it should be taken seriously. But it is not, and can never be, a trump card. Hence, any conversation on the possible outlawing of surrogacy must be integrally connected to conditions for comprehensive compensation and alternative employment of surrogate workers. It would have been helpful if Lewis's research had explored these dimensions, even while promoting what she took to be the wishes of surrogate workers.

ABOLISHING THE FAMILY

Right after she leans on surrogates' opinions to defend commercial surrogacy, Lewis turns around and ignores their views in her attack on the family. She offers no evidence that the surrogate workers *wish* to see the demise of the family structure. Indeed, if anything, surrogate workers overwhelmingly speak of doing the work for their families, especially their children. They speak of the longing to return to their familial setting after the forced confinement imposed by surrogate contracts. Lewis's defense of surrogacy is ultimately rooted in her conviction that biological parents should have no special rights over — and one supposes, obligations to — their children. The real path to liberation goes through the abolition of the nuclear family. She describes her project as "animated by hatred of capitalism's incentivization of propertarian, dyadic modes of doing family."[10] In other words, what makes surrogacy a potential model for progressive forms of social reproduction is the fact that it places no particular value on the biological connections between parent and offspring. Far from deserving to be abolished, surrogacy to her presents a model for transforming the practice of child-rearing.

Her ideal postcapitalist and post-familial commune would be practicing "full surrogacy" in the sense that people would be collectively responsible for child-rearing and for the care of each other.

10 Lewis, 22.

Everyone will be "surrogating" for everyone else. It's worth exploring this more carefully. There's good reason to strive for a social model in which people can lean on, and have the support of, kith and kin, friends and neighbors, so that children have a rich social environment and, even more importantly, parents have support in their responsibilities to their children. In this sense, a "village" is a much better model than an isolated nuclear family. However, in this model, we can, and probably should, expect that the first line of responsibility will be the parents. The child will know who to turn to, who is there for them, who is sleeping in the next room or on the next bed in the same room, etc.

But this is not what Lewis has in mind. She doesn't seek to embed the family in a nexus of supportive institutions. She wants, instead, to abolish it altogether. She argues for a transformation of child-rearing in which the parents are *replaced* by the community. More still, it is one in which the child does not necessarily have binding ties with any particular people. She approvingly cites Shulamith Firestone's model of communal child-rearing in which you have multiple adults who sign on as a child's caretakers, and who have the option of opting out if they wish; and so too, does the child.[11] She endorses it on the expectation that it fosters "an understanding that it is not nature but love, in all its contingency, that is the real source of the stability to which all children have a right."[12] It is not clear whether the biological parents are to have any special rights in this setup. Presumably they do not, since all relationships are supposed to be voluntary, and Firestone explicitly commits to wanting to "destroy this possessiveness [which issues from biological ties] along with its cultural reinforcements."[13]

I suppose that it's *possible* for this setup to be better for children. But is there any *reason* to believe that it will be? Amazingly, Lewis

11 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970).

12 Lewis, 121.

13 Quoted in Lewis, 121.

doesn't offer even a shred of evidence that tearing children away from their parents, and parents from their offspring, is in fact better suited to the children's emotional development. For anyone who has raised a child, the first lesson, painfully obvious from the very first day of their birth, is how desperate they are to connect; and it is apparent, at least on experience, that what they seek most of all in their relations with their caretakers is stability, not unpredictability. Is there any *reason* to believe that what they really need is to discover, in their infancy, the reality of love "in all its contingency"; is there any proof that for a two-year-old, or for even a seven-year-old, the experience of adults in their lives cycling in and out, as in Firestone's model, is actually emotionally healthy? Even more, is there any reason to believe that the grandiose claims to granting children "autonomy" in their choice of adults is anything but a cruel fantasy imposed on them?

Children may not need their parent(s) or parental figures to be biologically connected to them; but they do need and demand noncontingent love from them. I do not mean to suggest that the current familial structure is best suited or even adequate to meeting children's emotional needs. But the call for the abolishing of family seems to be pointless at best and possibly counterproductive. What should be attacked is an economic regime that systematically undermines the possibility of loving, meaningful relations involving adults and children.

While abolishing the family is obviously fraught with problems, providing it with the resources to reform its pathologies has much to recommend it. Multiyear fully compensated pregnancy and childcare leave, abortion care and leave, free and high-quality childcare, universal health care with special provisions for children and older people, and low-cost quality housing are all demands against the corrosive economic logic of capitalism, and they carry the potential to transform the traditional family in meaningful ways. When we are not tied down and punished for caring for each other, we discover more intimate, creative, and meaningful ways of connecting. It is

certainly possible that the family as an institution will dissolve, not from an abolition pronounced from on high, but from the choices of people who are currently trapped within a punitive regimen of caring.

Lewis's positions on surrogacy and the family are ultimately grounded in her opposition to the kind of biological determinism against which feminists have fought a long war. A large part of the anti-surrogacy campaign shares its platform with the anti-abortion right. Both often subscribe to the hoary idea of the sanctity of childbirth. Lewis is correct in stressing that the opposition to surrogacy cannot be based on reinforcing the patriarchal conception of motherhood, or of the heteronormative and racial assumptions that it typically promotes. She rightly decries the "humanist idealization of 'fetal motherhood' rest[ing] on the conviction that gestation is not work but the very pinnacle of wholeness and self-realization."[14] Against such biological determinism, Lewis raises scenarios that defy idealization: "sometimes people can't become mothers, sometimes they abort them, abuse them, abandon them, divorce their co-parent or even kill."[15]

It is of course true that not all women can or want to be parents, that most women want to and are able to parent only at certain points of their lives, that life circumstances, especially poverty, can debilitatingly impact the capacity for parenthood. But how does any of this negate the fact that women for the most part do form a bond with a fetus that they raise with their flesh and blood? In recoiling against the Right's continual invocation of the affective and emotional dimensions of family, there is a tendency on the Left to also reject the valuation of these aspects of life. And this is to their detriment. It is true that in the war against abortion rights, the Right mobilizes, often quite powerfully and successfully, the fundamental human emotions of love, compassion, and guilt. But Lewis's approach embodies the flaws of a response that simply cedes the very ground to them. Any

14 Lewis, 48.

15 Ibid.

viable progressive vision of a postcapitalist future cannot look like an experiment in social engineering, but as a project that recognizes the ties, both within the family and without, that often underlie the everyday struggles of working people.

It is commendable that Lewis strives to develop a perspective that respects the labor of surrogates. But the dogmatic hostility to the parent-child relation not only makes it hard for her to connect with the emotional violence suffered by surrogates, it also leads her to the quite astonishing conclusion that the road to liberation leads through a further commodification of social life. For Lewis, if patriarchy weaponizes women's reproductive and caring work in the form of "feminine mystique," then there is a need to demystify such labor by commercializing it. But this is very odd reasoning, especially for a progressive. Since when is the *commodification* of labor, or forms of social integration, the necessary precondition to humanizing it? For any Left project, this has to be anathema. The way forward is through the progressive constriction of the commodity form, the deepening of social supports for intimate relationships, and yes, through a *genuine* recognition of the labor of surrogates, who occupy that liminal space between the two realms.

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