

## **Book Reviews: *Interface*, 12 (1)**

**Reviews editor: Dawn M. Paley**

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**Book Review: Yasser Munif, *The Syrian Revolution: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death***

**Review Author: Isaac K. Oommen**

**Yasser Munif, 2020, *The Syrian Revolution: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death*. London, Pluto Press. £19.99, 208 pages.**

The war in Syria is perhaps the most complicated ongoing conflict in the world. While a myriad of commentators and random uncles appear to have their analysis down pat, the sheer numbers of factions and changing alliances makes the conflict hard to understand.

Even while following a number of Syrian on-the-ground analysts, this reviewer found it next to impossible to figure out who is the villain, particularly as more external actors, the latest of which is Turkey, get involved.

Perhaps the toughest part of the equation to pull apart is which of the many factions enjoy popular support. As Arundhati Roy mentioned in her analysis of Kashmir in *Listening to Grasshoppers*, one becomes resigned to the fact that the situation is too complicated to simplify for analysis.

Yasser Munif's attempt to untangle this web in Syria is one that is laser-focused on struggles on the ground, and the regime's response to the popular uprising. In a country that is seeing fights between rebel factions –including the Free Syria army as well as various actors like Al Qaeda, ISIS/Daesh, Turkey, Russia, Kurdish forces, Druze forces, tribal fighters and of course the Syrian state– Munif analyzes the competing nationalisms at play, and the many uses of power.

In an effort to have a well-rounded view of the revolution, Munif interviews activists in multiple cities (since each city is a microcosm of revolution) and visits several areas himself.

Central to *The Syrian Revolution: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death* is an analysis of the different nationalisms at play. Acknowledging from the first page the kind of factioning that happens among those discussing the situation in Syria (he uses the example of regime loyalists attacking a World Social Forum panel he organised), Munif separates organic nationalism that grew in Syria (and elsewhere in the Arab world) against the regime, from the nationalism manufactured by the Syrian state (currently under President Bashar al-Assad, whose father and grandfather preceded him in ruling the area).

*The Syrian Revolution* looks at the nationalism of popular movements in Syria –the ones that led to the temporary freedom of cities like Aleppo from the regime– as continuations of the Arab nationalism that fuelled the independence

movements that were abandoned after the 1967 war with Israel. This kind of nationalism emerged in opposing French colonialism, and had an openness to the definition of Syrian-ness and Arab-ness that allowed many groups to come together to fight the colonisers.

The nationalism of the Syrian state, on the other hand, is one Munif calls “authoritarian, exclusive and neo-colonial” (pp. 105), a nationalism made to maintain the grip of the state. According to Munif, then, the core of the conflict in Syria is one in which “two nationalisms are competing for dominance” (pp. 106).

It is through this comparison of nationalisms that Munif untangles the differences between the regime, revolutionaries and armed actors such as ISIS. The regime has created a rigid definition of nationalism that pushes aside groups such as Kurds and Palestinians.

ISIS hence falls into the same category as the state, imposing their strict ideology on the populace.

Though ISIS does mirror the state in this strict perception and enforcement of nationalism, Munif notes the difference in the two actors’ meting out of violent control: ISIS performs said violence in a highly visible way, whereas the Syrian government does so in a manner that makes them invisible while the actions stay highly visible.

ISIS performs beheadings before high-resolution cameras; however, Assad’s forces imprison people out of sight and use snipers to kill others, leaving no marks of their presence bar the marked bodies.

Finally, there’s the popular movements that began the revolution, who instead push for inclusivity to bring together Christians, Druze, Shia, Sunni and other groups.

The analysis of violence and control is also central to *The Syrian Revolution*, helping to unravel the complicated narratives about the conflict in Syria. From the use of sniper-guarded check-points and punitive bomb strikes to controlling the production of bread; death and population control are the macabre signatures of Assad’s regime.

Whereas revolutionaries tried to peacefully protest, such as during the Volcano of Aleppo shopkeeper strikes in March of 2011, the regime countered with a lethality practiced over decades. Control of industries such as bakeries was tightly implemented so that revolutionaries found it hard to move these businesses outside the state domain.

Imprisonment was (and continues to be) operated at a loss in order to maximise suffering. Bombing, snipers, foreign militias and tribes are deployed by the regime to control and kill populations. These tools are sometimes utilised to enact collective punishment as an example to other areas. The general idea through all of the above is that the regime is demonstrating to everyone that a post-Assad Syria is not possible.

Perhaps one of the most chilling ideas explored in *The Syrian Revolution* is that in this killing zone is that in Assad's Syria, life has no value at all. "A Syrian citizen is not essential to the regime, and as such can be disposed of," writes Munif (pp. 27).

Almost as chilling is the accusation of western complicity in the regime's machinations, from essentialist think-tank analyses, to Eurocentric news coverage and even UN complicity in working with the regime (delivering medicine to the Syrian government and hence making it unavailable to revolutionary-held areas). The sum of the above is a growing acceptance of the genocide in Syria by the rest of the world.

The only thing holding back Munif's analysis is the age-old hiccup of passive actions. Like many analysts, he notes that areas "were bombed" or that people "were killed" without naming those perpetrating the actions. Perhaps this form of writing too falls victim to the machinations of Assad's regime, where the result is seen, but the actor too often, remains hidden.

*The Syrian Revolution* is extensive within just a couple of hundred short pages in that it explores the varied ethnic, tribal and factional dimensions of the revolution while targeting state repression and PR efforts. Though complicating the narrative of the revolution, it brings essential clarity to state apparatuses in the combating of what would have been a democratic, people-centred revolution.

## References

Roy, Arundhati. 2010. *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*. New York: Penguin.

## About the review author

Isaac K. Oommen is based out of South India and Vancouver, BC. He is a post secondary educator and Co-founder of Solid State Youth Co-op, as well as a freelance journalist.

## **Book review: Masao Sugiura, *Against the Storm***

**Review author: Alexander James Brown**

**Masao Sugiura, 2019, *Against the Storm: How Japanese Printworkers Resisted the Military Regime, 1935–1945*, edited by Kaye Broadbent, translated by Kaye Broadbent and Mana Sato. Melbourne: Interventions. AU\$25, 164 pp.**

From the commencement of Japan's Fifteen Year War in 1931, when the Japanese Kwantung Army staged a bomb attack on the Manchurian Railway in order to justify the invasion of Manchuria, until Imperial Japan's surrender to the Allies in 1945, labour organising and anti-war resistance in mainland Japan was subject to fierce repression by the military and civilian police. With some notable exceptions, most Marxists and labour organisations capitulated to expansionist Japanese nationalism, either recanting their views or joining in class-collaborationist projects such as the Patriotic Industrial Association (PIA), which compulsorily absorbed labour organisations and mobilised them for the war effort.

The new English translation of *Against the Storm*, Masao Sugiura's account of labour organising in the Tokyo printing and publishing industry, demonstrates that in spite of widespread capitulation and ruthless repression, pockets of labour and anti-war resistance did continue throughout Japan's darkest period. In doing so it also helps to explain how Japan's labour and socialist movements bounced back so quickly in the wake of the defeat. The introduction of more favourable labour policies by the Occupation authorities was followed by an explosion in union membership and strike activity and the election of the first short-lived socialist-led coalition government in 1947, as has been documented in English by Joe Moore (2003).

This English edition of *Against the Storm* is a translation of Masao Sugiura's insider's account of the *Shuppankō Kurabu* (Print and Publishing Workers Club), whose precursors emerged in the Tokyo printing industry in 1934 and remained active until 1948, when it was disbanded following the establishment of a strong national printworkers union. The original text, *Wakamono wa arashi ni makenai* (Young People Will Not Give into the Storm) was published in Japan in 1982 based on an earlier 1964 version. Kaye Broadbent edited *Against the Storm* and translated the source text together with Mana Sato.

Broadbent also provides an introductory essay which summarises the development of the socialist and workers movements in Japan in the early twentieth century and describes the deepening economic and social crisis of Japanese society in the 1930s. *Against the Storm* is rounded out with a short interview Broadbent conducted with Sugiura at his home outside Tokyo in 2016,

when he was 102 years old. A useful glossary contains definitions for the many terms which will be unfamiliar to non-specialist readers. The book is published in Australia by Interventions, a new not-for-profit socialist publishing initiative established in 2015 as a continuation of the earlier Jeff Goldhar Project. In Australia's limited publishing marketplace, independent publishing ventures with an explicit political objective are a welcome intervention into the liberal mainstream.

In the preface, Broadbent describes how she came across the 1964 Japanese text in the library of the Ohara Institute for Social Research, Japan's leading research institute for labour history, while conducting research for an essay on wartime labour activism (Broadbent & O'Lincoln 2015). Like Broadbent, I have had a longstanding interest in the untold stories of resistance to Japanese militarism during the war. However, the existing English sources on this history are limited. The publication of a primary-source document of this nature in English therefore significantly expands the information available to labour historians who seek to reclaim Japanese traditions of grassroots resistance in order to counter the continuing stereotypical portrayals of Japan as a nation of conformists who are incapable of standing up to their government.

*Against the Storm* takes us inside the lifeworld of working-class printworkers in 1930s Tokyo. Sugiura helps us to understand the poverty and harsh working conditions they endured, with long hours and often only two days off per month. The workforce was divided between an elite of full-time printworkers and an army of temporary workers who had no job security and even worse pay.

Sugiura shows us how the seeds of working-class culture took root in this environment. On his rare days off, he would attend performances at the Tsukiji Small Theatre, where the police would be in attendance to haul off members of the audience who broke out with the *Internationale* as the performers on stage acted out socialist realist plays about corrupt bosses and workers going on strike. As Sugiura notes, while mostly of working-class background and therefore unschooled in the elite Marxism popular among middle-class intellectuals of the day, the typesetters and printing workers needed an above-average level of education and literacy in order to do their jobs printing Japanese-language texts, which use thousands of Chinese *kanji* characters.

The Print and Publishing Workers Club's first incarnation was as a literary circle called *Ayumi*. By publishing and distributing a magazine of the same name, organisers were able to make contact with workers in different factories and talk about labour issues. This formed the basis of their later organising. Following a 1935 strike at Tokyo Printing, *Ayumi* formed the kernel of a labour organisation and helped to raise strike funds and support striking workers. While the strike was ultimately defeated, the strike committee and literary circle continued to organise, forming a society which was formally established as the Print and Publishing Workers Club in 1937.

The Club tried to help the newly unemployed printworkers find jobs, an activity which forced them to confront corrupt labour hire practices in the industry.

Organisers of the Club had a background in the union and communist movements, but they argued that the workers needed a different type of organisation that would nurture a culture of solidarity among the workers that would in turn help build class-consciousness and open up avenues for further organising.

The Club's focus on grassroots networking and developing the cultural life of its members helps to explain why their resistance remains relatively unknown. Rather than focusing on explicit union demands and risking almost certain arrest and repression, the club focused on building solidarity among the workers in different factories and the publishing industry more broadly. This kind of activity is less likely to leave a trace in the historical record than strikes and other more visible forms of labour activism.

The Print and Publishing Workers Club built connections between workers which enabled them to survive the hardships of their daily lives by organizing as a social club. Their activities included publishing a *haiku* journal, organizing sporting competitions and organising hiking expeditions to the mountains. During the summer months, the club rented a house at the beachside to provide rest and recreation opportunities for the members. The group also operated a lending library including both novels and popular literature alongside Marxist and other socialist texts. These social activities gave them a veneer of legitimacy and helped to minimize police surveillance and repression.

As the Japanese state increased its repression of labour organizing following the intensification of the conflict in China after 1937, labour organisations and the still-legal proletarian parties began to take the increasingly class collaborationist line of supporting the nation in a time of crisis. Unions were forced to disband and joined the Patriotic Industrial Association (PIA), a body established by the government and conservative union leadership to support the war effort. Due to its unique organizational structure, the Club continued to organize at the grassroots, avoiding open confrontation with bosses. They prepared to go underground by dividing their activities into separate organisations, such as *haiku* circles, sporting clubs and women's groups.

The Club was formally dissolved in the presence of Special Police witnesses in line with the directive for all labour unions. While this enabled the organisation to operate covertly, its networks began to fray as conditions worsened and members were sent to the front or transferred to munitions factories. In 1942 the author, Sugiura and leading organiser Shibata Ryūichi were both imprisoned under the repressive Peace Preservation Law and brutally tortured by the police before being sent to prison, where they remained for the remainder of the war. Shibata died in prison in 1945, just months before Japan's surrender, but Sugiura survived and was released in October 1945, along with other political prisoners. He immediately joined the now-legal Japan Communist Party and began organising in the print industry, helping to found the All Japan Printing and Publishing Trade Union in 1946.



In making *Against the Storm* available for an Anglophone audience, Broadbent and Sato have given us new insight into the world of cultural activism and underground organizing during the darkest period for the labour and socialist movement in Japan's history. Today, far-right forces within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party are gaining confidence in their quest to rewrite the history of the Fifteen Year War, denying Japanese atrocities and minimizing the repressive nature of the wartime regime as they seek to rearm Japan so that it can play a greater role in foreign military conflicts.

Today, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe openly seeks to revise Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, the so-called peace clause which outlaws war as a means of solving international disputes. In their defence of the constitution, the democratic forces in Japan often point to the terrible violence committed by the Japanese military overseas and the repression carried out against the labour movement at home. However, this pamphlet reminds us that as well as remembering the crimes of the militarist part, it is also important to remember Japan's own traditions of resistance. The model of grassroots organizing, cultural resistance and industrial militancy the Club provides can give us confidence that even as fascism gains strength, it is possible to resist and in doing so to build the foundations of a democratic, peaceful culture.

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## About the review author

Alexander Brown is a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science International Research Fellow at Japan Women's University and an Honorary Associate at University of Technology Sydney. His research focuses on anti-nuclear activism in Japan and Australia. He is the author of *Anti-nuclear Protest in Post-Fukushima Tokyo: Power Struggles* (Routledge 2018). Alexander is also a translator of Japanese social science, most recently of Shimizu Hiromu's *Grassroots Globalization: Reforestation and Cultural Revitalization in the Philippine Cordillera* (Trans Pacific Press and Kyoto University Press, 2019). He can be contacted at abrown AT kemblatranslations DOT com.

**Book review: Samir Gandesha (Editor), *Spectres of Fascism*.**

**Review author: Rogelio Regalado Mujica**

**Samir Gandesha (Ed.), *Spectres of Fascism. Historical, Theoretical and International Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press. \$33, 304 pp.**

El panorama sociopolítico contemporáneo ha desbordado los paradigmas establecidos por la globalización neoliberal y su triunfalismo temprano en los años 90's, dando paso a una reconfiguración del terror que desenmascaradamente se dispersa por el mundo.

Las fuerzas políticas que, con diversos matices tanto a nivel del Estado como en el campo social, han sostenido una agenda caracterizada por la violencia en múltiples acepciones, genera que desde distintos sitios se activen fuerzas, tanto por parte de activistas como de intelectuales y académicos, que intentan no solamente capturar su dinámica sino confrontarla. Este es el caso de *Spectres of Fascism*, una obra que se destaca inicialmente por su capacidad de hacer frente al fenómeno al que alude su título.

Desde los años 30's y sobre todo tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la producción académica con respecto al tema ha sido sumamente prolífica, centrándose principalmente en el caso europeo que ha acaparado la mayoría de esfuerzos por múltiples razones, eclipsando el conocimiento de otros espacios. Aún con la gran cantidad de información y análisis que existen, una pregunta sigue siendo pertinente: ¿por qué necesitamos otro libro sobre fascismo?

Tan abierta como se pronuncia, las respuestas pueden ser múltiples, comenzando quizá por la necesidad de comprender las variables que se han manifestado actualmente y que justifica la mayoría de trabajos contemporáneos.

Sin embargo, si la pregunta se efectúa particularmente a *Spectres of Fascism*, la respuesta resulta tan particular como enriquecedora. El texto editado por Gandesha nos ofrece la posibilidad de romper con el cerco disciplinario tradicional que aborda las problemáticas de manera hermética, mostrando una capacidad de desenvolverse de manera no segmentada, al menos no en la obra como totalidad, por los estudios sociales y las humanidades, lo que precisamente corresponde a las exigencias que el fenómeno presenta.

En otras palabras, el pensamiento positivo fragmentario sirve solo para capturar la imagen estática del fascismo sin que esto contribuya a su disolución: *Spectres of Fascism*, inspirado en los desafíos esgrimidos por la Escuela de Frankfurt, constituye una crítica importante a dichas aproximaciones y lo hace a partir de su propio movimiento.

El título presenta ya una interpretación original del problema: los espectros del fascismo (*spectres of fascism*), como concepto, se distingue de las

consideraciones recientes sobre el neofascismo o el posfascismo al indicar que no se trata de un retorno de esta fuerza, sino más bien de su aparición fantasmagórica. Hace eco de las voces de Freud y Adorno, que ha atravesado los puertos migratorios de Europa, donde según el autor nació, y que se desplaza por el mundo familiarmente al hacer evidente el lado barbárico de la civilización que lo caracteriza.

El punto de partida de estos espectros que Gandesha advierte en la introducción, está marcado principalmente por dos acontecimientos del siglo XXI: el ataque a Estados Unidos del 9/11 y el colapso financiero del 2008. En realidad, estos acontecimientos, como base material contemporánea, se comprenden vinculados a los procesos de acumulación de capital expresados por el neoliberalismo, donde el fascismo se ubica como una contra-revolución cuyo relato expresa la crisis de la modernidad misma en su confrontación con la democracia liberal.

A lo largo de *Spectres of Fascism* se sostiene el vínculo con el neoliberalismo, la democracia liberal y los acontecimientos del 9/11 y 2008, además de otro elemento que deambula por la totalidad del texto: el papel de la tecnología. Nuevamente, recuperando la importancia de la Teoría Crítica, en este caso a Benjamin, el libro pone especial interés en el papel de las plataformas digitales y la reformulación que suponen a la industria cultural. Destacar esto es importante porque da paso a la comprensión de la estrategia propagandística del fascismo hoy en día y, al mismo tiempo, advierte los nuevos campos en disputa que pueden ser tomados en cuenta por los paradigmas emancipatorios.

*Spectres of Fascism* está compuesta por tres apartados: el histórico, el teórico y el que aborda los horizontes contemporáneos. Las diversas fuentes que lo nutren se anclan a corrientes críticas europeas. Por el texto vemos la influencia de Trotsky, Schmitt, Gramsci, Deleuze, Gattari, Lacan, Adorno, Benjamin, Horkheimer y obviamente a Marx y Freud. Esto resulta interesante, porque la obra en general no se concentra en los autores que tradicionalmente aparecen en el panorama de los estudios de fascismo contemporáneos, a reserva de la Escuela de Frankfurt a la que al menos se le suelen hacer guiños en casi cualquier discusión al respecto.

Sin embargo, tal como se apela a la diversidad disciplinaria para el enfoque crítico, resultaría pertinente encontrar en la obra la misma diversidad teórica/epistemológica. Otras corrientes críticas de pensamiento no europeas, seguramente podrán levantar la mano tras leer el libro y presentar otras líneas de entendimiento que nutra el análisis contra el despliegue del fascismo.

La primera parte de *Spectres of Fascism* se denomina 'Historia' y la componen las aportaciones de Ingo Schmidt, Jaleh Mansoor, Alec Balasescu y Tamir Bar-On y sostiene un ánimo crítico que ronda la historia del arte, la arquitectura y las plataformas digitales, consiguiendo una sutil perspectiva histórica.

El trabajo de Schmidt nos ofrece una mirada a las luchas contra el fascismo en la Alemania de los años 20's y 30's a partir de la crítica al Estado, el capital, las relaciones de clase y la psicología social. Mansoor, desde la historia del arte y la

teoría crítica, especialmente recuperando a Benjamin, propone la comprensión del futurismo italiano vinculado al fascismo, mostrando la potencia de la estética. En este mismo tenor, el trabajo de Balasescu nos propone la forma en que la pureza constituye un pilar para el totalitarismo y cómo, a través de la estética de la salvación, se activa políticamente el discurso contra la impureza.

Tamir Bar-On ofrece un análisis comparativo del movimiento Alt-Right y la Nueva Derecha Francesa que se desenvuelve en una perspectiva politológica. El enfoque de Bar-On, a diferencia de los otros capítulos, pierde un poco del perfil crítico que se venía presentando, aunque es el que con más énfasis nos ayuda a entender el papel contemporáneo de las plataformas digitales con su análisis del movimiento Alt-Right.

La segunda parte de *Spectres of Fascism* corresponde a la ‘Teoría’ y comprende los trabajos de Am Johal, Laura U. Marks, Samir Gandesha, Hilda Fernández Álvarez y Gary Genosko. Tiene como objetivo específico presentar interpretaciones teóricas que conformen una constelación capaz de ofrecer claves abstractas para el abordaje del fascismo contemporáneo.

De esta manera, el trabajo de Am Johal basa su texto en el uso político del trabajo de Carl Schmitt por parte de la izquierda en Estados Unidos. Aunque Johal propone un desarrollo crítico, a ciertos momentos se entrapa en las categorías burguesas que explora, de manera que obstaculiza la posibilidad de plantear otra gramática que desborde la clásica división politizadora entre amigo/enemigo.

El aporte de Laura U. Marks constituye una muy potente interpretación de la relación entre fascismo y misoginia, lo que resulta fundamental para los análisis actuales. La autora ofrece una interpretación del trabajo *Male Fantasies* de Klaus Theweleit, haciendo evidente las relaciones de violencia, especialmente con respecto a la mujer, en el escenario contemporáneo.

No solo se puede leer en clave de denuncia, sino como propuesta de resistencia y emancipación, lo que definitivamente contribuye al perfil crítico de la obra. El trabajo de Marks tiene similitudes con los planteamientos de Rita Segato, por lo que puede ser interesante establecer puentes entre su texto y la obra de la pensadora latinoamericana.

El editor del libro, Samir Gandesha, aborda la propaganda fascista en una discusión con Adorno y a la luz del clima político estadounidense. Una de las cuestiones más importantes de este capítulo es que pone al centro el problema de la identidad, crucial para comprender la dinámica del fascismo, además de que se desenvuelve hábilmente entre el plano abstracto y material, lo que nos da una posibilidad más potente de comprender la naturaleza del fenómeno.

El siguiente texto nos conduce por la teoría psicoanalítica clínica, mostrándonos la forma en que el subconsciente tiene participación en el ámbito político, especialmente explicándolo a través de la concepción de la compulsión por repetición. Hilda Fernández Álvarez nos ofrece otra clave teórica al introducir a Lacan en la obra, especialmente con el “significante-maestro” y cómo este se vincula al despliegue tanto del fascismo como al discurso de la izquierda.

El texto de Gary Genosko retoma a Deleuze y Guattari, especialmente el efecto del agujero negro y la resonancia, para mostrarnos la manera en que operan los micro fascismos que teje con el caso estadounidense. El capítulo es importante porque hace evidente la adaptabilidad del fascismo y la manera en que este se ajusta al espacio social, como lo muestra con su explicación sobre los *subreddit*, las comunidades virtuales específicas ligadas a la plataforma de medios sociales 'Reddit'.

El último apartado de *Spectres of Fascism*, denominado 'El horizonte contemporáneo', revisa cuatro locaciones geográficas: Brasil, Canadá, Estados Unidos e India. Los capítulos no plantean un estudio de caso de estos Estados nacionales, sino que los presenta como espacios que ejemplifican, desde distintas perspectivas, el recorrido del espectro del fascismo.

Vladimir Safatle, comienza trazando el panorama latinoamericano y explica cómo las dictaduras en la región sirvieron como laboratorio para el despliegue del neoliberalismo. Precisamente frente a la crisis del modelo neoliberal y el fracaso que significó el intentar incrustarle un rostro humano, como lo ejemplifica el caso de la Francia de Macron, nuevamente América Latina, específicamente Brasil, vuelve a ser laboratorio mundial, esta vez para mostrar la potencia fascista del neoliberalismo que el autor denomina "con rostro inhumano".

Luego, Patricia Barkaskas muestra la relación entre colonialismo y fascismo. Aunque no presenta una identidad entre estas dos formas, su abordaje sobre la situación de las comunidades indígenas canadienses, nos convoca a desafiar los discursos dominantes desde la teoría de resistencia indígena.

Aunque ha rondado buena parte de *Spectres of Fascism*, lo que quizá se explica por su capacidad mediática, el capítulo escrito por Joan Braune, remueve nuevamente el aire americano. Sin embargo, esta ocasión destaca porque no hace un análisis de la personalidad de Trump, sino que se introduce en el corazón de la maquinaria política del fascismo estadounidense a través del análisis de Steve Bannon y la influencia de la Teoría Generacional y el Tradicionalismo en su actividad política.

Ajay y Vijay Gudavarthy escriben el capítulo correspondiente a la India. La profundidad con la que desarrollan su texto, especialmente para los lectores no relacionados con el contexto indio, es la primera cuestión a resaltar. Exploran la relación entre fascismo y desarrollo tejida en la concepción del populismo bajo una importante influencia de los estudios gramscianos.

El horizonte contemporáneo que muestra Johan Hartle para cerrar *Spectres of Fascism*, está basado en el arte y la Situacionista Internacional, especialmente concentrándose en el concepto de 'espectáculo' que le permite realizar una crítica a la izquierda porque su desenvolvimiento, al menos en el ambiente artístico, ha quedado encerrado en las claves liberales, lo que deja la puerta abierta para la emergencia del fascismo.

*Spectres of Fascism* ofrece una ventana distinta para quienes quieran aproximarse al estudio del fascismo más allá de los esquemas politológicos tradicionales.

Su capacidad de analizar el fenómeno a partir de la psicología, la estética, el arte o el derecho, nos otorga una dimensión profunda del problema que rememora los esfuerzos de la primera generación de la Escuela de Frankfurt.

Aunque la obra fue concebida principalmente a través de una red de académicos que se conecta en Norteamérica y que se mueve principalmente con la epistemología occidental, es un esfuerzo considerable por trasgredir la concepción del fascismo incrustado exclusivamente en Europa, como lo apela el concepto que da título al libro.

No obstante, corresponde a los próximos estudiosos ensanchar la senda que abren Gandeshya y los colaboradores de la obra e incorporar otras latitudes, experiencias y reflexiones que, siguiendo la intención crítica, no se dedique más a la simple acumulación de material sobre el fascismo, sino que contribuya al posicionamiento contra el mismo que alumbre posibilidades emancipatorias.

### **About the review author**

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**Book review: Daniel Ozarow, *The mobilization and demobilization of middle-class revolt***

**Review Author: Agnes Gagyí**

**Daniel Ozarow, 2019, *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt. Comparative insights from Argentina*. New York: Routledge (271 pp.)**

Daniel Ozarow's new book *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt* is a longitudinal study of middle class mobilization and demobilization in Argentina since 2001, when debt default pushed Argentina's GDP down by one-fifth. Unemployment reached 25 percent, poverty soared to 54 percent. As millions of highly educated citizens became impoverished, the middle class was virtually extinguished overnight.

In December 2001 and throughout 2002, an enormous protest movement shook the country, where middle classes joined workers and the urban poor in a movement that came to be known by the slogan *que se vayan todos* (get rid of all of them).

Demonstrators' deep dissatisfaction with the political system, occupations of public spaces, experiments in direct democracy and horizontal decision-making, as well as a proliferation of neighborhood assemblies, collective self-help, and various models of alternative solidarity economy solutions made this movement a significant model for worldwide movements that reacted to the 2008 crisis. Ozarow offers his study of mobilization and demobilization as a contribution that can orient our thought about the future of post-2008 movements.

Following their initial successes (like removing four presidents in two weeks in December 2001), the 2001-2002 movements in Argentina were demobilized and co-opted by the Kirchner governments. Building on the corporatist tradition of Peronism, this regime carried out a reorganization to post-neoliberal developmentalism. The government took over and implemented some of the demands and practices of the movement – it supported the formation of cooperatives, included participative budgeting, nationalized some key industries, and provided significant state aid to the poorest strata in the framework of a “consumption pact” that helped grow economic demand.

These concessions were part of a regime of world-economic integration where the Argentine state made significant efforts to protect national capital's development, and meanwhile sustained a reorganization of dependent integration through commodity exports, based on extractivist industries. This model implied new concessions to export targets like China, or to multinational companies like Monsanto or Chevron, in turn sparking new conflicts with Indigenous groups hurt by the industrial expansion.

According to Ozarow's study, compared to significant state aid to poorer strata, the impoverished middle class started to feel neglected and disregarded. Parallel to the demobilization of protest, the links of solidarity to poorer strata built out during the 2001-2002 protests started to disintegrate. Competition for the same jobs, the lack of targeted state aid, or occasions like piquetero actions where roads were blocked by the urban poor, obstructed middle class workers' commute set the two groups against each other.

In *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt*, Ozarow shows how ideas of solidarity and belief in collective action gave place to political disillusionment, anti-poor sentiments, and a crisis of middle-class values tied to hard work, upward mobility and meritocracy. The Kirchner governments (2003-2015) came to be seen as corrupt, nepotistic, a power that rests on free aid to the unemployed, supported by the taxes of the struggling middle class neglected by the state.

In expressions of these feelings, long-term patterns of race-class divisions were activated that distinguished between white upper and middle classes of European origin, and Mestizo and immigrant workers and peasants – a division known in Argentinian politics as *la grieta* (the crack).

In a Freudian projection, diminishing differences between impoverished middle class and poor workers' positions were overemphasized in symbolic differences like race and moral values. Memories of 2001-2001 protests were rewritten in a negative light. If the significance of middle-class politics in 2001-2002 was manifested in the break of previous neoliberal policies and the installation of a left government through a social alliance with workers and the poor, the new anti-government protests that broke out in 2012-2013 contributed to the coming to power of the conservative and business-oriented government of Mauricio Macri in 2015.

These protests, contrary to those of 2001-2002, did not speak of material claims, but about values: corruption and the lack of meritocracy. Ozarow sees this cycle as a warning sign that progressive middle class movements can degenerate into passivity, moralization and voting for the "lesser evil." In the case of Argentina, this enabled political alliances with upper classes that, from the perspective of the material conditions of the struggling middle class, Ozarow interprets as a form of false consciousness.

During the Macri government, the economic growth promised in the campaign as a result of new foreign direct investment did not happen, while a new monetary crisis resulted in one of the largest IMF loans so far. Ozarow asks whether the new wave of multisectoral protest gaining strength in face of the new economic difficulties could result in a new *que se vayan todos* type of movement.

Building on longitudinal survey data and interviews with people sampled from surveys carried out between 2002 and 2016, *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt* looks at how changes in economic status,



participation in collective action, and broader conditions of political opportunity and macroeconomic context relate to each other.

Contrary to the tenet of resource mobilization theory that correlates movements' power with the robustness of their organizational structure, Ozarow points out that the Argentinian movements relied on informal modes of organization that did not build up into broader structures: assemblies acted as "nerve systems" of the protests, solidarity economy worked as a site for social mixing that enabled solidarities, and workplaces where proletarianized middle class workers met each other acted as catalysts of collective action.

*The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt* finds that previous experience in collective forms of organization strengthened participation. The author confirms the theory of J-curve and relative deprivation, which expects rebellion to break out when expectations for improvement are suddenly busted: in 2001-2002, the swiftness of economic downward mobility in his data correlates with the propensity to protests.

He shows that the change from individual coping solutions of the 1990's to the political protest of 2001-2002 was due both to the sudden economic collapse and the lack of the regime's political legitimacy, which allowed for middle class sentiments of individual failure to be reorganized as political struggle against an external cause of their misery.

Ozarow closes *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt* with a series of recommendations. He advises movements to avoid what he describes as losing sight of their systemic aim, being co-opted by top-down reforms, and then turning against their former allies through an alliance with elites.

Instead, contrary to the Argentinian movements' reluctance to build structured political organizations, movements should sustain structures of mobilization: they should be able to have mobilizing vehicles, tools to influence politics, and autonomous solidarity economy structures that sustain movement capacities and allow for social mixing. They should avoid forms of false consciousness that allure them to ally with upper classes, and maintain solidarities with workers.

The single point where I had questions was the relation between middle class claims and capitalist integration. From what I understand, Ozarow says that middle classes and poor workers share the same anti-systemic interest, and middle class politics that thinks otherwise is a result of false consciousness. In terms of long-term anti-systemic aims this of course makes sense, however in terms of analyzing more short-term dynamics of middle class politics, it obscures the limitations of semi-peripheral middle class development, and the resulting competition for state help.

Within the conditions of systemic integration, the short term interest of the middle class does not necessarily include solidarity with the poor. This is rather a characteristic of politicization reacting to crises, typically followed by a competition against poorer strata for state resources (e.g. Silver and Slater 1999, Janos 2000).

*The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt* does not make clear whether by progressive aims he means full anti-systemic struggle, or rather the broadening of social benefits within the conditions of capital accumulation. At points (pp. 253) it seems like he promotes the fulfillment of middle class desires for upward mobility together with an increased mobility of the poor.

Within contemporary hierarchies of global accumulation, the social democratic success of the latter version is impossible not only in semi-peripheral regions, but also in former welfare states of the core. Moreover, if we are to use the force of movements to destroy contemporary forms of accumulation in order to make survival possible in the face of climate crisis, encouraging movements and parties to reassure middle classes that based on their values, they deserve the fulfillment of their desires (pp. 254-256) seems counterproductive.

Middle classes' desire for upward mobility has been a key vehicle of systemic integration; in order to get rid of the system that is threatening to kill us all, middle classes, too, need to disengage with desires linked to systemic stakes. Ozarow's proposals for autonomous infrastructures of solidarity economy where middle classes can mix with other strata and create new common understandings and practices seem more promising in this respect.

On the whole, *The Mobilization and Demobilization of Middle-class Revolt* is an important resource for middle class self-understanding in the context of an escalating global economic and political crisis. Instead of universalizing moments of middle class progressive politics, it shows how these can give in to systemic pressures, and gives practical recommendations for how to avoid such effects by building autonomous structures of solidarity.

At the beginning of a new global crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic, as we see the rise of new wave of solidarity response, this warning could help us focus our attention to sustaining and broadening new structures of solidarity as a means of systemic disengagement and anti-systemic struggle in face of the climate crisis, instead of treating them as temporary measures before everything returns back to normal.

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### **About the review author**

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## **Book Review: Andy Blunden, *Hegel for Social Movements***

**Review author: Cameron Shingleton**

**Andy Blunden, 2019, *Hegel for Social Movements*. Brill: Leiden, Boston. \$28.00, 289 pp.**

If I had to pull a figure out of the air, based on my years teaching undergraduate philosophy, I would guess that approximately half of students who ever try reading the 19th Century German philosopher Hegel are put off by the philosopher's dense, sometimes turgid, prose.

Coming to Hegel for the first time, it's hard not to feel that at least some of Hegel's problems might cease to seem problematic if Hegel had chosen to be clearer about the meaning of the basic terms he was using.

However at a guess I'd say many of the remaining half of first-time readers fall at a different hurdle: Hegel's apparently relentless intellectualism. Big concepts, rather than more immediately recognisable forms of knowledge or experience, seem to be front and centre of Hegel's thinking.

Perhaps a third troubling factor, for readers who get a bit further, is what we could call Hegel's programmatism. Hegel's urge to fit everything together into a grand system, with Hegel's own philosophy sitting at the top of the whole edifice, at times seems to be pursued for its own sake.

Like any good philosopher, Hegel himself was of course not unaware of these potential difficulties. One can easily imagine him returning from the dead after 200 years and explaining why everything in the vast intellectual edifice of Hegelian thought had to be the way it is and no other.

In *Hegel for Social Movements*, author Andy Blunden's main concern is with the second issue I've mentioned: how to show that Hegel's framing of problems is practical, and decidedly political, in an unlikely sense.

The aim of *Hegel for Social Movements* is to take the reader step by step through Hegel's work, with periodic pauses for really committed students to read Hegel's own words. While not quite a representative sample of Hegel's work, Blunden's selections are intended to help readers to appreciate Hegel's contribution as a social thinker.

Blunden's central argument in the book is that Hegel's dynamic, dialectical, holistic understanding of concepts makes his work particularly suited to addressing many types of real world problems, particularly the challenges of social activism, which are clearly the author's passionate intellectual concern.

Probably the most novel interpretative manoeuvre in support of this is the claim that the core interest of Hegel for social activists lies in his logic: that

thunderous super-structure of ideas and thought movements leading from the categories of Being, Nothing and Becoming, up through Essence/Reflection, up to what Hegel's translators call variously the Concept or the Notion.

In interpretative terms, this means Blunden de-emphasises Hegel's first main work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in particular the role of the well-known Master-Servant dialectic. Blunden makes clear that he thinks *Phenomenology* is the wrong place to start for Hegel beginners and shows why, though not without interest, the Master-Slave dialectic has become something of a fetish of 20th Century European thought.

The interpretative framework of *Hegel for Social Movements* also entails re-interpreting the very concept of the Hegelian Concept. Blunden is at pains to demonstrate that Hegelian concepts are fundamentally forms of activity or practice. This opens the door to the wider claim that when Hegel shows us concepts dialectically emerging from one another, coming into contact, falling into contradiction, being opened out and split apart and re-emerging in richer, more complex forms; he can also be taken to be describing the way social movements form, struggle, evolve, devolve, win their struggles through revolutionary action or piecemeal reform, or fade into the background, by being superseded by other movements, through outright failure or by being successfully institutionalised.

With the raw logical mechanics on the table, and their relevance for real world political activity set out, Blunden can then cast new light on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1820), where the philosopher addresses himself more directly to social and political questions.

Blunden takes his readers step-by-step through Hegel's *Encyclopaedic Logic* (1830) and his *Science of Logic* (1816), then through the *Philosophy of Right*, at every point trying to dispel the fog of Hegel's style. He introduces relevant examples and provides common sense explanations, together with short case studies from the history of left-wing political movements, all with a view to bringing Hegel down to earth.

Many of the better-known watchwords of Hegel's system are singled out for specific elaboration. If you have heard but never really seen the point of Hegel's famous quip about Napoleon (famously apostrophised as the "World Spirit on horseback") or failed to grasp his rather less vivid idea that "the Rational is the Real and the Real is the Rational," *Hegel for Social Movements* provides a neat refresher.

The main strengths of Blunden's book lay in its clear-minded exposition, or, to put it another way, in the author's ability to bring just the right amount of detail (what Hegelians would call "concrete particularity") to bear on Hegel's rather ephemeral thought structures.

Another strong point of the book is the author's refusal to gloss over moments in the conceptual journey where Hegel seems sketchy, or where his theories have been invalidated by later scientific or historical developments, or where he is deemed to have been a victim of the ideological prejudices of his time. One of

the more amusing passages in the book comes when Blunden comments on Hegel's blinkered view of family life:

When you read the *Philosophy of Right*, I think, insofar as you can follow Hegel's arcane manner of writing, and tolerate his occasional rants against his contemporaries, everything makes abundant sense. . . until you get to the section on the Family. Suddenly one finds oneself confronted by such an atrocious, paternalistic, misogynist prig that one could be forgiven for tossing the book away and having nothing more to do with Hegel (p. 183).

Blunden is good at explaining the often counter-intuitive or unconventional sense of many of Hegel's basic terms, another potential hurdle for readers approaching the philosopher's work for the first time.

Take, for example, Hegel's slightly unnerving habit of talking about the truth of *concepts*, rather than the truth of propositions or sentences, or his knack of revealing one concept as the "truth" of another concept. Or take Hegel's even more unnerving habit of performing the same manoeuvre at a meta-textual level, for instance in claiming that his own logic is "the truth of" his phenomenology. Blunden comments clearly and incisively on this latter *obiter dictum*:

When Hegel says something is "the truth of" some process, he means: this is what the process turned out to be in the end. In the case [of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*], consciousness develops up to the point of absolute knowing ("absolute" because it is secure knowledge, not liable to fall into contradiction with itself when it passes some limit) where it comes to know itself as a necessary process of development, as the work of Spirit, he would say. (p. 68-69).

Hegel's talk of "the Absolute", which might, to the unschooled reader, have sounded like a vaguely totalitarian exercise in concept-mongering, appears instead as a not uninteresting exploration of the limits of ideas in a non-standard, thought-challenging idiom. In fact, Blunden's book abounds in clear-minded, low-key explanations of this sort.

*Hegel for Social Movements* shares some of the flaws of Hegel's own work, particularly a tendency to grand systematising that makes the reader feel at times that the phenomena of thought and history are being shoe-horned into an overall conceptual scheme, rather than the conceptual architecture genuinely taking shape from out of the thought or history under discussion.

The relevance of Hegel's concepts to the dilemmas and challenges of social activism is at times asserted rather than shown. And crucially, there is no detailed attempt to outline a distinctively Hegelian approach to contemporary problems of social activism.

There is no mention, for instance, of the hyper-mediated world of the Internet and the dilemmas it raises for activists trying to initiate open-minded debate or get out the vote or organise politically effective street protests: a pity, given that “mediation” is one of the strongest and most persuasive of Hegel’s conceptual themes. Likewise, *Hegel for Social Movements* makes no mention of the dialectics of the environment and the economy that are so often posed in shallow terms by the mainstream media, though one can well imagine contemporary climate activists of an Hegelian bent having a much more telling take.

In his exposition of the *Philosophy of Right*, and particularly Hegel’s logic, Blunden’s book is organized into sections which begin with slightly formulaic phrases (“And so we come to the concept of X. . .”). At times, the reader may feel that the connection between the new logical or social theoretic category and the one that has preceded it is more rhetorical than substantial, let alone a matter of logically unfolding concepts out of themselves. Though again, this is a failing that many readers will encounter when reading Hegel’s work itself.

At times, Blunden really does find himself between the rock of ideas and the hard place of Hegel’s style - a perennial problem with much continental philosophy generally. There is a sense that Hegel, and Blunden following him, seems at times to be taking rather simple thoughts or ideas that don’t go more than one or two steps beyond the meanings implicit in our basic conceptual vocabulary, and dressing them up in grandiose philosophical clothes. In some cases, Hegel simply seems to garble common sense for the sake of sounding profound and difficult. Thus it is to some extent with his discussion of the categories of “purpose” and “intent” in the *Philosophy of Right*, glossed by Blunden in his chapter on Hegel’s Theory of Action.

*Hegel for Social Movements* makes a brief attempt to deal with a major methodological objection to Hegel’s dialectical idealism in a short section on logic and history. The problem is essentially that deriving the major concepts of social theory such as class or the legal system or the state through a method of quasi-logical deduction gives the concepts far from satisfactory historical or empirical or practical purchase.

There is no denying that Hegel took a fairly high-handed approach to this issue. He states, for example, in the *Philosophy of Right*:

The historical origin of the judge and his court may have had the form of a patriarch’s gift to his people or of force or of free choice; but this makes no difference to the concept of the thing. . . [Similarly] if we ask what is and has been the historical origin of the state. . . all these questions are no concern of the Idea of the State. (*Philosophy of Right*, 258n, 219n, quoted in Blunden, p. 189 - 90)

Objections to this way of proceeding essentially come from two quarters. First from non-Hegelian Marxists, who tend to argue that Hegel’s concept of both the state and of class were simply too thin for the purpose of either interpreting or

changing the world of bourgeois modernity. The second come from Weberian sociologists, who point out that without due attention to the historical forms that the exercise of state power has taken, without specific historical studies of the way different forms of state power are legitimised, one's concept of the state is likely to forfeit a great deal of explanatory heft. Again, because Blunden's aim is to provide a kind of advanced primer, rather than a definitive answer to Hegel's most sophisticated critics, the depth and interest of these debates can hardly be broached.

The most notable shortcoming of *Hegel for Social Movements*, however, is that Blunden doesn't quite succeed in showing that Hegel, let alone Hegel's logic, is an indispensable manual of progressive politics.

Helping social activists make sense of Hegel is rather different from showing that Hegel can or should be considered an "operational manual" of social activism, whenever activists are dealing with a group of people organised around an idea or a social project of any kind. Likewise, digging up novel lines of Hegel interpretation in terms of the notions of activity and praxis, or, as in the final phases of Blunden's book, in the work of Hegel's latter-day Soviet exponents, though in itself a worthwhile intellectual exercise, hardly seems guaranteed to enhance social activists' ability to change the world. (One notes that, apart from in these later sections of the book, Blunden makes little reference to the voluminous history of Hegel studies: a reasonable omission, given that the book aims to speak to an audience of politically active beginners.)

Does Blunden succeed in bringing clarity to Hegel's work for first time readers or, say, readers who have given Hegel a go in the past and been beaten back by all those teutonic abstract nouns? The short answer is yes.

Does Blunden succeed in showing readers that Hegel is indispensable for anyone trying to understand how politically committed social action works? The short answer here is not quite.

In order to have done so, Blunden would have had to do more than contextualise the inchoate (and at times downright objectionable) features of Hegel's philosophy. But is there any getting around the fact that Hegel is almost infinitely interpretable, and hence very difficult to take in the tangible sense required for finite action in the social/political world?

That said, *Hegel for Social Movements*, in spite of its limitations, is a fundamentally sound and interesting work of Hegel interpretation. Blunden does indeed make a strong case for suggesting that Hegel can be of assistance to activists in understanding, if not exactly solving, the "wicked problems" that are the main object of their struggles.

In a way, Hegel emerges from Blunden's interpretation in a positive light, but not one that is all that different from other great thinkers. Hegel's achievement is not so much the (always ambiguous) one of changing the world, but the equally interesting feat of deepening and widening the very possibilities of change.



And in opening out Hegel's achievements to first-time readers of a progressive political bent, *Hegel for Social Movements* has succeeded in making those possibilities accessible in a world in which sophisticated frameworks for conceptualising politics are just as necessary as ever.

### **About the review author**

Dr. Cameron Shingleton is a member, and former Head, of the Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy. His research interests include the history of philosophy, ethics, aesthetics and the philosophy of technology.

## **Book review: Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today***

**Review author: Patrick Sawyer**

**Cas Mudde, 2019, *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge: Polity (205 pp., £14.99 paperback)**

Thirteen years ago, Cas Mudde wrote in the introduction of his classic text on *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* that the radical right party family was still a “relatively marginal electoral force in the vast majority of European countries” which would often leave his students in disbelief (Mudde 2007, pp. 1-2).

As history has shown, much has changed since then, giving a new sense of urgency to the question of the far right in the 21st century. The objective of *The Far Right Today*, Mudde’s most recent publication, is to take into account these new changes and provide a condensed, easy to read manual summing up decades of research on the far right.

In *The Far Right Today*, Mudde develops his thesis of the “fourth wave” of the far right. The fourth wave pertains to the mainstreaming and normalization of far right politics in the modern day. Events such as the 9/11 attacks, the great recession, and the refugee “crisis” (Mudde disagrees with this framing) helped bring far right politics into the mainstream by way of journalists and politicians who increasingly discussed the issues, adopted the frames, and pursued the policies once exclusive to the radical right.

This contrasts with the previous three waves in Europe, wherein far-right politics had generally been seen as out-of-bounds (with some exceptions) for mainstream parties and politicians and their parties were left to inhabit the political space at the margins. In the fourth wave, the borders between the far right and the mainstream become increasingly difficult to distinguish.

Drawing on his own and others’ research, Mudde lays out several shifts that are currently underway among right wing parties during the fourth wave. First, he argues, it is becoming increasingly acceptable, or even unavoidable, for mainstream parties on both the national and local level to enter into coalitions with radical right parties as many cases from Italian and Austrian electoral history demonstrate.

As far right parties gain in the polls, the feasibility of reacting to them with a policy of demarcation or an official *cordon sanitaire* becomes less tenable, as the incentives for mainstream parties to cooperate with them increase. An example of this can be seen in the recent scandal in Thuringia, Germany when the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) was condemned for collaborating with the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party in order to undermine a coalition government headed by *Die Linke*.

A second, parallel phenomenon is the emergence of successful radical right politicians from within traditionally conservative parties, such as with Trump in the United States, as well as the complete transformation of conservative parties into fully fledged radical right parties, as with *Fidesz* in Hungary and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland.

These events testify not only to the relative success of radical right politics in the contemporary era, but also to the extent to which traditional conservative parties have moved rightward. Under their leadership, the parties of Sebastian Kurz in Austria, Nicolas Sarkozy in France, and Teresa May in the UK all witnessed significant shifts to the right on issues like immigration, integration, and terrorism.

As the parties themselves change, so do their voters. *The Far Right Today* argues that the electoral base of the far right is becoming more diversified and that the bloc of “typical” moderately-educated white male voters once believed to be the linchpin of the far right base in the 1980s, is becoming less of a reality today.

Part of the explanation for this lies in several Western European radical right parties, such as the French *Front National* (FN) and Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), positioning themselves as “worker’s parties” in the midst of the social democratic parties’ move towards “third way” politics, which allowed them to pick up votes from the broader working and middle classes who felt alienated by this ‘betrayal’.

Aside from an overview of emerging trends over the past decade, anti-fascist and anti-racist activists will find that *The Far Right Today* has much to offer in terms of strategies of resistance to far right parties and movements.

While Mudde himself admits that the academic literature has not pointed to a definitive “silver bullet” to stopping the rise of these parties, he posits that a number of strategies have been successful in certain national contexts. Insofar as the state is concerned, a straightforward ban on more extremist parties has shown to be effective in many cases, though Belgium's *Vlaams Blok*, which had been found guilty of violating anti-racist legislation in 2004, simply bypassed this by forming a slightly more moderate party, the *Vlaams Belang*, only several weeks after.

Some success in fighting the far right can be had with a policy of demarcation, wherein all parties decide to ignore the radical right party and forbid their members to cooperate or engage with them, thus refusing them the possibility of presenting themselves as a respectable opposition party. Given national contexts in which radical right parties are still small in size and where all political parties and major media outlets agree to the strategy, the rise of the radical right can be limited to some extent. That being said, the *Vlaams Belang* and the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) are notable exceptions of cases where these parties have only increased in prominence despite a formal *cordon sanitaire*.

While there is a brief mention in *The Far Right Today* of the impact that civil

society actors and anti-racist movements have had on the rise of the far right, much of this focused only on a small sub-set of activities.

Other successful community efforts to resist the far right, unfortunately, were passed over for a focus on the more media-friendly anti-fascist demonstrations which turn violent.

The online activist group Sleeping Giants, for example, has led an incredibly successful campaign targeting Breitbart News' advertising pool, which Steve Bannon himself has admitted had greatly damaged the business model of the "home of the Alt-Right."

Moreover, the work done by anti-racist activists to reveal the extremist views held by members of the far right (the work of the Southern Poverty Law Center comes to mind) and put pressure on their employers and administrators of the social media platforms that host their content are also of importance in the struggle against the far right.

That being said, *The Far Right Today* was never meant to be a *Rules for Radicals*-style manual for anti-racist activism. The large number of anti-racist actions excluded from consideration is of course understandable if it is seen as a way to avoid distracting from the main message the book has to offer.

Another surprising exemption from the chapter on the repertoire of responses to the radical right is any mention of his colleague Chantal Mouffe's (2018) theories concerning the role that left or "inclusive" populism may have in stemming the ascent of the radical right and fostering a democratic reinvigoration. An engagement with these ideas and the way in which Mudde's theories diverge from Mouffe's could have been a rather fruitful addition to the book.

*The Far Right Today* ends with twelve theses on the fourth wave that summarise the mountains of research accrued on this topic over the past two decades. That the rise of the far right is once again a major issue confronting democratic societies today testifies to the importance of this book.

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## **Book review: Alyshia Gálvez, *Eating NAFTA***

**Review author: Dawn Marie Paley**

**Alyshia Gálvez, 2018. *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies and the Destruction of Mexico*. Oakland, California: University of California Press. \$29.95, 269pp.**

Alyshia Gálvez' 2018 book *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies and the Destruction of México* approaches changes in foodways in the country since the infamous North American free trade agreement was signed in 1994. It looks primarily at the transformations in the ways Mexicans eat, but also at the systems of food production, distribution and marketing and how they've changed over the past decades.

In *Eating NAFTA*, Gálvez calls on fieldwork carried out between rural areas in the central Mexican state of Puebla and the state of New York; she reflects on inequality and high-end dining; and she dives into statistics regarding food-related illness among Mexicans in Mexico and among those who have migrated to the United States.

*Eating NAFTA* begins with the story of Aura, a woman from a small town in Puebla who lived for years in New York City. While in the US, Aura slowly stopped eating the "beans, tortillas, eggs, squash, herbs and occasionally meat or chicken" she grew up with, and began to increase her consumption of meat and soft drinks (pp. xi). After returning back to her village with a fair amount of savings, Aura opened a convenience store. But instead of enjoying economic stability later in her life, she found herself battling diabetes and fearing for the health of her son.

Gálvez makes clear that Aura's story is far from exceptional. Throughout the book, Gálvez does an excellent job of shifting the narrative away from blame and individual choices towards the systems that determine the availability and accessibility of healthy food for Mexicans at home and in the United States.

She writes: "Economic transformation has not only entailed development in the broad sense but has also specifically promoted the market penetration and affordability of processed foods while simultaneously stunting the market reach and affordability of basic subsistence, minimally processed, and locally produced foods" (pp. 100).

Diabetes and other diet related illnesses have increased worldwide in past decades. *Eating NAFTA* makes the case that Mexico has been particularly hard hit. This is, of course, of particular interest in the context of the coronavirus

pandemic, as many of the complicating factors for those who become extremely ill and even die from COVID-19 are related to diet.

Gálvez convincingly proposes that we “...consider the massive proliferation of diet-related illness as a kind of structural violence—a result of policy decisions and priorities” (pp. 6). She goes on to make a compelling argument that this structural violence makes it more difficult for people and communities to make demands regarding the economy and the political system.

The transnationalization of Mexican foodways, which has tended to pull the poorest people away from healthy, locally grown food while flooding the market with imported and processed food, undermines not only community health, she writes, but also local autonomy.

The centrality of corn to traditional diets in Mexico provides the consummate example of this transformation, and is a major theme of *Eating NAFTA*.

Gálvez describes how the concentration of the production of tortillas and cornmeal, as well as massive corn imports from the United States, have meant “Older methods for processing and distributing corn are no longer practical or the norm for most people” (pp. 41).

Among other things, this means landrace (*criollo*) corn is increasingly under threat in Mexico, which now imports 40 per cent of its corn from its northern neighbor.

The diet related implications of importing so much corn from the US go beyond the partial destruction of Mexico’s food sovereignty. “...what we see as a result of increased US corn in the Mexican market is increased consumption of processed foods that use corn byproducts (mostly syrups and starches) accompanying a decline in consumption of tortillas” (pp. 51).

According to Gálvez, “The idea that Mexican corn is inherently inefficient is a recurring theme, traceable back to the conquest era –but in the last few decades it is US corn production that provides the counterpoint to Mexico’s, shaping ideas about progress and modernity” (pp. 68).

*Eating NAFTA* points out that the labor time needed to produce a ton of corn in the United States is 1.2 hours, while in Mexico it is 17.8 days. That said, most of the corn grown in the US “cannot be consumed directly, the way Mexican corn can be eaten fresh (*elotes* and *esquites*) and for grain (in the form of masa for tortillas or tamales)” (pp. 68-69). *Eating NAFTA* goes on to examine in some

detail how arguments around productivity and efficiency lead to a kind of faulty logic regarding where corn should be grown and by who.

One of the most original sections in *Eating NAFTA* is about the Pujol paradox, named after Pujol, chef Enrique Olvera's elite México City restaurant.

I will admit to sometimes waking up at night thinking about Pujol's *mole madre*, which I tried when a friend visiting from New York City took me to the fancy Polanco restaurant.

Our meal at Pujol that day cost nearly \$600, well above the monthly minimum wage in Mexico. Gálvez suggests that the elevation of corn-based cuisine "can only attain such a high value globally by being lost to those who customarily ate it" (pp. 30).

Her argument that the erosion of ancestral foodways via land concentration and industrialization are necessary precursors for traditional foods to be prepared by elite chefs is persuasive. These chefs, she writes, "rationalize their stratospheric prices as the cost of their salvage of methods and ingredients that would otherwise be unappreciated and in the process of slipping away" (193).

Another section of the book is devoted to understanding how food technologies and processed food connect to women's reproductive labor (which also tends to be invisibilized through the celebration of world renowned, often male, chefs).

"The production of tortillas for an average household prior to the mechanical grinding of corn required about forty hours of labor per week, including the nixtamalization of corn with mineral lime, grinding of corn, kneading of masa, and hand shaping and cooking of tortillas," writes Gálvez (pp. 153). Thus, the mechanization of tortilla production was "a linchpin for the imagined liberation of middle-class women" in Mexico (pp. 153), although of course, the reality for many women in Mexico today looks quite different.

The overall tenor of *Eating NAFTA* is one of terrible loss; even the subtitle suggests the book is about the "destruction of Mexico." But at times it seems Gálvez glosses over the resilience and ongoing presence of non-corporate food systems that reach back hundreds of years, especially in urban environments like the city of Puebla.

Her descriptions of Puebla as a super modern city bearing a "striking resemblance to Los Angeles, California" where citizens use cards to pay for everything and "the car is king" (pp. 92) are specific to the city's exclusive south (especially Angelopolis and Lomas de Angelopolis), though that is not made clear. Rather, Gálvez seems to suggest that beyond Puebla's colonial old city, wealthy areas make up most of the urban area. This is a far cry from what things look like on the ground in the metropolitan area of over two million.

While indeed Puebla does have gated, upscale suburbs and a massive esplanade featuring exclusive, US style malls, it is also home to huge amounts of social housing and low and middle income highrises and walk-ups, as well as dozens of markets and outdoor *tianguis* that bring together fruit and vegetable vendors,

butchers, fishmongers and food vendors in cash-only settings, sometimes outside the purview of state and local governments.

A much richer and more textured account of popular life and especially the organization of food markets in the city of Puebla is Sandra C. Mendiola Garcia's 2017 book *Street Democracy: Vendors, Violence and Public Space in Late Twentieth Century Mexico*, which is surprisingly absent from Gálvez' bibliography.

There were two moments while reading *Eating NAFTA* that I felt less than sated, desiring that the author provide more explanation and deeper detail. Both came as Gálvez used the same formulation to shyly advance two of her most provocative ideas.

First, she writes, "It is possible that the countries the United States has interfered in the most, with the highest level of migration to the United States and the highest levels of foreign direct investment, will demonstrate the highest rates of diet related illness" (pp. 96).

Later, she goes on to note, "It's possible that being treated as Mexican in the United States is as detrimental to health as any potential genetic predisposition, as time in the US is a predictor for the onset of disease" (pp. 164).

Further development of these hypotheses is crucial, but unfortunately *Eating NAFTA* doesn't pursue either. That said, Gálvez' strong arguments and the data she presents about politics, economics, migration and the transformation of foodways; as well as her explorations into many other aspects of food in Mexico, make the book well worth reading.

"We can see that the aftermath of NAFTA is not just a changed food system, but in fact a revision of the relationship between the state and its people," writes Gálvez. This quote provides a powerful example of *Eating NAFTA's* synthetic, accessible, and critical scholarship, which doubles as a call to action for researchers and activists to consider food and diet as an integral part of Mexican political economy.

## **References:**

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## **About the review author:**

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