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**A Turning Point in History
or a Failed Revolution?**

Lauren Schwartz

Patience is at a Premium

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Culture, Society, and Democracy

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A mystery tale of Mississippi

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For years the world has been enthralled by the bewildering spectacle of American domestic politics. But we can all take a deep breath now: The hotly contested presidential election is over and Joe Biden finally has assumed the highest office in the land. Nevertheless, many unresolved questions remain. The United States, which still should be considered the world's leading superpower, has renewed its multilateral ties, having reactivated cooperation with the WHO and participation in the Paris Climate Accord. Those are encouraging first steps that should reignite hope around the world. Apparently, people are beginning to understand that continuing down the road of ever greater internecine hostility ultimately will not deliver lasting benefits to anyone in the country, except, in the short run, the relatively small cliques that deliberately stoke it. Joe Biden would like his presidency to be judged partly by his success in bringing about a lasting reconciliation between the rival political camps and the cultural milieus that sustain them. But the question remains unanswered: To what extent can his administration effect such a major shift during his brief term in office? After all, the enmity that has been building over the past few decades overshadows day-to-day political controversies. The rift evidently reaches far down into the political culture and the country's »life-worlds.« However, if the United States really wishes to return to the civilized forms of conflict resolution for which it once was a model for the rest of the world, there is no workable alternative to what Biden is attempting. The histories of numerous countries demonstrate that profound crises do harbor the potential for renewal and mutual understanding if two realizations gradually sink in: that no one has sole ownership of the formula for attaining public happiness and that the road they have taken so far will do lasting damage to the entire society. The United States will be able to maintain its status as a world power if and only if the ideals that it defends in the global arena are given full effect in the nation's own internal affairs and lead to social and political outcomes that will stir the admiration of the rest of the world. It is always possible to implement new, trust-building measures, beginning with policies intended to reduce America's extremes of inequality and guarantee human security for all. Those would affect both of the front lines of political conflict in the U.S.-socio-economic living conditions and inter-ethnic relations – which are inextricably intertwined.

The current issue contains essays on this topic by several U.S. authors and/or Americanists as well as texts concerning the meaning and functioning of culture as the basis for civic life. It also includes a thoughtful analysis of the (provisional?) failure of the Arab Spring.



Thomas Meyer

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Thomas Meyer

Culture, Society, and Democracy

Political debates about culture often suffer from a tendency to tailor and trim the concept so that it best fits the world of art. Alternatively, the concept of culture may be pressed into the service of political ends, as has been the case in Germany with the notion of a »host culture« to which immigrants are expected to conform. To understand the fundamental role of the cultural sphere and its complex filiations with society and politics (especially when it involves the prerequisites of democracy as a way of life), we need to interpret »culture« more broadly, in the same spirit that it was introduced into sociology by Max Weber and his American »acolyte«, Talcott Parsons. Only thus can we also understand what is presupposed by a democratic civil society and what distinguishes integration from assimilation. Once that has been accomplished, we will be able to discern the foundations upon which social and political institutions must be built if they are to fulfill their purposes durably and reliably.

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, these questions gave rise to a research project on culture and democracy that even today should be recognized as one of the most interesting ever undertaken. Bringing it up to date would be a crucial step toward dispelling insecurities both old and new. In the 1950s the highly respected American political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba designed a cross-national study of five »Western« countries entitled *The Civic Culture*. The key question they hoped to answer was: How did cultural conditions contribute to enabling countries like Great Britain and the United States to maintain democracy and the rule of law in the face of a global economic crisis that had brought with it mass unemployment, poverty, and existential uncertainty? Conversely, why was it that other highly developed countries such as Italy and Germany, with comparable democratic institutions, failed dismally to preserve them during the Great Depression? Or, in other words: what additional ingredient, above and beyond the Depression itself, allowed fascism to take root in the soil of those democracies? At bottom, the results of their research, carried out with scholars from all of the countries involved, remain timely even to the present day although they are scarcely remembered anymore.

Political Culture

Political culture is the part of general culture in any social collectivity that relates to the political sphere: that is, to the political processes, actors, institutions, issues, and problems within it. In every country there are several asynchronous political cultures anchored in distinct socio-economic milieus. Three main types can be distinguished in the »Western« world. Each of them has been shaped over long periods of time by dominant forms of political authority that have been their conditions and prerequisites. Historically, the oldest type – and one that is still widespread – is »parochial« political culture, i.e., that which is limited to the local community and thus narrow in scope. It is typified by the outlook of »unpolitical« people who pay attention only to their immediate social environment, ignore the political sphere, and care little about whatever goes on beyond the local church steeple. It is characteristic of tribal and

feudal societies. The second type, also still alive and well, is the political »subject culture« commemorated in Heinrich Mann's novel, *The Loyal Subject*. Its origins may be found in the age of authoritarian rule by princes, to which civic commitment and critique were alien. The only type that really suits the age of democracy is the »participatory« or »civic« culture embodied in well-informed, tolerant, active citizens endowed with equal rights. Because these three types and the hybrid forms that emerge from them can coexist for long periods in all societies, a properly functioning, stable democracy needs to make sure that participatory milieus predominate. Hence, it should have come as no surprise when the Almond and Verba study found that democracy yielded to authoritarian rule during the Great Depression only in Germany and Italy where the participatory culture was too weak, while the parochial and subject cultures remained excessively strong despite the presence of democratic institutions. The civic political culture then exemplified by the USA but also well established in Great Britain assumes that citizens will have acquired the habit of taking an active part in social and political life and will keep political conflict and conflict-resolution within the bounds of civility. For the civic culture, what matters most is that political antagonisms should not degenerate into uncontrolled hostility.

Ideally, this balance should be cultivated in schools, neighborhoods, and civil society; indeed, it should be cultivated even in the private sphere of the family. In a true civic culture, it would seem perfectly normal for members of the same family to support competing political parties. The political culture of democracy, which operates in the economy, the state, and society as an interplay between consensus and conflict, contention and respect, is rooted in a humane civic culture and life-world. They are the foundations of all life in society.

What is culture?

Almond and Verba's study highlighted a number of other salient characteristics of culture. Above all, culture puts such an enduring stamp on every aspect of human and social action that it becomes a spontaneous habit, operates holistically, and – once people have reached adulthood – resists short-term, nakedly authoritarian efforts to reeducate or influence them. That is hardly surprising, since culture is the one function of societal life that provides a foundation and point of orientation for every other social subsystem by generating and maintaining knowledge, artistic expression, values, norms, and practices. In all of these performances it is supported by social expectations and sanctions. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu used the term »habitus« to summarize the ways in which culture leaves its mark on a person. It includes everything we normally think and do habitually and without reflecting on it at the time. In this sense culture counts as one of the fundamental presuppositions of social life, together and in reciprocity with the economy, politics (where it acts as the backstop for rules), and the socialization of the next generation.

In a certain sense cultures do indeed constitute something akin to a second nature for human beings, but not at all (as used to be assumed) in the sense that they immutably pervade an ethnic community and all of its members in ineluctable, homogeneous ways. For example, ideologies of »race« once claimed that conditions

peculiar to the earth's varied physical environments or even biological characteristics were the causes of culture. Research has refuted these naturalistic fallacies, but it has also made it clear that every collectivity has been shaped by the culture it acquired in the course of long-term historical processes, even though that culture itself is constantly in flux. Cultural transitions certainly may happen as a result of new experiences and intensive debates, but in most cases, it takes social shocks or upheavals to bring about such changes, often as the rising generation thoroughly alters the received culture according to its own standards. Most recently the latter point has been illustrated by the »silent revolution« – shift toward post-material values since the 70s that has taken place in all of the industrialized countries.

To be sure, it is always social collectivities that constitute, actualize, and maintain lasting, shared cultures. But in the modern world these functions are not performed by ethnic groups or by closed nations or states, but instead by smaller units: socio-cultural milieus shaped by strong social, economic, or regional commonalities. These milieus are knit together within the same state by fundamental political-cultural commonalities that reflect their shared historical experiences. Nevertheless, they clearly differ in their lifeways and belief systems. For decades, the Sinus Institute in Mannheim has been surveying ten contemporary, scientifically distinguishable socio-cultural milieus in Germany in exhaustive annual studies. The broad spectrum of political culture in this country extends from the mind-set of the subject culture to that of active citizenship, from conservative, chauvinistic world-views to committed progressiveness, from materialistic preoccupation with affluence to environmentalist engagement. But the vast majority of people in all of these milieus share the minimal norms of civic and democratic culture.

The process of modernization has brought us to the point at which it is increasingly possible to distinguish five levels of cultural orientation which shape the profiles of individuals and their milieus. On the first level, people attribute to religions and/or world-views the power to grant meaning and even salvation. At the second level, we encounter everyday culture and lifeways. The third level concerns social orientation, while the fourth touches on civic conduct in public spaces. Finally, the fifth level focuses on political thought and action. While in traditional societies these levels are densely interconnected, as modernization proceeds apace the linkages among them grow more and more tenuous until each becomes more or less independent of the rest. Nowadays we may share a faith or a basic political outlook with others, while adopting a different lifestyle or party preference. It has become rather rare for people to agree on everything; in fact, fundamentalists are almost the only ones who demand that they should. Nevertheless, close correlations persist between the extremes of every level. For instance, it is hardly to be expected that violence in the family will give rise to respectful, peaceful civic conduct and political tolerance. By the same token, dogmatic rigidity in matters of faith is closely associated with civil and political intolerance.

Research, complemented by European experience at least since the end of the Wars of Religion and the establishment of the rule of law, demonstrates that very different people, who disagree on religion and live quite different lives, still can get

along well with each other and coexist peacefully as equals. For at least two centuries cultural pluralism has been the norm in Europe. Hence, integration cannot aim to foster agreement in matters of belief or quotidian culture (that would be assimilation); rather it must encourage equal participation in the economy, society, and state based on a democratic civic and political culture shared by everyone. Integration on the civic and political-cultural levels can succeed provided that the newcomers don't stay permanently in metropolitan areas where the most conservative milieus of their countries of origin dominate social life.

Some have argued that cultural diversity in a democracy can dispense with shared norms and values, but that notion has turned out to be a grievous error. The mere fact that different subcultures take part in the tug-of-war over the solution of common conflicts, each striving to advance its own interest, encourages integration. However, conflicts not grounded on a shared culture of civilized contestation are a sure path to cultural civil war, as history has shown with dismaying regularity. The religious-cultural civil war in Lebanon, which lasted for 15 years (1975–1990), offered brutal proof of that. The USA, too, seems about to head down that same road. Without binding civic and democratic norms and institutions rooted in a shared political culture there can be no reliable foundation for the protection of any of the cultures or their rival belief-systems, not to mention their common life.

Cultures are not static, hermetically sealed worlds; they are open, social, dynamic spaces of discourse that do change, but slowly and from the inside out. That is especially true of the habituated variants that are inculcated at an early age and socially reinforced. These socio-cultural milieus, shaped by their interests, values, and experiences, campaign and struggle relentlessly in their society, usually silently and stealthily but less often openly and aggressively, for their own expansion and dominance. It is true that social conflicts over fundamental issues and experiences may significantly shift the balance of power among them, yet cultural changes – in contrast to institutional innovations – take a long time, because they rarely can be completed in the lifetime of a single individual. As a rule, the primary cultural influences from childhood and adolescence tend to be highly durable. Of course, individuals or small groups may keep striving to leave behind their original milieus and strike out in a new direction. However, their success will depend on whether they manage to free themselves from the old mechanisms of social control and immerse themselves in a new life-world. The more diverse our societies become, the less inclined we should be to underestimate the cultural factor, which is at work at all times and places. The same point holds true, although with different implications, for the »old-time citizen« of the recipient society who is no longer fully integrated into his or her political culture. In a culturally pluralistic society social integration has become a permanent task.



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Franz Maget

A Turning Point in History or a Failed Revolution?

The Arab Spring after ten years

The Arab Spring began ten years ago on December 17, 2010, when a young vegetable seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in the central Tunisian provincial town of Sidi Bouzid. His suicide triggered demonstrations and mass protests first in Tunisia and then in Egypt, ultimately shaking the entire Arab world. Tens of thousands went into the streets to protest against dictators and autocratic rulers, demanding social justice, freedom, and dignity. The process represents a caesura in history: in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak were toppled, both of whom had wielded power for decades. Libya's dictator, Muammar al Gaddafi, was killed in the wake of military intervention by some Western powers in that country. In Morocco King Mohamed VI was compelled to reform the constitution. In Bahrain, troops from neighboring Saudi Arabia put down a rebellion. Both Syria and Yemen experienced devastating civil wars which continue to this day.

In Europe these events initially were celebrated as liberation struggles by Arab youth for democracy and self-determination; the protagonists were showered with prizes and honors. Yet hopes that the Arab Spring would mark a turning point in history have been dashed. Regime change and a durable process of democratization occurred only in Tunisia. In most of the affected countries the people were unable to achieve any genuine progress. In many places conditions today are worse than they were before.

A region in crisis: the Arab world

Today, the Middle East and North Africa comprise the world's largest conflict zone. Instability and uncertainty are rampant everywhere in the region. The population is growing fast, unemployment remains high, especially among the younger generation, and economic prospects are dim. Year after year, the income and prosperity gaps between the EU and North Africa widen. The states in that region are falling deeper into debt; consequently, they become ever more dependent on international lenders such as the IMF and World Bank. Authoritarian states and repressive systems dominate the political scene.

In Syria and Yemen, the Arab Spring ended in a fiasco. The devastating wars there cost countless lives, destroyed cities and infrastructure, and have forced seven million Syrians to flee their homeland, about one-third of the population. Most of them live in huge refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon, even though the latter two countries have been experiencing severe problems of their own and are barely scraping by.

The military intervention of foreign powers has served only to prolong the suffering. Syria, Yemen, and Libya have long since become the venues for proxy wars among states locked in a struggle for regional hegemony. Turkey under Recep

Tayyip Erdoğan and his governing party, the AKP, now openly presents itself as the power protecting the Muslim Brotherhood and cultivates fantasies of being a great power after the manner of the Ottoman Empire. Russia has expanded its influence in Egypt, sent mercenaries to Libya, and solidified the power of Syrian president Bashar al Assad, at least for the time being. Iran has set about forging a Shiite crescent extending from Tehran across Iraq and reaching the powerful Hezbollah militia in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia considers itself a regional hegemon and received strong backing from the Trump administration to realize that ambition. Nobody should rule out a course correction under Joe Biden.

The future evolution of the region is still up in the air. But it's a sure bet that global crises such as climate change and the corona pandemic promise still more adversity. Global warming has increased the risks of droughts and floods, both of which threaten the future of agriculture. In most of the region's nations, the pandemic has overwhelmed brittle and chronically underfunded health care systems. And in the countries torn by civil war it also has infected already-weakened populations living in bombed-out cities and/or in conditions with poor hygiene.

The economic fallout will prove to be even more disastrous than the threats to health. There is no financial support available for bailouts and stimulus packages. So far, targeted aid from the industrialized countries has not been forthcoming. The economic downturn resulting from weeks-long lockdowns and curfews, the collapse of tourism, and interruptions to supply chains have long since led to an increase in employment and poverty. For affected families there is no short-time compensation or support from unemployment insurance. Most of the countries in question already have applied for emergency loans from the IMF.

The Mediterranean as a system boundary

The countries of North Africa are located at the European Union's front door, in our immediate neighborhood. From the northern coast of Morocco, you can make out the beaches of Andalusia with the naked eye. From the northeastern promontory of Tunisia, Sicily lies a scant 150 kilometers away, while it takes only two hours to fly from Munich to Tunis-Carthage. Nevertheless, we typically don't know much about those countries. They play no more than a secondary role in German politics and public perceptions. When we do pay attention to them, it is usually in the contexts either of the threat of Islamic terrorism or of migration. As far as the latter is concerned, the new mantra in Germany is »combating the causes of migration.«

At one time the Mediterranean was a unified zone of civilization, an element that linked the countries of Europe, Asia Minor, and North Africa. It was a locus of trade, exchange, and cultural encounters. The Arab world was a significant economic area, and Arabic was the veritable language of science.

Yet over the course of several centuries North Africa got drawn into the orbit of the European colonial powers. Later, after colonialism ended, the region, now a backwater, attracted less and less notice. And now the Mediterranean has ceased to link the countries on its shores; instead, today it divides rich from poor. Economic disparities there, as well as the aforementioned prosperity gap with Europe, show

no signs of improving. The Sea represents a kind of system boundary that migrants in rubber rafts seek to cross and which serves Europe as a protective barrier to keep unwanted immigration at bay.

The Mediterranean also separates both two religious spheres – now estranged from one another – and the cultures derived from them. Algerian writer Boualem Sansal describes his feelings about this cultural chasm as follows: »a fractured and soulless danger zone has emerged from a Mediterranean region that once was the cradle of two brilliant civilizations (the Christian-Western and the Arabic-Islamic) that mutually inspired each other. Now it is a sterile no-man's land; the Sea forms a border between two worlds that in the best case ignore each other and, in the worst, hate each other.«

The Tunisian exception

Tunisia was the country in which the Arab Spring originated and in which it celebrated its first and greatest success: deposing the autocrat Ben Ali, causing him to flee into exile in Saudi Arabia. And in Tunisia a constitution was approved that can stand comparison with other democracies around the world. There too, an alert, secular civil society fended off the attempt by part of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ennahda), recently allowed to participate in elections again, to steer the country in a more conservative-Islamic direction. The so-called national dialogue quartet, consisting of labor unions, employers' associations, the lawyers' guild, and the Tunisian Human Rights League, was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. There also, finally, evidence accumulated that a functioning democracy is possible in an Islamic country, just as the late President of State, Beji Caid Essebsi, had hoped to see.

That democracy did take root in Tunisia, alone among the countries of the Arab Spring, certainly relates to the fact that it is a small country without many natural resources. It is not near any of the locales where regional great powers struggled to achieve political dominance or gain access to resources. Yet other factors also proved to be crucial: From the very outset the founder of the Tunisian state, Habib Bourguiba, had prescribed a secular course for the country. He forbade polygamy and the wearing of head scarves in schools, government offices, and courtrooms. As early as the year of independence (1956) he codified equal rights for women in the Law on Civil Status, which at the time was unprecedented in the Arab world. Tunisia's laws on divorce and pregnancy rights were comparable to those in German law today. Participation by women in the life of society was encouraged. In consequence many women took up leadership positions at universities, the courts, the health care system, and the political sphere. For decades, too, Tunisia has provided legally mandated health and pension insurance, which offer people at least a modicum of social security. Finally, the country has a free, powerful labor movement in the form of the UGTT.

It was just these prerequisites that were lacking in the other countries of the Arab Spring. In Egypt, the military could rely on political and financial support from the Gulf states to recapture power in a coup. In Morocco the royal house, supported by the police and intelligence services, expanded its already broad range of powers. The

Tunisian solution also failed in Syria, where Assad used extremely harsh methods to put down protests, thereby plunging his country into a dreadful civil war. Nor could Tunisia's success be replicated in Libya. There, the dictator was indeed toppled, but rebels had no plan for how to shape the country's future.

One lesson from the Arab Spring is that you must have more than just free elections at the beginning of the democratization process. It is at least as important to encourage civic engagement instead of stifling it. Free labor unions, independent media with competent, courageous journalists, the founding of secular parties, and above all engaged women are the true prerequisites for democratic transformation. The Arab world will not be able to achieve a better future until a fundamental transformation in gender relations has taken place and state and religion have been more clearly separated.

The road traveled by Tunisia over the last ten years has been arduous and full of reversals. Terrorist attacks like the one in 2015 have cost numerous lives and brought tourism to a standstill. They made it abundantly clear how fragile the young democracy still is even today. The weak economy, exemplified by still frighteningly high youth unemployment and burgeoning government deficits, remains the country's Achilles heel. Yet the list of shortcomings easily could be lengthened to include the often-inefficient, bloated public administration, corruption, and bureaucracy.

Above all, Tunisia has a problem with elites. As in the past, an oligarchic upper class consisting of about a dozen wealthy and politically connected families runs the economy. Instead of investing in their own country, they move their wealth abroad. Not a few still harbor nostalgia for the »good old days« under Ben Ali.

Meanwhile, the political class appears hopelessly overmatched in its efforts to solve the country's economic and social problems. The disarray of Tunisia's political parties and the total fragmentation of the party landscape increasingly look like the most glaring deficiencies in the democratic system. There is a great danger that even more young people without jobs, prospects, or trust in the government and its institutions will turn their backs on democracy in frustration and disillusionment. Their desire to emigrate to foreign countries will keep on growing.

A historical turning point or a failed revolution?

The Arab Spring raised a great many expectations, but it is hard to identify a single one that has been met. So, in that sense one could call it a failed revolution. Nevertheless, it does mark a historic break with the past. It showed for the first time that people in the Arab world are prepared to take to the streets in defense of their rights and that they are capable of overthrowing despots. Today, ten years later, the negative consequences of bad governance, corruption, and cronyism in the economy have become ever plainer to see throughout the region. Most people have stopped believing in the legitimacy of their political leaders. Discontent with so many failures and so much misrule will linger and keep on accumulating as long as the economic situation continues to deteriorate, as many expect that it will. Curfews and social distancing rules which were imposed during the coronavirus crisis have had the side-effect of putting a lid on protests, at least for the time being.

Democratic transformations are slow and difficult processes that cannot be carried out on command or instituted overnight. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that – contrary to what many people had hoped – liberal democracy of the European type is not regarded as the model and preferred form of government everywhere. If Europe wants to play a future role in the countries of the Arab world, the EU ultimately will need to design and execute a common Mediterranean policy instead of continually acting like a club of rival economies, each selfishly defended by the individual member-states.

Ten years ago, Europe slept through the opportunities presented by the Arab Spring. Yet when the time is ripe, the discontented, the courageous, the young, those who do not want to see their future stolen from them, will demand work and bread, freedom and dignity, more loudly than ever. They will ask for a life with better prospects than they have now. They then will be able to recover the experiences of the past and build on them. The Arab Spring made a powerful impact. More shocks will follow.



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A Cautionary Tale from Mississippi

Susan Neiman: Confronting the Past in the USA and Germany

They were knocked off their pedestals both literally and figuratively. After his arrest, the African-American George Floyd died at the end of May, 2020 with a policeman's knee on his neck and gasping for air. Footage of this most recent instance of brutal police violence in the USA captured the attention of both demonstrators and the political world and directed it to many of the country's monuments. Often, these statues are glorified images of men whose attitude toward slavery implicitly justified systematic violence against black American citizens. They stand (or stood in some cases) for inequality, injustice, and unfreedom, for a past that has put many people's lives at risk in the present. But then again, the people glorified in those statues also have enabled George Floyd to be morph into one of American history's tragic icons. Given that background, the new book by Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, scarcely could have been more timely, since it surveys the successes and failure of efforts in both Germany and the United States to come to terms with their respective pasts.

Neiman approaches her subject by relying on numerous interviews and portraits and explicitly shifting back and forth »between analysis and anecdote.« Her quasi-

ethnographic study on the presence of the past in the American state of Mississippi stands out especially. It is an urgent cautionary tale about how tenaciously the legacy of slavery and segregation still holds the present in its grip, just as it always has. »Mississippi is ... a place where resistance against the Enlightenment is more than alive and palpable.« Tellingly, this American state was the last one – in the wake of the continuing protests over Floyd's death – in which it was decided to get rid of one of the weightiest symbols of the failure to come to confront history: the Mississippi state flag which incorporates the flag of the Confederacy. Susan Neiman does an impressive job of documenting the resistance to change and even more so the state's ongoing, rampant racism. It was there that a Black teenager, Emmett Till, was lynched in 1955 because he allegedly whistled at the wife of a White store owner. The brutal murder of the fourteen-year-old boy is widely regarded as one of the sparks that ignited the civil rights movement. Yet since that time very little has changed. When you read Neiman's study, you get a clear sense of the tenacity and inertia of this moral backwater.

To be sure, as Neiman makes unmistakably clear, Mississippi is not an isolated case. According to the author, America's refusal to come to grips with the past has left indelible traces across the entire nation. The fact that COVID-19 infections are far more deadly for Black Americans than for Whites is just one of many pieces of evidence for her argument. Even though the author emphasizes that coming to terms with the past is not a »foolproof vaccine against racism and reaction,« she nonetheless resolutely pleads the case for an unsparing, enlightened approach to the past. And, argues Neiman, that is exactly what the United States and the rest of the world could learn from the Germans.

Neiman does not intend her provocative argument to yield a comparison of the respective crimes of the two societies, but she does want to compare the intensity and seriousness with which those crimes were – and still are being – confronted politically and socially. By the 90s in Germany, she points out, a consensus had been reached to assume collective responsibility rather than to forget. But before that time, in early postwar West Germany though not in the GDR, mechanisms of psychic repression and coverup were at work. Knowing about all this could be helpful to other nations: »Learning that it took decades of hard work before those who committed what are arguably the greatest crimes in history could acknowledge those crimes, and begin to atone for them, brings enormous relief to those working toward similar acknowledgement in the United States.«

Neiman, who has lived for decades in Germany, albeit with some interruptions, and who has served as an advisor to numerous committees, puts considerable emphasis on the process of confronting the past in Berlin. This fascination is so strongly evident in the book that it occasionally threatens to conceal the fact that many Germans – both in the capital and in other parts of the country – continue to understand too little and only rarely wish to assume responsibility. Even though Neiman certainly does not overlook the efforts of right-wing populist and extremist forces to relativize or even deny the past, the author remains committed to the view that the confrontation with the Holocaust in Germany basically has been a success story.

Neiman, a philosopher, relies mainly on her own biography and aspects of her emotional experiences to develop her thesis, so it is surprising that she eschews any broader, more systematic analysis of the emotions. Furthermore, in some sections her preoccupation with ephemeral matters overshadows analytical argument. Neiman touches indirectly on the pathos that necessarily accompanies a confrontation with the past along with the quest for enlightenment, for example when she insists that we should put aside the »fear of anything bordering on kitsch« to the detriment of irony. In addition, she does address the relevance of shame directly. This collective emotion supposedly constitutes one of the crucial differences between the Germans' culture of memory and that of American society. Nevertheless, in the last analysis an unanswered question lingers: How exactly could a transformative, socially efficacious feeling of shame – and, resulting from it, a feeling of responsibility – emerge from the inclination of many people in the German postwar era to put their own suffering ahead of that of everyone else?

On the other hand, Neiman's analysis shows with admirable clarity that assuming responsibility is always a process. In addition, the author illuminates precisely the ambivalent, the grand, and the petty aspects of this assumption of responsibility. The fact that statues were toppled will not improve radically, directly, or immediately the lives of many Black American citizens. Yet Susan Neiman proves that this symbolic step on the way toward real change is necessary and correct. And when discussing the German model, she makes it clear that this course must be reaffirmed time and again. This is so because »the past keeps seeping into the present and infecting it. Confrontation with the past is never over and done with.«

Susan Neiman: Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil, New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019, 401 pages, \$ 21.99 hardcover.



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Torben Lütjen

Caught in an Endless Loop

Why the United States will remain a polarized country even after Trump is gone

There is no question about it: The campaign leading up to the 2020 presidential elections was the tragic (albeit temporary) climax of a lengthy drama in which the United States has grown ever more deeply divided and the country has been drawn into a cold civil war. Amid a climate of mutual suspicion and hysteria, the adherents of both sides understood the election to be something more than a decision about

the country's future direction; it would be a battle for democracy itself. A year before the election, in the fall of 2019, an opinion poll already indicated that nearly a fifth of the supporters of both parties thought that violence would be justified if the other side were to win the election. Thus, no one should have been truly surprised when, on January 6, a mob egged on by the defeated President stormed the Capitol. Of course, the crisis is not over yet, given the fact that a majority of the Republican Party's voters still believed, at the end of November, 2020, that the election was stolen and that Joe Biden would hold the office of the presidency by illegitimate means.

And so American democracy has survived this provisional last act – again. But it seems fair to wonder: how long can the country endure such polarization? That question is certainly a more obvious one to ask than another heard more frequently, but one that seems hopelessly naïve: Now that Trump has departed the White House and Joe Biden has moved in, is there a chance for »reconciliation?« Not only does that question overestimate the influence of individuals; it also overlooks the fact that, in the final analysis, neither side has an interest in burying the hatchet.

To determine where the country is headed, one would need to broaden the temporal focus considerably, since, if there is going to be any relaxation of political tensions at all, it will only take place over the long run. Of course, the first steps will be to get rid of more or less polarizing presidents (there is no serious question about the fact that there is a difference between Trump and Biden in terms of their aspirations and styles), and to move past the effects of the pandemic and everything else that might dominate short-term perspectives. Instead, the really important thing is to understand what caused the toxic polarization of the country in the first place. Not until that is done can we move on to the second step: asking which of the structural problems could be solved and which ones are more likely to intensify as time goes on. Roughly speaking, the causes of America's hyper-polarization can be addressed on two levels: first, the specific fault lines and the range of interests characteristic of the country, and second, a level that might be described as »the sociology of knowledge«, in which one seeks to explain why American society has drifted apart into disparate and mutually incompatible perceptions of reality.

The long-term fault lines in American society

So, let's begin with the fault lines in the country: What are their origins? And to what extent can they be overcome?

First, there is the conflict over race, unquestionably the dominant one: i.e., the battle over ethnic inequalities in the country. Its origins reach back to the 1960s when the Democrats allied themselves with the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King and ultimately launched a more resolute struggle against racism, mainly in the Southern states. The measures taken by the Democrats met with stiff resistance, again mainly in the South, where voters began a mass exodus to the Republican Party. Since that time debates have raged not only about how energetically the national government should intervene to overcome injustices, but also about the extent to which »systemic racism« dominates American society. Among Democrats it is now a truism that such racism exists, whereas Republicans regard

such talk as a perfidious strategy of the American left to discredit all conservative positions right from the start.

Religion is the second fault line. Like countries on the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean, the USA since the 1960s has undergone a far-reaching shift toward liberalization that has posed challenges to traditional ideas about values and norms. But, in contrast to rapidly secularizing Europe, one part of the country remained deeply religious, fiercely defending Christian social morality. Ever since the Seventies and the »culture wars,« the country has been at loggerheads over abortion, pornography, and homosexuality. Anyone who wonders why so many religious Americans have remained loyal to Trump for so long will find an answer in this observation: For many of them it seems to be the final battle, in which even questionable allies like Trump, who delivered for them by appointing conservative justices to the Supreme Court, must be welcomed.

The third and final major division – and the one most readily transferable to European conditions – is that between the winners and losers from globalization. It, too, is mainly a conflict between prosperous big cities and rural regions that keep falling further and further behind. It is also a fissure that cuts across all class lines. While less affluent and socially *déclassé* Americans in the metropolitan regions often vote Democratic, America's White working class has turned its back pointedly on the Democrats and has been voting Republican for a long time.

The crucial point here is that, by this time, all of these fault lines align with one another, thereby blocking off ideological intersections and extinguishing ambivalences, literally dividing America in two. Thus, today White, Christian, rural America is pitted against multi-ethnic, less religious, urban America. In short, we are dealing with what political scientists call »reinforcing cleavages.« Societies beset by such cleavages are much more fragile than those with multiple conflicts that do not lead to the formation of two antagonistic camps.

Still, even though these fault lines seem to be so irreconcilable, one could plausibly argue, at least in the case of the first two, that they are actually symptoms of modernization crises that accumulate in transitional phases, when one side fears that it is going to lose its previous status. Particularly on the issue of race, we are clearly confronted with just such a state of flux: the battle of the once and now former majority society to defend its privileged status tenaciously. In fact, the animosities between those of different skin colors really have abated. In spite of Trump, open racism is less openly expressed than it was a few decades ago. What is being negotiated right now in America is actually the end of White dominance over the rest of the country. Who would expect that such a change would come to pass without any friction?

And when it comes to the topic of religion, if we take a look at the opinion polls and statistics, many of the confrontations suggest that there is less hostility now than the polarized debates – for example over the appointment of Supreme Court Justices – might lead us to believe. With the exception of the abortion issue, the United States as a whole has become a more tolerant and liberal place over the past few decades. For example, the issue of homosexuality is rarely invoked anymore by

Republicans during electoral campaigns. The number of strictly observant Protestants is in decline, although the »unchurching« of the United States is proceeding much more slowly than in Europe. So, at some point the culture wars that are currently fueled by religion may die down.

It is only when we come to the third conflict – between the largely urban winners and predominantly rural losers of globalization – that it begins to seem far less clear how things will play out in the future. Trump's »America First« campaign hardly slowed down the deindustrialization of the country in any case. Besides, even the Democrats seem to lack any clear scheme for reintegrating the disconnected regions of the country. Yet it is hard to imagine why this one divide by itself should have resulted in the existential confrontation – primarily a cultural clash – that culminated in the Trump presidency.

Paradoxical Individualization

To be sure, there is another level on which America's deep fissures can be explained, one that – unfortunately – does not leave much room for hope. It describes a higher-order sociological process that basically must be kept separate from concrete controversies. America is falling apart for a deeper reason: It was exposed powerfully and quite early to the centrifugal forces of modernity. This is a process that I call »paradoxical individualization« Never before in history did so many people have so much freedom to choose how to lead their lives: i.e., to choose where to live, which preferences to prioritize, whom they should love, and, above all, what kinds of information they wish to consume. Yet such unprecedented freedom of choice has not turned them into ambivalent postmodern flaneurs, nor made them more open and tolerant toward other life plans. Instead, all that autonomy was used to construct a world free from contradiction: echo chambers of people who think alike (not exclusively, but doubtless mainly, in social networks) and who have been radicalized due to the lack of dissenting voices. Democrats and Republicans no longer live close together, nor do they intermarry or pray together in the same churches. And they certainly don't read the same newspapers or watch the same news broadcasts. Their life-worlds have thus drifted far apart, which means that they perceive the world from diametrically opposed perspectives. And often it is the more highly educated and socially better positioned citizens who cultivate especially homogeneous networks – on both sides of the barricades.

So how might these divisions be healed? We are talking about a social process of such a fundamental character and such depth that it appears nearly immune to incursions from the outside. To return to the early stages of our argument: In what way might even the best-intentioned appeals for reconciliation change anything in these imbedded structures? It is possible that the country's political discourse will settle down now that the »tweeter-in-chief« is gone from the White House. And because of his disposition and origins, Joe Biden may not stir up quite the same resentments as did Barack Obama or even Hillary Clinton. However, none of this will convince hard-core Republicans. After four years during which Trump will tirelessly continue to undermine trust in the country's institutions, the electoral pro-

cess, and the entire political class, these people are likely to see the new president as an illegitimate usurper, just as, by the way, most Democrats regarded Trump.

Polarization and democracy

In short, the outlook is far from promising. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that polarization does not inherently have to be a problem. Democracies – especially when they can hark back to a deeply imbedded tradition – often turn out to be astonishingly resilient and, fortunately, can endure quite a bit of conflict. Therefore, certain conclusions can be drawn with confidence. Before being too alarmed by what have become almost knee-jerk-reflex worries couched in formulaic invocations such as »deep social divisions« and the like, we should ask some preliminary critical questions. After all, liberal, representative democracies exist to manage conflicts, sometimes even bitter ones. Ultimately, democracy owes its survival and its superiority to other regime types to the fact that, although it does not suppress conflicts in the name of some fictitious social harmony, it does formulate rules that enable it to manage disputes peacefully and keep them from spinning out of control.

The problem is that there is more than one kind of polarization. Roughly speaking, we can identify three criteria that allow us to judge whether polarization has reached an unhealthy level. All three may be fulfilled in the United States.

First, there is the question about which kinds of conflict are the dominant forms. The sociological literature on conflict distinguishes between its divisible and indivisible forms. The first type involves a dispute in which a certain public good and its distribution are the focal point. In cases of this kind, people can find common ground somewhere in the middle. Here, the old truism is applicable that a successful compromise means all of the parties will end up dissatisfied. Divisible conflicts include, for example, disputes over the distribution of socio-economic benefits. Certainly, nobody should ever underestimate how bitter quarrels even over these matters can become. But still, they are always easier to resolve than the indivisible conflicts now roiling the United States: battles over recognition and identity that turn on such elusive matters as moral decay or renewal. And precisely because it is often not at all clear what concrete political differences are at stake, the possibility of compromise often remains out of reach. For a change, let's consider the (quite radical) positions of some segments of left-wing America. As far as they are concerned, the history of the United States is little more than a saga of racism, violence, and repression that has continued unabated down to the present day. For someone who sees things through this lens, any reform inevitably will be too little too late.

Turning to the second of the three criteria of crisis-evaluation, we find that the dynamic has proceeded even farther. Americans today are no longer quarreling about irreconcilable political issues alone; instead, the political process itself has become the bone of contention. Disputes of this kind center on questions like: who has the right to hold a certain political office: whether there were irregularities in the last election, what rights the government and the opposition have; and when it is justified to cast doubt on the authority of other institutions under the U.S. constitution (e.g., when the executive questions the validity of verdicts issued by independ-

ent judges). In those instances, political legitimacy is at stake. Disputes of this type have the potential to evolve into constitutional conflicts. From that point on, fundamental questions of power will end up front and center – ones that really should not be on a democracy's agenda.

At first, all this sounds like a description of the United States in the Trump era. In this sense there is no question that the country finds itself in the midst of a constitutional and legitimacy crisis. Considering the ferocity of the attacks and the rather successful efforts of Trump and large portions of the Republican Party to undermine confidence in the country's institutions and political process, which culminated in their refusal to acknowledge Trump's electoral defeat, then the issue becomes: why has the system been so resilient? The answer is that the United States has had a strong, independent judiciary, a vigilant media system, and a lively civil society. Another reason is that, while Trump may have harbored the ambitions of a would-be autocrat, he lacked the requisite skills and resources to become one. Above all – and this is the great good fortune of his presidency – he neglected to do what any fascist party leader would have started doing from day one: appointing his cronies to the state apparatus so that he would be prepared for the coming showdown. But Trump lacked a network of this sort. He seems never to have been fully aware of the importance of efficient patronage, likely because he erroneously believed that he could rule as an elected yet absolute monarch. Thus, the horror scenarios in which Trump might ultimately stay in power thanks to a *coup d'état* turned out to be more than a little overwrought, since the explosion of violence that took place on January 6 did not amount to a *coup d'état*. Trump did not dissolve parliament or arrest opposition figures, did not take over TV stations, nor did tanks rumble through Washington that day. Trump never held enough power to do any of those things.

But these considerations suggest that we should take a second look at the role of the Republican Party. To be sure, there is no question that we are dealing with a particularly spineless bunch of unscrupulous power politicians who have allowed Trump to do whatever he wants. And yet, if things have gone well so far, the reason must be sought in a historically unique paradox: The enemies of democracy are not dedicated anti-democrats. That may sound strange considering all of the taboo- and norm-violations that have taken place since 2016. But the ideological heart of the party does not harbor genuinely anti-democratic attitudes. It does not defend a counter-ideology that dreams of an entirely different form of the state. Indeed, even a perverted form after the manner of Viktor Orbán's »illiberal democracy« plays no role in the mental world of conservative Americans. Let's take that paradox a step further. Ironically, it is this very commitment to democracy that has allowed U.S. conservatism to become the home of numerous truly lunatic conspiracy theories. Convinced that there is no alternative to democracy and never doubting – like all populists – that they represent a silent majority, they can't accept any electoral outcome that contradicts their claim to be the one true voice of the people. Following this logic, there must be something rotten in the state. In this way paranoia has become the party's main preoccupation, especially among its advance-guard in the

media. Trump's supporters did not dream of a new political order; they just dreamed that Trump had won the election.

The preceding observations should not be taken as an »all clear« signal, because by now there is little doubt that this mental disposition has brought about catastrophic consequences. But it is possible that, in reaction to the defeat, a hard alternative to the existing order might emerge at some point. Perhaps Trump was not the ending but merely the beginning. Perhaps someone with the same populist instincts, but who has both a better grasp of strategy and who is really convinced that the system has to be dismantled will emerge to succeed him. But as long as that is not the case, America will remain what it is: deeply divided, socially poisoned, and frequently politically immobilized, yet still a functioning democracy for the foreseeable future.



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Patience is at a Premium

American foreign policy after Trump

In addressing the foreign policy of the Trump administration – a four-year flirtation with right wing populist nationalism in a 30-year arc of geopolitical shifts and political identity crises for the United States – it is important to state from the outset that »America First« is just the latest and ugliest affliction to erupt from a number of underlying preexisting conditions. This examination should not be taken as an excuse or justification for the policy or its coherence, but as an overview to see what direction U.S. foreign policy has taken in the last four years and how the international balance of power has shifted. Then it is worth entertaining how Europe should act in light of these developments and in anticipation of the incoming Biden administration.

What direction U.S. foreign policy has taken in the last four years

Trump's America First policies were not just obviously populist-nationalist but were also rooted in historical precedents seeking to preserve American isolationism and non-involvement in the Second World War. With the benefit of hindsight, the folly of America First positioning in the 1930s and 40s is obvious, and it was used to signal the ominous potential of similar posturing in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Trump's America First policies were a disappointment domestically and a mess internationally. The disparagement and discourteous treatment of

friends and the shunning of alliances in favor of transactional exchanges and coddling language towards international strongmen was confounding to the greater Washington foreign policy community. Moreover, insulting diplomatic staffing choices – like Richard Grenell as Ambassador to Germany – will long be remembered as new nadirs in European relationships with the United States. The same is true of the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the JCPOA. And yet, this bombast and spite is not exactly the intellectual or philosophical hallmark of a Trump foreign policy.

The *Weltanschauung* of four years of Trump foreign policy – such as it is – was articulated in 2019 by A. Wess Mitchell, the former Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and Elbridge Colby, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Strategy and Force Development in the U.S. Defense Department, who emphasized the dangers of the Obama administration's reactive posture to geopolitical change and sought to justify the direction of the Trump administration three years in, following their exits from the administration. Mitchell and Colby advocated an offensive posture in a world of new great power competition between the United States and China, with a vengeful Russia seeking to sow chaos in the international system. This offensive posturing would in turn demand classic power counterbalancing – if necessary, against both Europe and Asia, in a generalization unhelpful in constructing a coherent view of alliances in a multipolar world – and would affect all areas of international relations from military to diplomatic and economic relations.

If this foreign policy agenda seems to be rather pessimistic, it is not entirely the fault of the previous dangerous administration. The United States does not have a clear sense of international purpose in the way we did during the Cold War. The past three decades have been outlined by what they are not and by what preceded them – »Post-Cold War« does not positively describe this period of time, but negatively defines it. And indeed, what has followed the collapse of the Soviet Union has been an identity crisis and lost time in American policy. We squandered our unipolar moment in the 1990s, spent the first decade of the 20th century engaged in waging a vague but costly war on terror and pursuing regime change with very little (geo)political payoff. The first post-9/11 decade ravaged American domestic and foreign policy and spoiled a great deal of the popular public appetite for international engagement and intervention, military or otherwise. President Obama was confronted by this shift in political will well before Donald Trump sold the American public on a retrenchment from the world and America's role as »global policeman,« or lumped valued alliances into a general category of grievance and affront to the American people.

How has the international balance of power shifted?

While engaged in an enormously costly series of wars and attempted regime changes in the Middle East, the United States consistently underestimated the growing strength and challenges posed by China. Despite Barack Obama's »Pivot to Asia« which so aggravated the transatlantic community, it was not successful in engaging

China as a partner. The United States was backfooted by its struggle to withdraw from its various engagements the Middle East; thus, the resultant policy was indeed, as Mitchell and Colby complained, reactive. In one of the few things that the highly polarized U.S. Congress seems to agree upon, a general bipartisan hawkishness on China is a current hallmark of American foreign policy. The emergence of the novel coronavirus has only fanned the flames of Washington's frustration with Beijing and bilateral US-China relations are at the worst they have been since Richard Nixon reengaged China in the 1970s.

The United States also failed to take Russia seriously as it developed under the various regimes of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. Russia's position in the global balance of power might not be what it was as the Soviet Union in the Cold War, but relations with Washington are – like those with China – in a very confrontational state. Russia's role in the 2016 elections has secured its position in American domestic as well as foreign politics as an object of great mistrust and frustration.

But these are obvious assessments. Less obvious in the discussions of the international balance of power concerns domestic policy phenomena: how an explosion of kleptocratic practices symbiotic with globalization run amok resulted in an even more nebulous yet existentially dangerous development: a slow-moving crisis of credibility for democracy and globalization. Loopholes in American domestic policy measures implemented after 9/11 and intended to hinder financing and operation of international terrorism networks contributed to a kind of kleptocratic globalization rooted in real estate that permitted offshoring of income and tax evasion during several economic crises that saw lower- and middle-class citizens on both sides of the Atlantic suffer while the rich maintained their fortunes. It sowed a crisis of confidence in democracy, any form of globalization, and liberal capitalism from which we have not yet recovered. With two major power shifts occurring while America was not fully paying attention, and the alarming rise of right-wing populism on both sides of the Atlantic threatening the democratic ideals of the West, how should Europe act, and what could be expected from the Biden administration?

How should Europe act?

The great plea of the Washington policy community in the wake of the 2016 election was that Europe continue to engage the United States – and to Europe's credit, despite the injuries inflicted by American policy communication continued even if cooperation slowed down and Europe was left confronting major questions without or in spite of the Trump administration. Obviously, the United States is not currently in a position to prescribe behavior since repairing the oft-personal harms inflicted by the Trump administration cannot and will not happen overnight. But the US and Europe would benefit by reconsidering not the existence of the transatlantic partnership, but the substance and ways in which we work together to deal with contemporary challenges – the COVID-19 pandemic chief among them. Multilateral cooperation is not and should not be limited to military cooperation – something with which the transatlantic relationship is unfortunately confused. NATO could expand its self-conception beyond a strictly military alliance and grow

to accommodate combatting the many non-military threats to its members. Public health policy, economic philosophy, consumer and labor standards, and classic public diplomacy tools like intellectual and cultural exchange should all be part of our broad alliance and its daily working relationships. To name but one specific example – transatlantic cooperation on eliminating tax evasion and money laundering is both an item of important domestic priority – America’s experience with the overt grift of the Trump administration should be motivation in and of itself for reform on this point – but also amounts to a hawkish and progressive foreign policy possibility.

What will possibly change with Biden?

The election of Joe Biden as America’s 46th president is remarkable not just because of the context of his election, his experience, or his running mate Kamala Harris, but because there is simultaneously both a sense of familiarity and enigma with Biden. His decades in Congress and on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee should seal his foreign policy bona fides – but his administration will not be a restoration of Obama-era policy. Indeed, the content and detail of the incoming Biden administration’s foreign policy agenda is not widely known in public or diplomatic circles – in part, as a response to the Trump legacy, seeking to avoid even remote claims of impropriety during the transition period. Yet, there are some things that could be said with confidence about Biden.

The next president will place a high priority on attending to our relationships with Europe, especially Germany and the European Union. He will defend the west and aspires to initiate a global Summit of Democracies to reinforce shared values and good governance. Biden will recommit the US to the Paris Agreement. Biden’s personal affinity to Ireland and the fact that he is a known Brexit sceptic indicate his patience for Boris Johnson’s primary policy objectives vis a vis Europe will be the inverse of what they have been under Donald Trump. A Biden administration has to tackle more simultaneous challenges to the United States and its allies than any president since Harry Truman – so it would seem likely that the old policy silos will be ignored and that foreign, domestic, and economic policies will be treated as one body of challenges in want of answers.

Biden cannot fix America’s relationships on his own – and he appears to be undergoing a change in attitude towards China, Russia and the Middle East, which suggests that there will be a great deal of continuity with the past four years in these areas. American pushback on China will continue, the ongoing attempts to draw down troops in the Middle East will persist, and sanctions on Russia will continue. Rhetoric around NATO will be less confrontational, but while one can hope the alliance will expand its horizons from a strictly military arrangement to something more holistic, it seems unclear what will realistically happen in the short-term.

European leaders should maintain patience with the United States and realize that much of the immediate future in US-Europe relations hinges on the interlocutors the US can send and find across the Atlantic in the wake of four years of Donald Trump’s leadership. They should also take note from our experiment with populism

– not only their experiences of the United States as an ally gone mad, but in fact the United States’ foreign policy struggles in creating and building a world with shared purpose rather than pseudo-historic constructions, delusion, or mercenary transaction.



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Rolf Schieder

The Religious Right’s Influence on American Politics

Donald Trump is a fascist. That statement is not intended as an insult; rather, it gives an accurate rendition of Trump’s political style. To fascists, contempt for the law is one of several essential principles. Furthermore, they interpret the world as »will and idea« (to borrow the title of Schopenhauer’s masterwork). Fascists want a civil war – one staged as a final struggle and waged as »total war,« just as Trump’s son, Donald Jr., demanded on Twitter during the dispute over U.S. election results. Fascism necessarily culminates in destruction – either of oneself or of others, often of both. Trump is an actor, a liar, and a cheat who, even in his private life, flouts all conventional moral standards. So why, for heaven’s sake, did so many practicing Christians who consider themselves members of the evangelical movement vote for Trump again? In their eyes he evidently has done a lot of things right; otherwise, there is no way to explain why he won millions more votes in 2020 than he did in 2016. What promises to them did Trump keep? And on which issues did he deliver?

Trump fulfilled a dream that the evangelicals have cherished for more than fifty years: He transformed what had been a left-liberal majority on the Supreme Court into a solid conservative majority. It is not hard to fathom why white evangelicals cared so much about this one issue. When school prayer was prohibited in public schools in the 1960s, and then the ban on abortion was finally lifted, the Supreme Court seemed to many evangelicals to have become a hostile, anti-Christian institution that had done much to make pious people feel like strangers in their own land. The cultural, social, and economic transformation of the last few decades swept over conservative milieus in the Midwest and elsewhere with such force that those who were previously »quiet in the land« (Psalm 35) began to organize politically and become radicalized. Their radicalization initially found expression in the »moral majority« of the early 80s that fought for the restoration of traditional family values: i.e., against abortion, same-sex marriage, sex before marriage, and generally against the relaxation of moral standards.

Presumably, family values mean nothing to Trump. But he understood how much they mean to these evangelicals, who after all constitute 25 % of the entire

electorate. For them, commitment to family values was the decisive single-issue criterion for electability. Trump promised them full support and he kept his promise. Since three new justices appointed by Trump now sit on the Supreme Court, the chances are good that it will accommodate the wishes of the right-wing evangelicals. Hence, they were very satisfied with Trump – a dream of 50 years came true.

In return, they devised highly elastic theological formulas that excused Trump's moral shortcomings: ultimately all men are sinners; even King David was an adulterer, but God made him a messianic king anyway. The more critical thinkers compared Trump with Cyrus, the Persian king who freed the Israelites from Babylonian rule. Although he was not a Christian, he was sent by God, and just as Trump was seen as God's emissary, the Catholic Joe Biden was cast as the Antichrist.

Whoever wishes to understand the world view of the evangelicals needs to reach for a Bible and study the Apocalypse of John. There one finds the apocalyptic road map by means of which the evangelicals read the signs of the times. In Germany, if you asked people about the meaning of expressions like »the beast from below,« »the end-times tribulation,« and »rapture,« you would be rewarded with quizzical looks. But in the United States such concepts are taken-for-granted aspects of the collective (evangelical) consciousness, except that the »deep state« now represents the »beast from below.« Many Americans regard it as self-evident that we are living through the end-times. If you combine that mood with the feeling that one is the victim of dark powers, the result is a dangerous mixture: a sense of inferiority coupled with rage and thirst for revenge. Thus, the conspiracy theories making the rounds in America often have a religious dimension.

Are all evangelicals in the United States Trump voters? By no means. The vast majority of black evangelical congregations want nothing to do with a racist like Trump. There is also a small group of white evangelicals who always have had a left-leaning agenda. The focus of political interest for them is not sexual morality but social justice. Those evangelicals, who rally around the Journal *Sojourners* and whose most prominent spokesperson is Jim Wallis, did all they could to support Barack Obama. Moderate white evangelicals such as Rick Warren also entered into a constructive dialogue with the Obama administration. Therefore, it makes sense to classify the Trump voters among the evangelicals as part of the »religious right,« a category that would also include the Catholic Steve Bannon. Furthermore, one must take into account that – in marked contrast to Germany – there are virtually no overarching structures uniting individual evangelical congregations. Because each congregation is one of a kind, we must examine every one of them carefully to understand what the members of that specific congregation mean by the term »evangelical« or »Christian.« Since universally recognized standards for the vocation of »pastor« are lacking in many denominations, any zealot can start a congregation. Hence, what is to be considered »Christian« in such cases is highly arbitrary and often no longer bears much resemblance to German theological standards.

The history of religion reveals that American evangelicals are the successors of those European immigrants who have been dubbed the »left wing of the Reformation.« These groups were characterized by a quest for individual religious free-

dom and a critical distance toward the state. The religiously homogeneous states of Europe forced them to emigrate. In the United States they could practice their faith freely. The cornerstone of that faith was belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to dwell in every individual; hence, there was no need for priests or any other elites as middlemen. The state was consistently regarded as a hostile power and as a threat to both religious liberty and the more general freedom to act as one chose. In any commonwealth it was the people, not the state, that should have the final say. While the churches in Europe reminded the faithful that they were sinners, the evangelicals preached that anything was possible for people the moment they welcomed Jesus into their hearts. He would offer protection against all hostile powers. The Holy Scriptures would reveal their meaning to anyone who read them; therefore, learned interpretation of them was not necessary. The evangelicals were populists in the best sense. They mistrusted elites, preferring to arrange their affairs for themselves. They believed that the Kingdom of God would come and that they themselves could help bring it about. In the 19th century, Northern evangelicals belonged to the avant-garde of both the anti-slavery and the women's movements. They were the first to allow female preachers. It is difficult to imagine that there would have been a social gospel or a civil rights movement in the United States without evangelical involvement. Thus, we would do the history of American evangelicals an injustice if we reduced it to today's noisy neo-fascist religious right.

Nevertheless, some basic traditional evangelical convictions and mentalities persist among Trump's religious advocates, albeit in a perverted form. Trump's skepticism about science correlates very well with the same attitude among evangelicals. As one female believer said in an interview: »I don't fear the corona virus because I have bathed in the blood of Jesus.« Likewise, Trump's supposed struggle against the »deep state« has its counterpart in the profound skepticism of the evangelicals about any government meddling in personal or local matters. Evangelical congregations will sacrifice a lot to take care of undocumented migrants who lack health insurance, but many are dead set against legally-mandated health insurance for all. Finally, Trump's symbolic decision to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was evidence to the evangelicals that Trump must have studied the Apocalypse of John carefully. Supposedly, only when the scattered people of Israel have been reunited again in one state, can the hoped-for Kingdom of God finally come about. Of course, the evangelicals' love for the state of Israel is marred by a gruesome flaw: When Jesus returns, the Jewish people, who continue to refuse to recognize him as the Messiah, will have to burn in hell. Their affection for Donald Trump is deeply rooted in the sentiment that he is »one of us.« His refusal to »act presidential« was interpreted as courage and rebellion against the elites. His boorishness meant that he was justifiably resisting the arrogance of the powerful in the economic, scientific, and cultural spheres. Trump was a welcome means for the middle classes, threatened with downward mobility, to raise their collective middle finger at these imagined elites.

Following Trump's loss in the election, his more radical supporters played with the idea of turning the culture war into a civil war. Evangelicals called for modera-

tion. The day after news of the election outcome broke on Fox News, Robert Jeffress, the pastor of a mega-church in Dallas and a Fox News commentator himself, wondered how Christians should now behave. He concluded that, even if Trump's loss was a bitter pill to swallow, the Bible's word in Daniel 2:21 still holds: God deposes kings and raises up others. The salvation of Christians does not depend on which secular ruler governs. If Joe Biden is to be the President of the United States, then Christians will have to pray for him just as they would have prayed for Trump: »If President Biden succeeds, we all succeed. May God bless Joe Biden, and may God bless the United States of America.«

How should Joe Biden, the second Catholic president after Kennedy, deal with the religious right? He has promised to heal the nation's soul. Without the inclusion of the 20 million adherents of the religious right, he can't keep that promise. The diversity experts of the Democratic Party will have to give some thought to how even religious lifestyles and the grass-roots-democratic impulses of this segment of the population can be mobilized to advance the goals of the Democratic Party. Despite Joe Biden's win, the overall election results for the Democrats are dismayingly reminiscent of the fate of the SPD in Germany, which paid the price for the consent of the cultural and economic elites by losing the support of the working class. So the million dollar question in the United States as in Europe is this: How can we help the populists avoid blundering into the fascist trap?



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Mariano Schuster

The Evangelicals are Taking Latin America by Storm

Hardly a month goes by without headlines in the media such as »The Perfect Marriage: Evangelical Churches and Conservative Forces in Latin America« or »Evangelical Groups: the USA's latest weapon in launching *coup d'états* in Latin America.« Do the headlines reflect reality? And why has the number of evangelical churches continued to increase since the 90s in a region whose culture has been shaped by Catholicism for centuries? The scholarly literature agrees on two points: (a) There have been distinct »evangelical waves« and (b) these exhibit three main currents: the Lutheran (classical, traditional) church; the evangelical (Protestant) churches, as well as the Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal churches.

The widely shared idea that there is a direct link between the evangelical milieu and the political right does not withstand close scrutiny. At least in the past, it would have been a mistake to classify the discourse on political engagement characteristic of the »evangelical universe« as right-wing.

On the contrary: In societies dominated by Catholicism, where officials of the Catholic Church maintained close links to right-wing forces and conservative regimes while ignoring or marginalizing more progressive tendencies (those associated especially with liberation theology), the evangelical universe took clearly different positions. During a good part of the 20th century, a significant portion of the »historical« evangelical churches (Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and others) and a minority of the Baptist churches (as well as a few of the Pentecostal ones) favored the concerns of progressive political forces and the Latin American left.

Thus, during the 60s and 70s organizations emerged that fused evangelical characteristics with an orientation toward unmistakably leftist world-views. Groups such as Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina (ISAL) in Uruguay and Argentina set about creating something like an »evangelical liberation theory.« Meanwhile, other organizations such as the Misión Iglesia Pentecostal in Chile openly criticized the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. And in Nicaragua during the era of the Sandinista revolution a paradigmatic event took place: a split within the Unión de las Asambleas de Dios, one of the largest Pentecostal church organizations in the world and one traditionally allied with the evangelical right wing, which gave rise to a leftist splinter group known as the Grupo de Pastores Revolucionarios (Revolutionary Pastors' Group).

This process, in which some groups turned increasingly toward the left, continued during the 80s, albeit with diminished intensity. During that decade groups such as the Latin American Theological Fraternity (Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana) established by René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, attained greater significance. Evangelical groups of that type proposed that Latin America's problems should be solved on the basis of Christian values. Following that route, they advocated the deepening of democracy, greater social justice, and a conception of community that dovetailed with the basic assumptions of many socialist and grassroots movements.

It is true that these groups did not represent the totality of the evangelical world or even a majority of it. Still, in almost every case they constituted significant minorities, albeit ones with rightist counterparts that often maintained direct ties to political power. Yet the situation began to change as evangelical Christianity in its Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal forms gained ground. As René Padilla observed: »Liberation theology (whether in Catholic or evangelical versions) opted for the poor, but the poor opted for the Pentecostal churches.«

The spread of Christianity under the aegis of Pentecostal churches and of neo-Pentecostal congregations in Latin America is a fact. Some have characterized this trend as a phenomenon deliberately contrived and intended to combat progressive theological approaches by installing highly charismatic pastors. Others see it as the logical outcome of a historical process of transformation within evangelical Christianity. In any case no one can deny that broad segments of the population that had been courted by progressive theologians were looking for something that the former could not deliver: ways of solving problems in the here and now and the cultivation of a sense of community in a world that excluded and marginalized them.

Hybridizing in the evangelical world

A variety of hybrid tendencies have emerged from the so-called historical evangelical churches (which include the Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian), the evangelical Protestant churches (Baptists and various confraternities and sodalities) and the Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal churches. The phenomenon of hybridization and the fusion of elements occurred especially between the last two groups named above: i.e., between the evangelical Protestant and the Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal congregations.

Initially, this trend was defined in religious terms. But should it also count as a political phenomenon? The question of how certain moral issues should be resolved and by whom (discursive primacy) has made the relationship between broad segments of evangelical Christianity and the left more difficult, especially at a time when paradigms are being deconstructed and feminism is on the rise. At the same time, the »theology of prosperity« discourse has been understood as a component of a cultural and religious turn to the right, which serves the »capitalist Gospel.«

In fact, a part of the evangelical world is undergoing a rightward shift, although church members do not always automatically adopt the positions of their religious leaders. The participants in evangelical church services do not define their political views, either exclusively or even predominantly, in the context of the church (this may be different when it comes to moral perspectives). Rather, they tend to vote under the influence of forms of socialization that transcend the boundaries of those religious contexts. That is one of the reasons why in most cases so far attempts to promote »evangelical candidacies« have come to naught. Such candidates would be pastors themselves or else people supported by them who are unequivocally on the right and who issue »moralistic« denunciations (especially against what some groups call »gender ideology« as a way of expressing their rejection of feminism and the justified demands of women for rights such as the freedom to terminate their pregnancies).

The rightward shift of the evangelical churches is by no means over. Yet, the claim that they have been »Bolsonaro's power-base« not only disregards the specific features of churches in Brazil, but also forgets that those same sectors backed Lula a few years ago. Lula himself did not dispute that fact. A few days after being released from prison (to which he had been unjustly sentenced), he declared: »I would like to talk to the evangelicals. I would like to clarify which president it was who offered them the most respect.« The pastor of a Pentecostal church in Rio de Janeiro, Daniel Elías, concurs: »There are many members of the evangelical movement who disagree with Bolsonaro, but who don't say so.«

At the same time the perception that evangelical movements should always be classified as right-wing leads to oversimplifications. It is easy to forget that a large proportion of the members of the evangelical churches of Argentina supported the candidacy of the Peronist Alberto Fernández (who has already created a ministry for gender issues and diversity), despite the fact that they tend to end up on the right side of the political spectrum, and that Argentina's evangelical world called for demonstrations against abortion and spoke out against same-sex marriage.

Similar processes may be observed in other countries of the region. Although »the evangelical movements« in Bolivia were held responsible for the coup against Morales, people neglect to mention the fact that many of the Congressional representatives from the Bolivian Movimiento al Socialismo shared the evangelical faith. Silvia Lazarte, the first indigenous president of the Constitutional Convention, was the liaison to those movements. Citing the Law on Religious Freedom, Evo Morales declared that »evangelical and Catholic believers have the same rights.« That statement won him the support of evangelical pastors. Something similar happened in Venezuela. In 2006, before Hugo Chavez's reconstruction process had degenerated into an outright dictatorship, around one million adherents of the Pentecostal churches there declared themselves to be »Chavistas and anti-imperialists.«

Even in countries like today's Chile, where right-wing evangelical sectors are trying to gain political influence, there are counterexamples: Pablo Vital, a deputy of the Frente Amplio and the son of a pastor, harshly criticized the political and moral rightward drift of many of the political representatives who »want to exploit their evangelical faith.« He went so far as to declare that »the evangelical church is much more progressive than is commonly assumed.«

It is true that the self-styled progressive elements in the evangelical sectors are in the minority, but they do exist. And it is by no means self-evident that there won't be some believers in churches with a conservative world-view who would nonetheless be classified as holding leftist political positions.

But if and when major components of the evangelical world move toward the right, it is the responsibility of the left to counter that shift. However, in doing so it should make clear that it is by no means rejecting the evangelical faith as a whole. The left has two choices. It can insulate itself and try to seek out the few evangelical forces which see themselves as progressive, feminist, and open to diversity (such forces do exist and the left is already in dialogue with them). Alternatively, it can begin taking the long road. Along that path it will have to talk with elements who largely reject its ideas a priori, and with whom it will come into conflict over moral issues. But the left cannot afford to give up the fight and refuse to enter into dialogue with elements that occasionally will reject some of its ideas. As long as the left unhesitatingly claims that »the evangelical forces are on the right, they are anti-feminist and anti-socialist, they oppose the majority of the population, defend capitalism, and favor the USA,« it will always end up assigning the evangelicals to the same place on the political spectrum. And some day it will confront the inevitable outcome: The evangelical forces (which in terms of religion will constitute a major swath of the population that the left would like to represent politically) really will have turned to the right. And that would be an enormous problem that the left ought to avoid, even if it might fail in the effort.



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The »New Feudalism« versus Democracy

Currently, Latin America is experiencing a crisis of democracy that – in terms of the changes in political culture that have occurred in the region's recent history – is all too reminiscent of the age of military dictatorships. By the same token, this renewed crisis is also linked to the overlapping, mutually reinforcing (»intersectional«) marginalization of broad sectors of the population.

From a historical perspective, once Latin American countries achieved independence they were handicapped by the ability of the local creole elites to maintain their positions of power without significant opposition. With the exception of post-revolutionary Haiti, elites throughout the region regarded themselves increasingly as an aristocracy and excluded indigenous, Afro-American, and mestizo groups as well as women and the illiterate from the process of nation-building.

In many Latin American countries, it wasn't until the early 1990s, in the wake of large-scale indigenous and popular movements, that legal and especially constitutional reforms were instituted that led to an across-the-board recognition of previously marginalized groups. The redefinition of the nation in pluricultural terms had already been initiated, at least tentatively, by governments organized on a neo-liberal, multicultural basis. The center-left governments that succeeded them continued and expanded that trend. This inclusionary surge brought about a historic deepening of democracy in the sense that the whiteness-based aristocratic model was dismantled as democratic participation expanded significantly. Those same patterns also found expression in political representation. Now, a social nobody such as the indigenous coca farmer Evo Morales in Bolivia or the steel worker Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil could become president. At the same time political participation by women under these leftist governments also increased so much that by 2013 Latin America had become the world's region with the highest share of women in parliaments. During the first decade of this century, three of the geopolitically and economically most important countries of the region were led by women associated with the leftward trend: Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, Michelle Bachelet in Chile, and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina. However, the current situation contrasts radically with this boom in the democratization of political culture. White males belonging to or closely affiliated with the moneyed aristocracy have recaptured political power. In Paraguay, Honduras, Brazil, and most recently Bolivia the transfer of political power through undemocratic processes, analogous to a »soft coup,« already has begun. In what follows we will examine the current political culture, which is characterized not only by an obvious lurch to the right, but still more by an unbridgeable socio-economic chasm between the richest 10 % – mostly white people – and the diverse remainder of the population.

Right now we are experiencing a historically unprecedented polarization everywhere in the world. Since 2015 the richest 1 % of the global population has come to possess more wealth than all the rest of the planet's inhabitants combined. In the last two decades alone the number of billionaires has shot up to more than 2,000.

Paradoxically, according to a survey by the financial services provider Capgemini, the number of billionaires in Latin America increased enormously just when left-wing governments held office. Between 2008 and 2016 their number grew from a bit more than 420 to nearly 560. Moreover, billionaires in Latin America are disproportionately richer than those in other parts of the world. Whereas billionaires in the United States mostly acquired their mega-wealth on financial markets or from the New Economy, in Latin America the factor of land ownership has continued to play an important role. According to data supplied by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) there is no other region in the world in which the ownership of landed property is so unequally distributed as it is in Latin America. In fact, the Gini coefficient for land ownership there reaches 0.79, far exceeding the figures for Europe (0.57), Africa (0.56), and Asia (0.55). And according to Oxfam, inequality in the distribution of landed property in Paraguay, at 0.93, is comparatively the most unfair of any Latin American country.

Nevertheless, during the era of leftist governments the region clearly benefited from a »rising tide lifts all boats« effect: that is, all strata of the social class hierarchy experienced some socio-economic uplift even though no fundamental narrowing of the socio-economic gap took place. Rather than undertaking redistributive policies (say, by imposing wealth or inheritance taxes or doing agrarian reform), the left-wing governments confined themselves to launching state-sponsored support programs for the lower social classes financed through the boom in raw materials prices. As prices for raw materials began to plummet during the first decade of the 21st century (an event that triggered a severe recession), social groups that had been on the rise during the past few decades appear to have fallen back down into the lower classes. Still, the top 10 % have barely been touched by downward social mobility. Here, we are seeing a »bungee effect« that exacerbates the social gap even more. According to a very recent study by Oxfam, the tendency for social classes to drift farther apart has intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic: Between March and June of 2020, the wealth of Latin America's moneyed aristocracy increased by 18 %, while the illustrious circle of billionaires welcomed eight new members. By contrast, the informal sector, in which so many working-class Latin Americans earn their living, has been hit especially hard by the pandemic.

The political rise of the moneyed aristocracy

The yawning chasm that has opened up in the socio-economic domain between ordinary people and the moneyed aristocracy is now increasingly duplicated in the political arena. Contrary to the democratic principle that even a »nobody« can act as a political representative for the term to which he or she is chosen, now it is increasingly only appointees of the moneyed aristocracy who represent the political community. In this manner their economic power is redoubled by the addition of political power. In Chile Sebastián Piñera initiated a countertrend against the »pink tide.« In 2010 Piñera, whose fortune was estimated at 2.2 billion dollars when he took office, became Chile's first conservative president since the military dictatorship formally ended, and has continued to wield power since his reelection in 2018.

In Argentina Mauricio Macri's term in office (2015–2019) illustrates the same tendency. In Brazil, the so-called »soybean baron,« Blairo Maggi, served as the minister of agriculture from 2016 to 2019.

This problematic amalgamation of economic and political power certainly raises concerns for democratic theory, but the accompanying changes in political culture should worry us just as much. In many countries the right wing is determined to reverse the results of the politics of recognition that emerged during the last three decades. As early as the transitional government of Michel Temer, who came to power in a soft coup against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, there were no Afro-Brazilians, no indigenous people, and – for the first time since the end of the military dictatorship – not even any women in the cabinet. In Bolivia the government of Evo Morales was overthrown in November, 2019 by an alarming coup d'état in the province of Santa Cruz engineered by right-wing and even openly fascist groups led by the far-right, evangelical entrepreneur Juan Fernando Camacho, who enjoyed at least the moral support of the Organization of American States.

But it is Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro – selected as »racist of the year« by the NGO Survival International in 2019 – who embodies the most striking example of the boom in exclusionary politics. As early as 1998 he already had been expressing regret that the Brazilian cavalry had not been as successful as its American counterpart in campaigns of genocide against the indigenous population. In 2016 he advocated arming big farmers to prevent their having to cede even one more millimeter of land either to indigenous reserves or to the villages founded long ago by escaped slaves known as *quilombos*. These targeted policies against indigenous people, their reserves and territories, and the state institutions designed to support them (such as FUNAI) provoked the German Federal Government's plenipotentiary for human rights policy and humanitarian aid, Bärbel Kofler, to charge the Bolsonaro regime publicly with endangering the very existence of Brazil's indigenous people. But even leftist governments were not always immune to whiteness rhetoric and the sense of racial superiority that it engendered. In Ecuador, for example, the left-wing former president Rafael Correa labeled the indigenous movement in his country »barbaric« and called it »an obstacle to the nation's progress«. This new discursive form of identity politics offers emotional appeals to alleged white supremacy and breathes new life into ideas drawn from the genocidal programs of late 19th century colonialism.

One encounters a similarly reactionary attitude on gender questions. For example, conservative demonstrators in Brasilia condemned the renowned gender scholar Judith Butler as a witch and demanded that she be burned. More generally, the right in Brazil – incited by a powerful evangelical movement – declares that the role of the »woman as mother« cannot co-exist with a »gender ideology« open to LGBTQ. Paradoxically, such discourses are attractive to the very groups that have moved up out of the lower into the middle class. This is so because »money makes you white,« and anyone who has finally become white doesn't want to squander his or her identity politics capital.

Nevertheless, this crude and often post-factual rhetoric is just the tip of the iceberg. Newly emergent techniques of governance in the Foucauldian mode are even

more disturbing. Evidently, the neo-liberal and multicultural politics of recognition is coming to an end. New institutions of ethno-governmentalism that were supposed to grant self-rule to indigenous people and help them function as citizens and as participants in a market economy are being dismantled or emasculated. Instead, one discerns a return to sovereign power, a form of rule that Michel Foucault characterized as »the power to kill.« In this vein the Chilean government describes the Mapuche communities fighting to defend their land rights against logging companies as internal enemies and »terrorists« against whom an anti-terrorism law from the era of the Pinochet dictatorship ought to be invoked. Something close to a state of emergency has been declared against the Mapuche. In other regions, too, the police and military are being deployed against indigenous people, especially when they resist environmentally destructive projects like mining, soybean and palm-oil production or dam building.

Such exercises of sovereign power by the state are imitated by non-state actors as well. According to global comparisons compiled by the NGO Global Witness, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, and Nicaragua are all among the countries in which the most »defenders of the earth« (often indigenous people) have been murdered. Afro-American and/or feminist activists are in the crosshairs, as evidenced by the murder of Marielle Franco, a city councilwoman in Rio de Janeiro. Recently, pogrom-like racist riots against the Mapuche have taken place. Similar attacks have happened in Bolivia as well. While the feminist movement, relying on affiliates such as *#NiUnaMenos* and *#NiUnaMas*, has been able to articulate broad protest, the indigenous movements largely have been limited to defensive discourses. Latin American intellectuals like Maristella Svampa see this as the beginning of an eco-territorial pivot committed to the defense of local life-worlds. No matter how important this local-level defense strategy may be for democratic processes, it still can't be denied that over the past few years broad segments of the population have been disenfranchised. Amplified by the sounding board of international organizations and NGOs, the voices of women, indigenous people, Afro-Americans, and environmentalists used to be heard loud and clear in the political arena from the 1990s up through the first decade of the 21st century. At this point, however, they have come to be perceived as little more than »noisy« distractions. Any careful survey of conditions in Latin America, such as the one attempted in this essay, leaves little room for doubt about the conclusion: democracy is incompatible with extreme social inequality.



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