
STATES, POWER, & SOCIETIES



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Caroline Lee
Lafayette College

I write this Chair's letter on the precipice of summer and the promise it brings. With an exhausting spring of turmoil (and far more entanglement in the administrative politics of our campuses than many of us would choose) behind us, I hope that you will have the opportunity to take stock, read deeply, slow way down, dive into research, and/or reconnect and recharge for the fall, in whatever assortment of those activities works for you. I'll be slowing down by struggling fiercely with bunnies and slugs for garden vegetables that I could purchase drama free at the Easton Farmer's Market (est. 1752!). But

where's the accomplishment in eating gazpacho that has not been coaxed from the soil by the keyboard-softened fingers of yours truly? Secret ingredient for gazpacho and all other summer salads and slaws from your chair: pickle brine.

On the taking stock and reading deeply fronts, please enjoy the compelling essays our spectacular newsletter team has assembled here, in which members reflect on the varied impacts of the Israel-Palestine conflict in sociological context. Your Political Sociology Council and a bounty of volunteers have been hard at work reading award submissions this Spring, and there is a bumper crop of groundbreaking scholarship to catch up on from the past year. If you feel like crawling under the covers with a good read, start with our members' new books and articles.

Finally, in the reconnect and recharge department, we have all been planning for a terrific gathering in Montreal in August. Our

section's day is Sunday the 11th, and we will have a slate of fabulous panels around that day (see p. 7), a mentoring session from 6-7 PM following the Presidential Address, and our super-reception with the Global and Transnational Sociology and Comparative Historical

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Sections from 7-10 PM, all taking place at the Palais des congrès de Montréal.

Whether or not we see you in Montreal, please make sure to re-up your section membership, as we are starting our membership push before the

desperation sets in in late August. Take care all, and come find me for drink tickets at the Mentoring Session!

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Crisis, Again, in Palestine and Israel

In this issue’s symposium, Eman Abdelhadi, Omri Tubi, and Benjamin Case provide sociological perspectives on conflict in Israel and Palestine and ripples into other contexts.

Biden Underestimated Muslim Voters

Eman Abdelhadi
University of Chicago

For the first time in 24 years, Muslim Americans are no longer aligned behind the Democratic Party. Even more surprising than Muslims’ defection is that they seem to be taking a significant chunk of Biden’s progressive base with them. Biden and the Democrats overestimated the docility of Muslim voters and underestimated their influence. These fatal errors come from a failure to understand generational shifts among American Muslims and their place in the progressive coalition.

Muslims have been a part of American society for hundreds of years, from the forced migration of enslaved peoples from West Africa, to mass conversion to Islam within Black Nationalist movements, to the waves of migrants from South Asia and the Middle East that have been arriving since the 1980s. [Today, two thirds of Muslim Americans are Arab or South Asian migrants and their children.](#)

When the 9/11 attacks occurred and initiated decades of [surveillance](#) and [criminalization](#) of Muslims at home and murderous wars in

Muslim countries abroad, immigrant American Muslims had to emerge from [decades of invisibility and political quietism](#). The Democrats seemed like natural allies. Republicans often made Islamophobia and a war-Hawkish stance towards the Muslim world a hallmark of both their foreign and domestic policy. Recall that Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign first gained traction and nation-wide attention when he called for a ban on Muslim entry to the United States. Before that, he famously questioned the authenticity of President Obama’s birth certificate, a claim intimately tied to the accusation that Obama was secretly Muslim.

Allegiance to the Democrats was never about complete approval of their foreign policy. Especially in the realm of foreign affairs, they were viewed as a lesser evil. Nonetheless, Muslims consistently voted Democrat across both national and local elections. Muslims found a home in the progressive wing of the party, in particular. In the 2020 primaries, [they were more likely to vote for Bernie Sanders](#); and in 2018 a [wave of Muslim](#)

[political candidates](#) ran on progressive tickets.

[Gen X and millennial second-generation Muslims were intimately shaped by the events of the early 2000s](#). They were often politicized around the second intifada, the war on terror, the invasions and subsequent destruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, and a relentlessly Islamophobic rhetoric that re-designated Islam and Muslims as a global enemy every election cycle. These generations cut their political teeth in progressive politics, which no doubt shaped their domestic politics around support for government spending for infrastructure, free healthcare, police accountability and other leftwing causes.

Muslims were not just a part of the progressive coalition of the past two decades, but they often occupied leadership positions within it. I do not think it is coincidental that two members of the Squad are Muslim women, one of whom is Palestinian. Muslim politicians became household names as progressives. On the local level, Muslim institutions came to occupy a central role in left organizing.

Since October, Muslims have dedicated all of their political energy to ending the genocide in Gaza. They have mobilized the progressive coalition towards holding this administration accountable to its unconditional support for Israel's policies of mass slaughter and mass destruction. Biden's bet has been that the Trump boogeyman would keep Muslims and their allies in line and ultimately loyal to the

Democratic party. They also assumed a "come to the table" approach would keep Muslims satisfied with various non-interventions like [half-hearted air food deliveries](#) and the [disastrous US-built port in Gaza](#). Instead, the Biden name is so toxic in the Muslim community that the handful of Muslim leaders who agreed to attend an Iftar at the White House this Ramadan had to keep their names secret for fear of community reprisal.

Muslim Americans have proven far more politically powerful and influential than Biden anticipated. Having high rates of education and incomes that match the general American public, Muslims are not as vulnerable to Democrats' bullying as this administration seems to have anticipated. Ultimately, other progressives' general disappointment in Biden's administration have made defection an easy sell. Despite campaign promises, Biden has failed to expand the social safety net, protect abortion rights, abolish student debt, etc. But above all, Muslims have used every ounce of political will to keep all eyes on Gaza and the Biden administration's continuous support for Israel through weapons and aid. The horror and brutality of the last nine months have much of Biden's base asking, what is more evil than [genocide](#)?

Dr. Eman Abdelhadi is Assistant Professor of Comparative Human Development at the University of Chicago.

“Strong State” No More? Another Look at the War and Right-Wing Politics in Israel

Omri Tubi

Northwestern University

The war with Hamas is demonstrating the failure of the Israeli right-wing’s politics. The war shattered the right’s assumptions and claims that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be “managed” rather than solved, that peace with Arab countries is possible without solving the conflict, and that only the right can keep Israel secure.¹

But during the war, we also witnessed something else: the breakdown of Israeli state power. This breakdown is not necessarily evident in Hamas carrying out its attack, but in the fact that the state failed to provide much needed social services for its own citizens in the wake of October 7. The state’s dysfunction is thrown into sharp relief by the actions of civil society organizations that immediately sprang into action.²

This breakdown of state power is puzzling because Israel has long been considered a “strong state” with considerable infrastructural and despotic powers (Mann 1984; Migdal 1988; Campbell 2017). These powers gave the state the ability to mobilize the population for war, provide various social services, levy taxes, and control a sizeable

Palestinian population using various means, including violence.

The question is: what happened to that power, especially its infrastructural (Mann 1984) components? The answer is that over the last two decades or so, Israel’s right-wing governments championed measures that curtailed state power. The war exposed how damaging this process is.

There is, of course, an important caveat: Israel’s capacity to mobilize an army and wield violence is plainly evident. The prolonged war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Israeli military operations in the West Bank, the ongoing fighting/potential war with Hezbollah, and the conflict with Iran clearly demonstrate these capacities exist.

Yet other capacities, especially within Israel itself, are lacking. Consequently, civil society organizations have replaced the state during the war. American Jewish organizations raised record-breaking donations to meet the challenges of war. Israeli organizations also stepped in, including pro-democracy organizations that shifted their operations from protesting the government to meeting wartime emergencies.³ Together, American Jewish and Israeli organizations provided

¹ Berl Katznelson Center, Molad, Telem. *Dangerous Delusions: The Misconceptions that Led to the October 7 Catastrophe*. <https://www.conception2023.co.il/en/>, accessed May 26, 2024.

² For example, the New Israel Fund has supported trauma care, lodging evacuees from southern Israel and more. <https://nif.org.il/even-more-humanitarian-activities/>, accessed May 24, 2024. Other organizations sent volunteers to assist in agriculture. <https://newmedia.calcalist.co.il/magazine-26-10-23/m02.htm> accessed May 24, 2024.

³ Maya Buenos, “Huge Donations: ‘the Economic Assistance Channeled Here is like a Third Aircraft Carrier.’” *Walla*, December 1, 2023; <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3626035>. Accessed May 26, 2024; Guy Fishkin, “A Strong State Must Have Strong Agriculture.” *TheMarker*. November 30, 2023. <https://www.themarker.com/labels/livestock11/2023-11-30/ty-article-labels/0000018c-1f67-dc03-a9ec-1f7ff8f7000> Accessed May 26, 2024.

trauma care, support for evacuees which included lodging and education, aid to small businesses and farmers, and more. While civil society is accomplishing all this, the state is missing in action.

This outcome stems from the confluence of two processes that curtailed the state's infrastructural power, and are themselves tethered to right-wing politics: neoliberalism and damage to the civil service.

For decades, Israel has been shifting from a collectivist-developmental-welfare state to neoliberalism. Right-wing governments, and most notably that of Benjamin Netanyahu, zealously implemented the neoliberal creed (Doron 2007).⁴ As the war started, the continued trend of cutting social services proved highly detrimental. For example, the Israeli mental health system was all but non-existent already before the war, suffering from a shortage of some 10,000 psychologists and 1,500 social workers.⁵ The events of October 7 exposed a state terribly ill-equipped to deal with the mental health-related consequences of the war and with the anticipated volume of future requests for treatment.

At the same time, in the name of governance, Israel's right-wing governments politicized

⁴ Berl Katznelson Center, Molad, Telem. *Dangerous Delusions: The Misconceptions that Led to the October 7 Catastrophe*. "Misconception #8: A Strong Israel with Weak Social Services."

<https://www.conception2023.co.il/sector/>. Accessed May 25, 2024. Scholars claim that state power persists under a neoliberal economy, as the state still intervenes in the economy (Maman and Rosenhek 2012). This might be true, but it is a different manifestation of state power that is not at odds with constructing a "thin" state that provides less and less social services.

⁵ Berl Katznelson Center, Molad, Telem. *Dangerous Delusions: The Misconceptions that Led to the October 7 Catastrophe*. "Conception #8, A Strong Israel with Weak Social Services."

<https://www.conception2023.co.il/sector/>. Accessed May 25, 2024.

the civil service, especially over the last ten years. Thus, politicians preferred their own trusted appointees over capable professionals to fill civil service positions.⁶ Unsurprisingly, as the war started, government offices displayed disorganization, ineptness, and failure. Civil service functions best with trained, career-pathed officials. These officials are the pillar of the modern state (Weber 2001: xxx-xxxii; 1946: 196-240). As a result of right-wing rule, this pillar is missing in contemporary Israel.

What is to come? Alongside the more-than-urgent need to aid Gazans, there is much talk about the "Day After" the war. Plans for the "Day After" are mainly geo-political. They include moving towards a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while rehabilitating the Gaza Strip. But Israel itself also desperately needs a "Day After" plan, one that will include a comprehensive social and political redirection. Without it, the Israeli state might be reduced to violence-wielding against external threats while continuing to abandon its own citizens.

Campbell, John. 2017. "Foreword." Pp. vii-xii in A. Maron and M. Shalev (eds) *Neoliberalism as a State Project: The Changing Political Economy of Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Doron, Avraham. 2007. "Itzuv Mediniut Harevaha BeIsrael, 2000-2005" [Hebrew]. Taub Center Website: <https://www.taubcenter.org.il/research/%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%91-%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%95%D7%97%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C-2000-2005/>. Retrieved May 28, 2024.

⁶ Berl Katznelson Center, Molad, Telem. *Dangerous Delusions: The Misconceptions that Led to the October 7 Catastrophe*. "Misconception #9: Politically Motivated Appointments Improve Governance."

<https://www.conception2023.co.il/governance/>. Accessed May 26, 2024.

Maman, Daniel and Ze'ev Rosenhek. 2012. "The Institutional Dynamics of a Developmental State: Change and Continuity in State-Economy Relations in Israel." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 47: 342-363.

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Palestine in Higher Education

Benjamin S. Case

Arizona State University

Violence in Israel/Palestine draws enormous global attention. This short piece discusses two interrelated dynamics of that attention, focused on higher education in the United States.

Palestine solidarity actions are widely conforming to the contours of a social movement, and through the contentious dynamics of protest and repression, this movement is exposing fault lines of institutional power. Movements confront power when they forcibly ask questions that authorities want to keep off limits. By doing that, the solidarity movement is revealing contradictions in higher education that won't be easily reburied.

Notwithstanding the competing narratives involved in Israel/Palestine, which often deploy such different perspectives and facts, it's as though they inhabit separate dimensions, the defining feature of the violence is extreme asymmetry. That asymmetry is complex and multilayered, but respective casualty figures, both now and historically, are a primer. One would be hard-pressed to find empirical comparisons to Gaza apart from episodes widely understood to be ethnic cleansing or genocide.

In this context, and drawing on histories of moral stands against atrocities like South African apartheid, many students and faculty from all backgrounds identify with and feel compelled to stand up for the Palestinians, while institutional leadership is more likely to be politically, financially, or ideologically invested in the State of Israel. The resulting struggle bears the social movement dynamics of people power from below – i.e., protests, sit-ins, boycotts, and strikes – versus institutional power from above – i.e., authoritative sanctions, capital leverage, and police repression.

One indicator of this power dynamic is the scarcity of exceptions. There is no university where the administration calls for a ceasefire while inviting police onto campus to clear protesters demanding increased support for the Israeli war machine.

A second indicator is how each side reacts to direct challenges. In response to administration threats and law enforcement intervention, protest encampments grew and spread. Conversely, as campus actions escalated, donor pressure on administrations and police coercion against protesters intensified.

A third is authorities' behavior toward Palestine solidarity protesters and pro-Israel counterprotesters, respectively. Administrators and police have been far more aggressive with protesters than with counterprotesters, even when the latter are instigating confrontations.

For years, universities have been struggling to reconcile professed values like human rights and democratic governance with increasingly centralized administrations, elite donor bases, contingent labor, and a mounting student debt crisis. Questions like "why can't we divest from a state massacre of civilians?" and "why are universities invested in weapons manufacturers in the first place?" are touching exposed nerves.

The focus on divestment is illuminating. Theoretically, major universities have endowments to insulate themselves from market shocks and undue pressure from individual donors in order to enable conscientious institutional decisions. Yet in a moment when so many are putting their careers and bodies on the line to pressure for a ceasefire via divestment from war profiteers, many administrations chose to call the police.

Divestment opens questions closer to home. Where did the wealth in these endowments come from? Why can't their investments be discussed openly? Why are faculty jobs increasingly precarious and students buried under debt while top administrators make millions and billions sit in endowments? These questions were supposed to remain off limits.

Some schools have acquiesced to protesters, and at least one top administrator has lost their job for it. Wherever an institution falls on the spectrum of hesitant to hostile, the rub is not only the issue at hand, but also the emergent notion that university administration might be open to transparent discussion, perhaps even democratic decision-making.

The ASA Resolution for Justice in Palestine echoes the same dynamic. The resolution, which calls for a ceasefire and reaffirms academic freedom including the right to criticize Zionism, passed with 59% of the membership vote. However, the original version also included a call for financial disclosure of military investments. ASA Council unilaterally removed this item, claiming that investments are operational decisions and therefore not subject to member resolutions. Again, finances are off limits.

As political sociologists, we should be well situated to interpret and participate in this moment. Many of us also have a tendency to exempt our own departments and professional associations from our analyses of power. Palestine solidarity protests are reminding us that that politics doesn't only happen in our datasets, fieldwork, and lit reviews. We are being dragged face to face with the reality that we, like everyone else, are embedded in sites of struggle, that what we collectively do has consequences in the real world.

Dr. Benjamin S. Case is a Research Assistant Professor at Arizona State University.

2024 Annual Meeting Section Activities

The entire conference program can be viewed here:

<https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/asa/asa24/>

New Developments in Political Sociology: Reimagining State Power

Sat, August 10, 4:00 to 5:30pm

Presider: Anna Wozny, University of Tokyo

Discussant: Joseph Rafael Kaplan Weinger, University of California-Los Angeles

Organizer: Lynette H. Ong, University of Toronto

Intimate Governance and the Rationalization of Spouse-Seeking in Japanese
“Marriage-hunting” Anna Wozny, University of Tokyo

Conglomerated Colonization and the Mechanisms of Hybrid Sovereignty Joseph Rafael Kaplan Weinger, University of California-Los Angeles

Managing the grassroots: street-level bureaucrats, red tape, and competitive evaluation Fengrui Tian, Boston College

States and Social Hierarchies in Kuwait and the Arab Gulf Region Lisa Blaydes, Stanford University

Organizers: Alessandro Giuseppe Drago, McGill University, Sakeef M. Karim, New York University

Attention, Shocks, and Relevance Judgements: The Case of White Nationalism in the U.S. South, 1980-2008 Marshall A Taylor, New Mexico State University

Down the Rabbit Hole? Information Uptake and Political Participation in Right-Wing Populist Mobilizations Anna Lea Berg, University of Chicago

From Christian to Nationalism: The Case of the World Congress of Families Jeffrey Swindle, Harvard University and Kristopher Velasco, Princeton University

Imperial Memory in Migration Policy: The Unconventional Path of Right-Wing Populism and Refugee Governance in Turkey Sevin Gulfer Sagnic, University of California San Diego

Status Reversal and Its Discontents Michael N Hechter, Arizona State University and Fabian Neuner, Arizona State University

Rise of the Far Right

Sun, August 11, 8:00 to 9:30am

Presider: Martin Lukk, University of Toronto

Politics of Artificial Intelligence (Co-sponsored by Section on Science, Knowledge, and Technology)

Sun, August 11, 10:00 to 11:30am

Presider: Laurel Smith-Doerr, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Organizers: Atef S. Said, University of Illinois at Chicago, Paolo Parra Saiani, University of Genoa

Algorithmic Risk Scoring and Welfare State Contact Among US Children *Martin Eiermann, Duke University*

AI Policymaking: An Agenda for Sociological Research *Tina Law, University of California, Davis and Leslie McCall, The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

Propaganda Bias and Large Language Models *Hannah Waight, New York University; Eddie Yang; Yin Yuan, University of California San Diego; Solomon Messing; Margaret Roberts; Brandon Michael Steward, Princeton University; and Joshua Tucker*

Red AI? Inconsistent Responses from GPT Models on Political Issues in the US and China *Di Zhou, New York University and Yinxian Zhang, CUNY-Queens College*

Section Roundtables

Sun, August 11, 12:00 to 1:00pm

Section Business Meeting

Sun, August 11, 1:00 to 1:30pm

Diaspora Politics (Co-sponsored by Section on International Migration)

Sun, August 11, 2:00 to 3:30pm

Organizer/Presider: Prema Ann Kurien, Syracuse University

Paradoxical Politics: Transnationalism and the articulation of Indian-American homeland politics *Nisarg Mehta, University of Chicago*

The Elementary Forms of Ethnic Life: Sacredness and Remembrance in Korean Diasporic Nationalism *Haruki Eda, Rutgers University-New Brunswick*

The Racial Politics of Post-Imperial Status Adjustment: Making the Case for Afghan Adjustment *Neha Lund, Brown University*

Mentoring Session

Sun, August 11, 6:00 to 7:00pm, Palais des Congrès de Montréal

Joint Reception

Section on Comparative-Historical Sociology and Section on Global and Transnational Sociology

Sun, August 11, 7:00 to 10:00pm, Palais des Congrès de Montréal



Political Sociology Section Web Series on the 2024 Election

Organized by Jennifer Dudley, Jen Heerwig, Daniel Laurison, and Wendy Li, the ASA Political Sociology Section is hosting four web panels on topics related to the 2024 U.S. Election. Two of the four planned events took place in Spring 2024. Below, Jennifer Dudley summarizes the discussions at these first two events. To stay up to date on the next two events, RSVP at <http://tinyurl.com/election-series>

White Christian Nationalism Panel

March 6, 2024

Panelists:

Victoria Asbury, New York University
Luisa Godinez-Puig, Urban Institute
Samuel Perry, University of Oklahoma

In the first event of the series, panelists shared their respective expertise on race, racism, ideology, and theology in politics. Asbury explained how perceptions of Americanness are dynamic and subjective. Godinez-Puig described White fortressing in communities as opportunity hoarding. Perry described how Whiteness can become salient by calls to Christianity.

As the conversation continued, the panelists reflected on connection points across each other's work. Asbury noted that the morality which is wrapped up in Whiteness is inherently linked to perceptions of Americanness. Godinez-Puig pointed out that social identities are an important component of the political dynamics all three panelists study - who is losing out when some communities or individuals are empowered? The panelists all pointed out that questions of deservingness and Americanness seem to benefit White Americans at the expense of Black Americans and other racially minoritized groups in the U.S.

Moderator Daniel Laurison asked panelists to comment on the relationship between race, racism, and White supremacy relative to region, class, and other factors. Perry says he has found that Christian Nationalism is associated with working class individuals and can distract from class inequality (making race more salient to White Americans). Godinez-Puig agrees that such intersections are important, but can be difficult to study and urges those interested in the topic to consider the goal of different groups as they pursue or close off resources. Asbury says that status fear, especially in relation to race, can motivate anti-Blackness, especially around lower class Whites.

When asked about conclusions for the election, the panelists agree that race, racism, and theology play a large role. Asbury and Perry both warn that politicians' messaging around race and religion can activate anti-Blackness and White Supremacy, especially if politicians think those messages will be well-received by voters. Godinez-Puig says more efforts should be made to uplift young voices and movements.

Watch the panel at:

https://youtu.be/_CURRzkWI-A?si=DLgOYUp6Q0WjqYz0

War and Conflict Panel

March 8, 2024

Panelists:

Laura Acosta, Brown University
Benjamin Case, Arizona State University
Dana Moss, University of Notre Dame

In the second event of the series, panelists discussed conflict, identity, group dynamics, uprising, and resistance. A common theme across all three panelists' work and observations is that of perpetual conflict – the idea that tensions do not resolve after uprisings, violent protest, or even civil war. In fact, Acosta says most conflict is intra-country conflict and tends to recur. Case challenges the binary classification of violent versus nonviolent protest, showing how both types of protest can work together. Moss asks when repression succeeds versus when does it stoke protest.

The panelists also drew connections across each other's work. Acosta saw connections between her work and the violent and non-violent forms of protest Case described in terms of how civil wars are carried out. She also saw overlap with Moss's work, around the question of how third parties are blamed during conflict.

Panelists were asked about themes across the different kinds of conflict or settings they study. Case points to police violence and its role in escalating conflicts. Acosta finds a disconnect between what outsiders often think a conflict is about as opposed to what people living through the conflict see as the underlying issue. Moss indicates that scapegoating is often a way for people in control of a narrative to sell an easier-to-buy story than the facts of structural issues. She encourages educators and researchers to

encourage people to ask what is really true in order to avoid being influenced by scapegoating. Additionally, Moss encourages others to not fall prey to misinformation about whether or not movements have 'failed.' Despite backlash, fruitful change has happened and more change will take time.

When asked what U.S. national news and politicians get wrong, the panelists agreed that it is quite a lot, including some of the basic facts. Moss points to the mistaken belief that there are only Sunni and Shia Muslim groups in Middle Eastern conflicts. An additional mistake is the assumption that conflicts stay local. Moss says that leftist radical movements were connected across the globe. Movements move; they look for ties and resources abroad and connect with each other.

Case says there has been a wave of bad analysis of "Antifa" as a single organization, when it is, in fact, mostly informal groups. This leads to misunderstandings which activists are happy to leave that misunderstanding unchallenged; it is fine with activists if the popular perception of them is skewed. Case also asserts that these misunderstandings play into the way the media gets the rest of the country wrong. He says that the US is often portrayed as "red" versus "blue" when in fact party affinity within states is quite loose, regardless of voting behavior.

Acosta explains that the US media gets many things wrong about the Columbia civil war, especially that it is a war about drugs. She says analysis would be better off focusing on how local populations come to understand each other. Possibilities for bringing the conflict to an end can only come from such an approach.

Watch the panel at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xGYUXWFWGU

A Political Sociology of Algorithms: Five theses

Atef Said

University of Illinois at Chicago

Algorithms are everywhere. It is no exaggeration to state that our society is run by algorithms (Peeters and Schuilenburg 2020). Algorithms are typically understood as structured sets of instructions or aggregated data processed to solve specific problems. Some of the big digital media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Tiktok and large corporations such as Amazon, and Google rely heavily on algorithms. Sociologists have started to pay attention to algorithms in the last few years (Airoldi 2021; Burrell and Fourcade 2021; Schwarz 2021; Zajko 2022). These analyses helped us not to treat algorithms as technical abstracts - they are data and formula at the end of the day - but to look at their social power, and at how the problems and solutions are defined as well as how they involve people who are positioned differently in society.

In this short piece, I argue that political sociologists have much more to contribute to the discussion on algorithms and power dynamics in society. I am inspired here by sociologists who brought power issues up front when analyzing algorithms (Aneesh

2009; Burrell and Fourcade 2021; Zajko 2022). For example, sociologist Aneesh Aneesh has proposed that global work processes are becoming algocratic (2009). My goal is to contribute to a much-needed discussion, and I argue that political sociologists should not reduce the question of power and algorithms to issues of regulation and governance. I do so through presenting five theses as a provocation. Before proceeding, I would like to start with two clarifying notes. First, by suggesting that we should not limit the question of algorithms and power to discussions of governance and regulation, I do not mean at all that these issues are trivial. On the contrary, we have been ruled by algorithms in many social processes, for example, governments have used predictive analytics to identify taxpayers that are most likely to be noncompliant (Bal 2019). Second, the term regulation is multi-laden and could refer to many things. Sometimes algorithmic governance is used interchangeably with regulations by algorithm. I am avoiding this confusion, as I am not focusing on governance and regulation specifically here. Now to the five theses.

Thesis I: An algorithm is a structure, an authority and an agency.

As one scholar suggested, if power is exercised, relational and productive, we ought to take seriously algorithmic power, as they lead to what she described as programmed sociality (Bucher 2018: 3). Algorithms are not mere calculations (gone far) but these calculations and formulas have some power to order and govern (Bucher 2018: 4), if not simply influence people's behavior. I am aware that algorithms and power invoke much more analytical potential (to speak to their complex reality), but for the sake of this piece, I propose that we could think of algorithms as structure, an authority and as an agency. First, an algorithm is a social structure. Describing an algorithm as a social structure does not refer simply to them as structured data, but to the fact of their power and relation to the user. One of the meanings of social structure being collective rules and resources that structure behavior (Porpora 2013: 339). These rules are made available whether explicitly or not to humans when they decide. But the options are limited to humans to the parameters of the algorithms. One study showed that people are more likely to follow algorithmic advice than identical advice offered by fellow humans (Bambauer and Risch 2024; Yang et al 2024). The fact that algorithms have the capability to shape individuals' decisions without them even knowing makes a case for conceiving algorithms as a social structure.

Second, an algorithm is an authority, at least because they represent some authorities, dominions of sways and influence of different institutions and power interests (whether police, or banks or corporations or governments). While they seem neutral, they carry the interests of digital corporations, the capitalist advertisers, programmers and the

political campaigners. This appearance of neutrality, while they have the power to sway people, invites us to think of the relative authority of algorithms. Algorithms have some legitimacy (based on some basic trust from the point of view of the user), even if users do not question these legitimacies and take algorithms for face value.

Third, algorithms have some agency, not only because they reflect algorithmic agents (data collectors, coders, programmers, etc), but they do appear as tools that have some power to decide. what seems to be digital tools, they have a power to decide. One could argue that there are three groups of agencies involved in algorithms: 1) the aggregated agency of the human actors who created algorithmic (CEOs of the corporations, coders, programmers, etc), 2) the algorithm itself appearing to be neutral and making decisions on behalf of human users or providing them with narrow options to choose from, and 3) human users, who could be ought to be reflective or not of the experience of relying on the algorithms when making decisions.

Thesis II: Social media algorithms can be classified as a form of a coercive contract whereby users enjoy some real or imagined social gains in exchange for compromising their privacy and freedom.

People use social media for varieties of reasons such as socializing, doing business and sharing information and even getting news among other things. There are social gains. These social gains are both real and imagined. When human actors join social media or are told that they are only able to enjoy the service of the platform through their designated applications, they are entering a form of a contractual relation. In legal theory, freedom is essential to the legality of any contract. In fact, there are larger key dimensions for any contract to be

valid (let us assume for a second that we live in a liberal free world). These elements are offer, acceptance, awareness, consideration, capacity and legality. Most of these elements are compromised, for example, when a user joins a social media platform or accepts a new cookie from a website. Typically, no one bothers to read the terms and conditions of these contracts. Even if they are willing to spend the time to read the terms before acceptance, most do not precisely because it is so time-consuming. Thus, joining a social media platform in today's digital capitalist world can be defined as a form of coercive contract. When a user joins a platform or signs into a new service update on this platform, they are signing a contract. Coercion here is not simple force or even intimidation, but more along the lines of strong inducing. A user is told that there are cookies needed for a personalized service. This personalized service is offered by the platform to provide algorithmic assistance (tailored service). This tailored service comes in the form of sorting searches and posts based on relevancy to the user based on their earlier searches. In other words, not only your searches for shopping or political news are defined by the algorithms (which in part are defined by an examination of the user's previous searches and models about their behavior), but this deal is based on the user's agreement to accept the cookies and allow the platform or website to cull personal information from them. In short, by agreeing to provide information about their emotions, behavior, identity, sexuality, location, traveling history, and political orientation, among other things the user exchanges their privacy for an immediate convenience). Such agreements also mean consenting to be surveilled. One scholar describes this as a manipulative and persuasive technology (Faraoni 2024; see also Golobardes 2022). Assuming that individual choices exist in this

form of consent is absurd, for how can we believe that "notice and consent can fully specify the terms of interaction between data collector and data subject" (Giannopoulou 2020:6)?

One of the key problems in this coercive contract is that users are not only treated mainly as capitalistic consumers but also as labor: data bodies, whereby their bodies (behavior, identity, psychological state of mind) are sold as commodities without their awareness. Under what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) describes as the age of surveillance capitalism, this becomes a form of unpaid labor (Fuchs 2014). As political sociologists who are concerned with freedom, democracy, and social change in the age of digital capital, we must give attention to the role and nature of consent in these platforms, as well as to the future of individual and collective freedoms.

Thesis III: Internet algorithms contribute to reproducing hierarchies and inequalities.

In her notable book, *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018), gender and Black studies scholar Safiya Noble investigates search engines like Google. She found that algorithms in internet search engines are informed by biased sets that discriminate against people of color, specifically women of color. In other words, while search engines appear to be neutral, Noble demonstrated that search algorithms reproduce racist and sexist beliefs in the construction of these algorithms.

Scholars and policy makers have long been concerned about the so-called digital gap, which refers to discrepancies in access to technology. But what Noble and other critical scholars of algorithms point out is how algorithms contribute to enduring inequality through algorithmic bias. Algorithmic bias refers to when algorithms, which are already

based on sexist or racist principles, for example (this could be data or coding bias), make decisions that contribute to systematic discrimination against certain people based on these biases. Some scholars suggest that algorithms are not inherently biased (Cotter and Reisdorf 2020), but as one sociologist put it, technology is part of the existing power structure in society (Zajko 2022). Scholars agree that, unless there is a systematic effort to reduce bias in algorithms, they will continue to reflect, augment, and contribute to inequality in society. Indeed, the relationship between algorithms and existing inequality is very complex. Here are two examples to demonstrate these complexities. First, research shows that employers and decision makers prefer algorithmic decision-making to maneuver around equal opportunity laws and to demonstrate that there are no biases in selection processes (e.g., Bigman et al. 2021; Hoffman 2022). In this sense, algorithms (which are based on existing knowledge and data biases) are used to cover up for existing racism and discrimination. Second, efforts have been made to make use of algorithms as a tool to ensure fairness (Hanna et al. 2020). In this sense, algorithms are used to do the exact opposite. Overall, one could argue that if structural racism and inequality exist, then algorithms will likely reflect these inequalities and hierarchies. Just as combatting structural inequality requires systematic effort, structural algorithmic biases cannot be defeated unless they are approached systematically as well.

Thesis IV: Social media algorithms increase political polarization.

Algorithms, as tailored and congregated formulas or bundles of information, create echo chambers, and the latter produces political polarization. Echo chambers enable groups to reinforce their own views by

connecting with like-minded others; (Bruns 2022: 33). Because of algorithms, people only see information that supports their current beliefs and opinions, and thus echo chambers and polarization continue. One way to think of algorithms is to consider them as ideological reinforcements or forms of voluntary indoctrination that sustain one's beliefs and increase the lack of tolerance to others' views.

Echo chambers also can contribute to the spread of misleading information, false news, or rumors, which all have negative social impacts. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the full scope of echo chamber effects. It is fair to suggest that political polarization is an important implication of the existence of algorithms as echo chambers in digital spaces.

Indeed, it is perhaps difficult to examine empirically whether social media algorithms contribute to existing political polarization or create new ones. However, one could argue that echo chambers and polarization are mutually constitutive, and that algorithms are a form of tunnel vision (whether completely attributed to algorithms or partially attributed to the choices of online users, who also engage in bubbles) that maintains echo chambers and exacerbates polarization. One scholar suggests that "Feed algorithms classify users' preferences by collecting their behavioral data, thus matching users with precise and continuous information" (Gao et al 2022: 1). This classification of information gradually creates a powerful driving force for group polarization, which is highly likely to lead to the formation of echo chambers (Gao et al., 2022: 1). One notion scholars of algorithms use is filter bubbles, which refers to when online users choose to enhance the personalized nature of algorithms for their comfort or shield themselves from contrary perspectives (Bruns 2021: 33).

It is understandable that, with the rise of populist parties in recent years, hate speech and racist violence are formed or fashioned in part because of misinformation, particularly through echo chambers and the polarization of digital spaces (see Earl et al. 2021). But echo chambers are not static situations. In a world where the logics of digital capitalism dictate how algorithms work, big tech intensifies polarization, particularly when the priority is traffic, growth, and attention, which requires more effort from citizens to maintain their presumed autonomy.

Thesis V: Algorithms undermine the democratic process, but they have a paradoxical impact on the organization of social and political movements.

More than a decade ago, there was an almost techno-optimistic discussion about what digital spaces and social media could bring to democracy. This yielded a gloomy argument about the digital world causing divisions in the context of ascendant digital repression. Through all this, the debate about the impact of digital spaces on democracy did not stop.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal (in which an estimated 87 million Facebook users' information was collected without their consent by British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, predominantly to be used for political advertising and even manipulations by Trump's campaign in 2016) proved that the democratic process is more vulnerable to information technology than many had previously thought. Indeed, democracy means many things on many levels. Political sociologists talk about constitutional, substantive, and procedural definitions of democracy. To be sure, democratization is a contentious process, and "democratization" is not A Single Thing, but the contingent outcome of interactions among a number of

claims and counterclaims, and democratization and de-democratizations co-exist all the time (McAdam et al. 2001: 268). critical scholars of political sociology have addressed the influence of lobbyists, corporations, and military industrial complexes, among others within the democratic process, if we buy into liberal capitalist notions of democratic government based regular, fair, and free elections. Cambridge Analytica proved that the tech industry (read: digital capital) had become an influential actor in the democratic process. The tech industry mastered the arts of persuasion, manipulation, and misinformation with regard to voters' decisions in elections. The democratic process is undermined by algorithms through the misrepresentation of the political views of citizens and through the psychological manipulation of voters. As some research suggests, the processes of filtering, hypernudging, and microtargeting not only contribute to polarizing the electorate but also undermine the deliberative aspects of democracy, at least on a macro scale (Christiano 2022).

Indeed, deliberation does not disappear, but one could argue that, organically, on smaller scales with like-minded people, something has emerged that could be described as two track democracy (García-Marzá and Patrici 2024: 13). Again, at the risk of some simplification, one could argue that, without transparency and accountability for the tech industry, the democratic process will continue to decline, and manipulation and misinformation rather than deliberation will continue to dominate the political landscape.

As for social movements, I would argue that the impact of algorithms is more paradoxical. On the one hand, the phenomenon of digital repression is on the rise (Earl et al., 2022) and social media algorithms are used by

governments and or tech corporations on behalf of authoritarian regimes to target dissidents and critics (Chen 2024). On the other hand, algorithms can also amplify causes and create greater visibility for movements and actions (Trere and Bonini 2024). Humans are also likely to organize with like-minded people. Organizing in the age of algorithms could signal the expansion of single-cause activism (see also Etter and Oana 2021) and perhaps the decline of coalitional politics in movements (although we are currently witnessing global movements and actions in solidarity with Palestinians and against the war on Gaza). Some scholars also speak of the intentional and strategic use of algorithms for reparations under the rubric of algorithmic resistance (Velkova and Kaun 2021). Social movements do not disappear in polarized settings, but perhaps they can even flourish as they work against the stream, best exemplified by the movements for gay marriage and reproductive justice.

Conclusion

By choosing to focus on these aspects of power dynamics in algorithms, mostly representing the negative aspects of algorithms, I did not give proper attention to their positive contributions. My stance, like many, is that the existing hierarchies in digital society based on capitalistic logics makes the negatives of algorithms outweigh the positive impacts. One of the most important things we ought to examine closely is the role of human agency vis-à-vis algorithms. I am only hoping that these initial remarks be part of and expand the conversation among fellow political sociologists about the role of algorithms in society.

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Valentina Cantori is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Southern California. Her dissertation, "Imagining Inclusion: How Muslim Advocates Craft Public Images in U.S. Civic Life," explores how American Muslim advocates produce public discourse around Islam and

Muslims to counter the tarnished representations of their group prevalent in mainstream culture by engaging in inclusion projects. Any inclusion project must negotiate difficult trade-offs, but these are compounded for Muslims, who are marginalized as non-Christians, as immigrants, and as racial others. The study shows how Muslim inclusion projects manage trade-offs, sometimes perpetuating as well as challenging racial, national, or religious exclusion. Valentina's previous research was published in *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* and the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* and won multiple awards.

She is also the writer and producer of a documentary titled “So They May Know One Another: Muslims and Evangelicals Bridging American Divisions.

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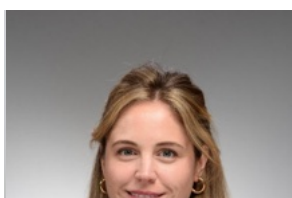


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Sadie Dempsey is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at University of Wisconsin – Madison studying democracy, social movements, and civic life. Her dissertation is an ethnography of engaged citizenship that interrogates two interwoven paradoxes: Why do engaged citizens increasingly distrust political institutions and the people in them? Why do they continue to participate in a system they do not trust? This research has important implications in this time of democratic crisis – where concerns of plummeting trust, declining participation, and democratic backsliding abound – challenging us to rethink the structure of our political institutions in pursuit of a more just, democratic future. She puts her research into practice as a community-engaged scholar collaborating with local organizations to expand our notions of who can participate in the political process and how. Her work has been supported by the Russell Sage Foundation, the Institute for Humane Studies, and the Mellon Foundation.

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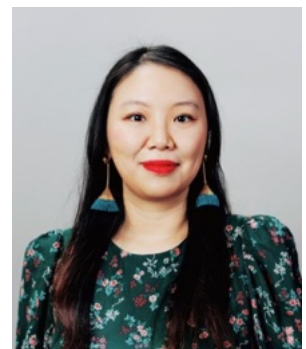
Jennifer Dudley is a postdoctoral scholar in the Equity by Design Lab at Columbia Business School. She earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Notre Dame. Broadly speaking, her research focuses on the ways identity moderates norms in politics and organizations. Her dissertation, “Uncivil Congress: Testing Selection and Influence Effects Contributing to Legislative Culture,” investigates sources of uncivil behavior -- or breaches of context-specific norms of decorum -- in the U.S. Congress. Her research contributes to our understanding of incivility by providing missing evidence of Americans’ tolerance for uncivil behavior to challenge commonly held assumptions about which politicians can get away with uncivil behavior.

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experiences and their approach to organizing Asian American communities. By conducting ethnography research with Asian American political organizers in Houston, Texas, she uses their experiences as a case to spell out the challenges that racial minorities with a recent immigration history face when they strive to incorporate themselves and their communities into the US political landscape. Her works are published in the journal *Social Problems* and *Sociological Perspectives*.

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I received my PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago in 2022 and am currently a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Sociology at the University of Mannheim. As a political and historical sociologist, I use quantitative and computational methods to study the formation and transformation of political institutions. My main research project examines the relationship between state formation and the emergence of the first political parties in American history (1777-1820), leveraging new data on political elites' social attributes, networks, career structures, and roll call voting. My other research includes analyzing the changing structure of elite recruitment in the American state (1850-2000), career mobility of political elites during China's reform era (1978-2011), and political discourse in Renaissance Florence (1376-1378). My latest

project utilizes NLP tools to analyze the protocols of the German Reichstag during the Weimar Republic (1919-1933).

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Jacob Thomas is a Research Assistant Professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Department of Sociology and Research Fellow at Princeton University's Center on Migration and Development. Drawing on data from China, his complete book manuscript *Denial, Deterrence, and Disenchantment: Why Many Never Migrate* (forthcoming with Cambridge University Press) examines how three distinct mechanisms stratify populations of those who do not immigrate, structure migrant selectivity, and limit nation-states' capability to control migration. His current book manuscript in progress, *Fraught Choice: To Migrate to an Unfamiliar Culture or Adapt to an Autocratizing Polity?* will compare survey, digital text, and oral history data from 1) those who have emigrated from Hong Kong before they have emigrated, and 2) Hong Kongers who have considered emigrating but not yet emigrated. With this data he aims to critique the push-pull model and develop a push-retain-pull-repel model that explains why so many remain ambivalently immobile.

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Benny Witkovsky is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. Benny’s research examines urban governance, political parties, and polarization. His dissertation explores how nonpartisan local political actors resist, exploit, and succumb to partisan conflict in the daily operation of urban politics in Wisconsin’s small cities. Other research projects focus on the growing local rural-urban divide, local political parties and the #StopTheSteal movement, the civic

engagement of elders in rural Wisconsin, and prison proliferation in rural America. His dissertation research has been supported by the ASA Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant, the Tobin Project, and the Mellon Public Humanities Fellowship. His teaching—which has received multiple awards at UW-Madison—has focused on the sociology of race and ethnicity and the sociology of social movements. His work has been published in *Ageing International*, *Police Chief*, *The Conversation*, and *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*.

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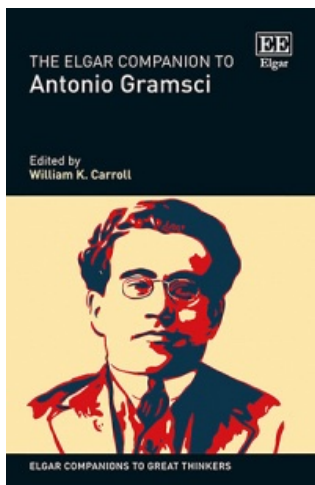
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Books

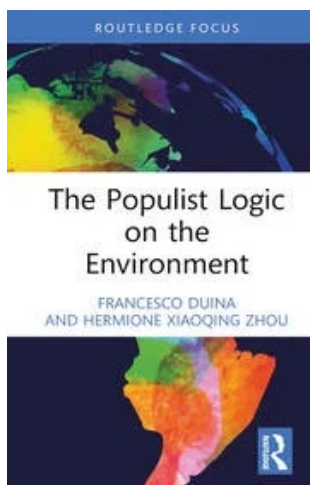


Carroll, William, ed. 2024. *The Elgar Companion to Antonio Gramsci*. Edward Elgar.

Affirming Antonio Gramsci's continuing influence, this adroitly cultivated Companion offers a comprehensive overview of Gramsci's contributions to the interdisciplinary fields of critical social science, social and political thought, economics and emancipatory politics. Within the tradition of historical materialism, it explores the continuing impact of Gramscian perspectives in the present day.

Featuring contributions from eminent scholars, the Companion engages with Gramsci's thought in the broader context of his life, outlining his innovative theoretical and historical analyses of capitalist modernity.

Key themes within Gramscian theory are examined such as historical bloc, passive revolution, integral state, and civil society, which elaborate upon the core concept of hegemony. Chapters map out the development of historical materialism and rigorously analyse contemporary issues of urgency including climate breakdown, the rise of far-right populism, and increasing geopolitical tension.



Duina, Francesco and Hermione Xiaoqing Zhou. 2024. *The Populist Logic on the Environment*. Routledge.

The Populist Logic on the Environment provides a framework that draws from populism's essence to explain populist politicians' approaches to the environment.

Over the past few decades, populism has spread across the world – particularly in Europe, but also notably in the US, South America, and Asia. Its essential features – especially its ideological 'thinness' – mean that we can observe considerable variations across populists in their environmental stances. This holds across the political spectrum from the left to the right, despite the traditional tendency of right-wing parties to be skeptical of pro-environmental positions and of left-wing parties to

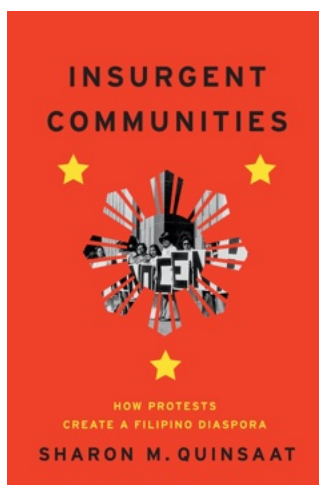
subscribe to them. Regardless of variations, however, 'true populists' can be expected to consistently anchor environmental stances in people-centrism and anti-elitism – in ways linked to

additional party-specific factors. This book systematizes analytically what the literature observes, corrects some of its empirical limitations, and allows for reflection on the commitment by any one populist party to the environment. The authors undertake a cross-regional analysis of four case studies to illustrate their argument: Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France, the US Republican Party led by Donald Trump, Spain's Podemos led by Pablo Iglesias, and Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro's socialist regime in Venezuela.



Surak, Kristin. 2024. *The Golden Passport: Global Mobility for Millionaires*. Harvard University Press.

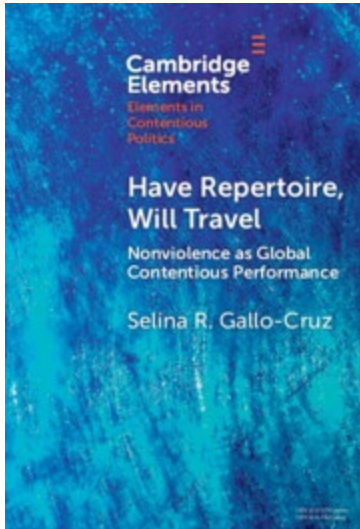
Citizenship has become a hot commodity. Now over a dozen countries allow wealthy individuals to naturalize in exchange for a set donation or investment, and more than 50,000 people use such citizenship by investment programs acquire "golden passports" each year. If the sale of citizenship has grabbed headlines, much less is known about the geopolitical powerplays that define this global market. We typically think of citizenship as a status that secures rights within a country. However, the value of citizenship by investment usually hinges on the rights that citizenship secures outside the country, including visa-free access and business opportunities. This grants third countries and supra-national powers substantial influence over how other states admit new members. Drawing on six years of fieldwork in sixteen countries and a new dataset, *The Golden Passport: Global Mobility for Millionaires* (Harvard University Press) lays bare the operation of the global market in golden passports, focusing on the geopolitical powerplays that both define and disrupt these global flows. Traveling the world of elite mobility challenges us to reconsider our basic assumptions about citizenship, inequality, and globalization.



Quinsaat, Sharon M. 2024. *Insurgent Communities: How Protests Create a Filipino Diaspora*. The University of Chicago Press.

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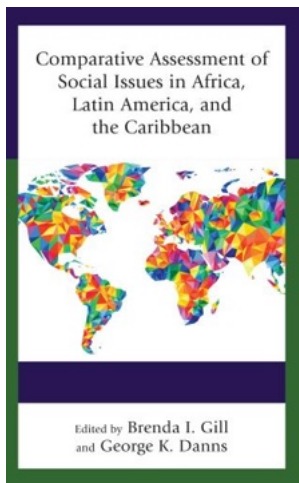
When people migrate and settle in other countries, do they automatically form a diaspora? In *Insurgent Communities*, Sharon M. Quinsaat explains the dynamic process through which a diaspora is strategically constructed. Quinsaat looks to Filipinos in the United States and the Netherlands—examining their resistance against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, their mobilization for migrants' rights, and the construction of a collective memory of the Marcos regime—to argue that diasporas emerge through political activism. Social movements provide an essential space for addressing migrants' diverse experiences and relationships with their homeland and its history. A significant contribution to the interdisciplinary field of migration and social movements studies, *Insurgent Communities* illuminates how people develop collective identities in times of social upheaval.



Gallo-Cruz, Selina R. 2024. *Have Repertoire, Will Travel: Global Nonviolence as Contentious Performance*. Cambridge University Press.

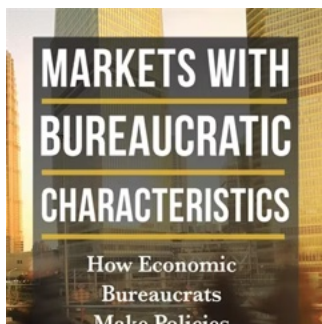
Nonviolence is celebrated and practiced around the world, as a universal 'method for all human conflict.' This Element describes how nonviolence has evolved into a global repertoire, a patterned form of contentious political performance that has spread as an international movement of movements, systematizing and institutionalizing particular forms of protest as best claims-making practice. It explains how the formal organizational efforts of social movement emissaries and favorable and corresponding global models of state and civic participation have enabled the globalization of nonviolence. The Element discusses a historical perspective of this process to illuminate how understanding nonviolence as a contentious performance can explain the repertoire's successes and failures

across contexts and over time. The Element underscores the dynamics of contention among global repertoires and suggests future research more closely examines the challenges posed by institutionalization.



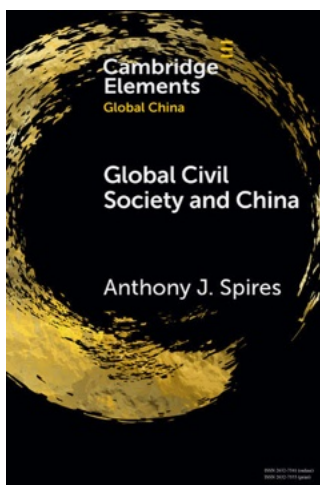
Gill, Brenda I. and George K. Dannels, eds. 2024 *Comparative Assessment of Social Issues in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean*.

Using a comparative framework, this edited volume evaluates pressing social issues facing African, Latin American, and Caribbean countries. Unique in its comparative and multi-regional perspective, this book provides a scholastic and practical understanding on questions ranging from governance and security to poverty, inequality, and population health.



Wang, Yingyao. 2024. *Markets with Bureaucratic Characteristics: How Economic Bureaucrats Make Policies and Remake the Chinese State*. Columbia University Press.

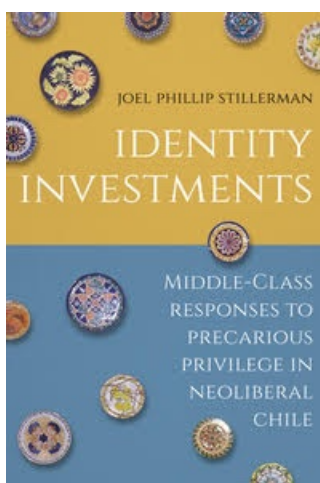
Markets with Bureaucratic Characteristics offers a new account of economic policy making in China over the past four decades that reveals how bureaucrats have spurred large-scale transformations from within. Yingyao Wang demonstrates how competition among bureaucrats motivated by careerism has led to the emergence of new policy approaches. Second-tier economic bureaucrats instituted distinctive—and often conflicting—“policy paradigms” aimed at securing their standing and rewriting China’s long-term development plans for their own benefit. Emerging from the middle levels of the bureaucracy, these policy paradigms ultimately reorganized the Chinese economy and reshaped state-market relations. Drawing on fine-grained biographical and interview data, Wang traces how officials coalesced around shared career trajectories, generational experiences, and social networks to create new alliances and rivalries. Shedding new light on the making and trajectory of China’s ambitious economic reforms, this book also provides keen sociological insight into the relations among bureaucracy, states, and markets.



Spires, Anthony J. 2024. *Global Civil Society and China*. Cambridge University Press.

This short book traces the history of and recent developments in the unstable relationship between global civil society (GCS) and China. It analyses the normative impacts GCS has had on China – including the Chinese state and domestic civil society – and the possibilities created by Beijing's new 'going out' policies for Chinese civil society groups. It examines the rhetoric and reality of GCS as an emancipatory project and argues that 'universal values' underpinned by principles of human rights and democracy have gained currency in China despite official resistance from the government. It argues that while the Chinese party-state is keen to benefit from GCS engagement, Beijing is also determined to

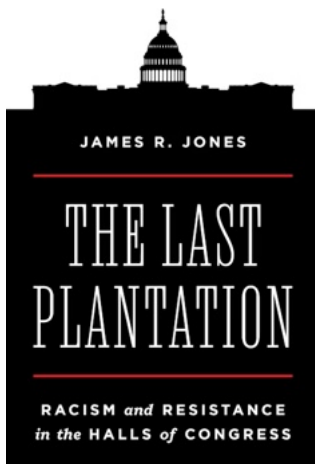
minimize any impact outside groups might have on regime security. The book concludes with some observations about future research directions and the internationalization of Chinese civil society.



Stillerman, Joel. 2023. *Identity Investments: Middle-class Responses to Precarious Privilege in Neoliberal Chile*. Stanford University Press.

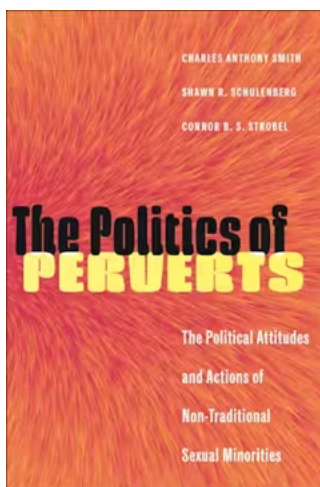
After Pinochet's dictatorship ended in Chile in 1990, Chile's middle class expanded dramatically, echoing trends seen across the Global South as neoliberalism took firm hold in the 1990s and the early 2000s. *Identity Investments* examines the politics and consumption practices of this vast and varied fraction of the Chilean population, seeking to better understand their value systems and the histories that informed them. Using participant observation, interviews, and photographs, Joel Stillerman develops a unique typology of the middle class, made up of activists, moderate Catholics, pragmatists, and youngsters. This typology

allows him to unearth the cultural, political, and religious roots of middle-class market practices in contrast with other studies focused on social mobility and exclusionary practices. The resultant contrast in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of these four groups animates this book and extends an emerging body of scholarship focused on the connections between middle-class market choices and politics in the Global South, with important implications for Chile's recent explosive political changes.



Jones, James. 2024. *The Last Plantation: Racism and Resistance in the Halls of Congress*. Princeton University Press

Racism continues to infuse Congress's daily practice of lawmaking and shape who obtains congressional employment. In this timely and provocative book, James Jones reveals how and why many who work in Congress call it the "Last Plantation." He shows that even as the civil rights movement gained momentum in the 1960s and antidiscrimination laws were implemented across the nation, Congress remained exempt from federal workplace protections for decades. These exemptions institutionalized inequality in the congressional workplace well into the twenty-first century. Combining groundbreaking research and compelling firsthand accounts from scores of congressional staffers, Jones uncovers the hidden dynamics of power, privilege, and resistance in Congress. He reveals how failures of racial representation among congressional staffers reverberate throughout the American political system and demonstrates how the absence of diverse perspectives hampers the creation of just legislation. Centering the experiences of Black workers within this complex landscape, he provides valuable insights into the problems they face, the barriers that hinder their progress, and the ways they contest entrenched inequality.



Smith, Charles A., Shawn R. Schulenberg, and Connor B.S. Strobel, 2024. *The Politics of Perverts: The Political Attitudes and Actions of Non-Traditional Sexual Minorities*. NYU Press

Over the past four decades, there has been significant research focused on the political and social lives of lesbian, gay, and transgender (LGT) individuals, exploring how these sexual communities interact with politicians and voters who identify as straight. However, due to society's binary view of sexuality, this research has overlooked non-traditional sexual minorities. To address this omission, *The Politics of Perverts* delves into the political attitudes and activities of individuals who identify with nontraditional sexual orientations and practices, such as Polyamory, BDSM, the Furry Fandom, Nudism, and the large bisexual population within these communities. These groups face similar discrimination, stigma, and lack of legal protections in various aspects of life. The authors shed light on the political identities, affiliations, and attitudes of these communities in the United States, revealing how sexuality and politics are even more deeply intertwined at the margins of society. Despite facing challenges,

these communities actively engage in political discussions and activities in hopes of fostering greater inclusivity, better representation, and more informed policies.



Pula, Besnik. 2024. *Alfred Schutz, Phenomenology, and the Renewal of Interpretive Social Science*. Routledge.

In recent decades, the historical social sciences have moved away from deterministic perspectives and increasingly embraced the interpretive analysis of historical process and social and political change. This shift has enriched the field but also led to a deadlock regarding the meaning and status of subjective knowledge. Cultural interpretivists struggle to incorporate subjective experience and the body into their understanding of social reality. In the early twentieth century, philosopher Alfred Schutz grappled with this very issue. Drawing on Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Max Weber's historical sociology, Schutz pioneered the interpretive analysis of social life from an embodied perspective.

However, the recent interpretivist turn, influenced by linguistic philosophies, discourse theory, and poststructuralism, has overlooked the insights of Schutz and other phenomenologists. This book revisits Schutz's phenomenology and social theory, positioning them against contemporary problems in social theory and interpretive social science research. The book extends Schutz's key concepts of relevance, symbol relations, theory of language, and lifeworld meaning structures. It outlines Schutz's critical approach to the social distribution of knowledge and develops his nascent sociology and political economy of knowledge. This book will appeal to readers with interests in social theory, phenomenology, and the methods of interpretive social science, including historical sociology, cultural sociology, science and technology studies, political economy, and international relations.

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<https://inkstickmedia.com/whats-happening-in-gaza-is-not-a-war-its-a-massacre/>

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