

Book Reviews: *Interface* 14(1)

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Books reviewed in this issue:

David Graeber and David Wengrow, 2021, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (750 pp., hardcover, \$35).

Review Author: Daniel Fischer

Darren Byler. *Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City*. Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press. (Paperback, 296 pp. US \$26.95).

Review author: Isaac K. Oommen

Diego Castro and Huáscar Salazar. *América Latina en tiempos revueltos: Claves y luchas renovadas frente al giro conservador*. Montevideo, Cochabamba and Morelos, México, ZUR, Excepción y Libertad bajo palabra. (Paperback, 264 pp.)

Review authors: Armando Bravo and Ricardo Miranda

**Book Review: *The Dawn of Everything:
A New History of Humanity***

Review Author: Dan Fischer

David Graeber and David Wengrow, 2021, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (750 pp., hardcover, \$35).

In *The Dawn of Everything*, the late anthropologist David Graeber and archaeologist David Wengrow reexamine societies of the deep past and revisit unjustly neglected theories of feminist scholars to produce a riveting account of human societies from the Paleolithic to the Enlightenment.

The book's main contentions are that "human societies before the advent of farming were not confined to small, egalitarian bands" and that agriculture didn't "mark an irreversible step towards inequality" (4). The authors remind us that it's only been within the last two percent or so of our existence as *homo sapiens* that we became *stuck* in year-round hierarchy. The implication, of course, is that we can become unstuck. Graeber and Wengrow revel in examples of part-time, seasonal, and temporary leveling of social relations.

However, they infuse the volume with needless pessimism regarding the possibility of a truly egalitarian future. Although Graeber used to defend horizontal organizing as a way of treating each other as responsible adults, this volume conflates egalitarianism with childishness. While Graeber previously emphasized the necessity of human mobility for freedom, he and Wengrow now make this linkage unnecessarily vague.

By not delving deep enough into the past, *The Dawn of Everything* unnecessarily dismisses anthropological understandings of humanity's egalitarian origins, and portrays ancient cities and civilizations as more hierarchical than they may have actually been. Despite their intentions to write a "new history of humanity," the authors disappointingly gloss over humanity's African origins in order to center foragers who lived in Europe well after humanity's dawn.

Graeber used to describe his politics as a logical outcome of hearing his father recount serving in the International Brigades in Anarchist-run Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War:

"[A]lmost anyone who believes that anarchism is a viable political philosophy—that it would actually be possible to have a society without states or classes, based on principles of voluntary association, self-organization, and mutual aid—is likely to feel that wouldn't be a bad idea. If most people have a problem with anarchism (That is, those who actually have a clear idea what anarchism is) it's not because

they don't think it is an appealing vision, but because they have been taught to assume that such a society would not be possible" (Graeber 2007, 6).

The trajectory from believing egalitarian anarchy is possible to believing it's desirable is central to prevailing accounts of humanity's origins. Consider the explanation given by Christopher Boehm, in a study cited by Graeber and Wengrow:

"Once one band, somewhere, invented an egalitarian order, this radical change in social ways of doing things would have become visible to its neighbors [...] One would expect a gradual cultural diffusion to take place, with attractive egalitarian traditions replacing despotic ones locally" (1999, 195).

The Dawn of Everything's bibliography is rife with references to works that theorize Paleolithic egalitarianism by writers including Chris Knight, Sarah Hrdy, and Pierre Clastres. Hrdy notes that "[v]irtually all African peoples who were living by gathering and hunting when first encountered by Europeans stand out for how hard they strive to maintain the egalitarian character of their group" (2009, 204). Furthermore, the archaeological record shows a decreasing size difference between male and female hominids and a decreased sharpness of teeth, suggesting a turn from domination to persuasion as we became human (Shultziner et al 2010).

The latest evidence for a transition toward equality includes early red ochre traces corroborating a "female cosmetics coalitions" hypothesis, in which women collectively used mock menstrual blood to conceal ovulation patterns and therefore thwart male attempts to maintain chimpanzee-like harems and dominance hierarchies. Anthropologist Camilla Power explains that it was women who spearheaded the "revolutionary" transformation to egalitarianism that "made us human" (2019).

One might expect Graeber and Wengrow to welcome the understanding that most of our species's history involved treating each other like equals. Instead, they assert that egalitarian-origins theorists believe in a "childhood of man" (118).

It's not clear why they equate egalitarianism with childhood, since warding off hierarchy requires significant political sophistication. In his earlier work, Graeber described horizontal relations as the antithesis of immaturity. "Insisting on treating everyone like responsible adults may not always guarantee mature behavior, but in my own experience it does prove surprisingly effective," Graeber wrote of New York City's horizontally-structured organizing (2009, 331).

In constructing their argument against an egalitarian Paleolithic, Graeber and Wengrow make two contradictory claims in a single page. They state they'll only focus on the last 40,000 years because "for the most part, we don't have the

slightest idea” what earlier humans were like, adding “[t]here’s only so much you can reconstruct from cranial remains and the occasional piece of knapped flint” (81). From there, they point to different skeleton sizes between communities and make the sweeping assertion that the “presence or absence of social hierarchies [...] must have varied at least as much as physical types and probably far more” (81).

It’s unclear why the authors think physical differences *between* regions, which they describe as resembling a world of “hobbits, giants and elves,” would have affected social structure *within* a given region. Even when size disparities were stark in a given area, the larger individuals’ ability to dominate would have been mitigated by the leveling effect of wooden spears going back at least half a million years (Boehm 1999, 181).

The Dawn of Everything pays special attention to North America’s hierarchical coastal forager societies such as the semi-sedentary Kwakwaka’wakw and Calusa people. Although the authors speculate that vertical social structures were typical throughout human existence, it’s commonly understood that humans were entirely nomadic in the Middle Paleolithic, and the Upper Paleolithic’s unstable climate would have made sedentism a rarity (Shultziner et al. 2010).

In contrast to the Kwakwaka’wakw and Calusa, who launched raids with war canoes (151, 174), the overwhelming majority of Paleolithic foragers seem to have been peaceful (506). A survey of skeletons and cave art at 400 Paleolithic sites across Africa, Asia and Europe found only one site had evidence of warfare and 395 had no signs of violence at all (Haas and Piscitelli 2013).

The Dawn of Everything also brings up certain peoples’ seasonal transitions between egalitarianism and hierarchy, arguing that these fluctuations were likely typical throughout human existence. The authors cite accounts of the Inuit living as equals during winter and dispersing into patriarchal families during summer to follow migrating animals (106-114). Although they describe such variation as “playing” with hierarchy, they fail to consider how their notion of play contrasts with the lived experiences of Inuit women who reported being subjugated for months at a time (Bitton 2022).

The authors’ other examples of seasonal transitions—including Great Plains warriors’ comparatively benign enforcement of buffalo meat sharing and a contested account of Nambikwara transitions in the Amazon—involve farming societies which are of limited relevance to theorizing humanity’s forager origins. The Paleolithic’s most common social fluctuations probably involved alternating men’s and women’s rituals. This alternation can still be observed in African foraging societies which remain “egalitarian all year around” (114-5).¹

¹ Although Graeber and Wengrow cite Chris Knight, the correct attribution should have been to his former student: Morna Finnegan’s “The politics of Eros: ritual dialogue and egalitarianism in three Central African hunter-gatherer societies,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 697-715.

Graeber and Wengrow don't remark on the fact that seasonal hierarchies are related to hunting patterns, nor that their evidence of lavish burials in western Eurasia (87) come from the Upper Paleolithic when, aided by the spread of spear-throwers and bows, humans expanded hunting and largely abandoned scavenging (Knight, 320). Mary Stiner and Steven Kuhn (2009) argue the Upper Paleolithic first occasioned a division of labor by gender, when men became specialized handlers of hunting weaponry. This would help explain humanity's population rise, since it became easier for women to carry and raise a baby when she's not stalking mammoths or warding off hyenas. This period's costly practice of raising hunting dogs suggests another association between increased hunting and incipient hierarchy (Mietje Germonpré et al. 2020). What was likely going on was men's gradual transformation of hunting weapons into weapons of domination, corroborated by the fact that societies mostly reliant on hunting (or animal husbandry) are far more likely to be male-dominated than societies mostly reliant on gathering (Sanday 1981, 170).

In a different context, that of Anatolia's Çayönü Tepesi region, Graeber and Wengrow mention this trend: "hunting as predation, shifting subtly from a mode of subsistence to a way of modelling and enacting dominance over other human beings" (244). As Power (2019) spoke of humanity's "revolutionary" emergence, the rise of patriarchy could be considered a counter-revolutionary corollary, one unfortunately largely overlooked by the authors.

Pointing to the near universality of women's gathering among forager societies, Graeber and Wengrow argue that women should almost certainly be credited with inventing farming (237). The authors clarify that farming developed through a millennia-long process of playful experimentation often involving relaxed flood-retreat techniques and avoiding easy-to-tax cereal crops. Such "play farming," they posit, explains the 3,000 year gap between the domestication of plants and the adoption of full-time agriculture (242-8).

While *The Dawn of Everything* does not characterize this prolonged experimentation as a Neolithic "revolution," I do think it's appropriate to describe women's creation of farming as revolutionary. Several of the book's middle chapters introduce readers to egalitarian cultures throughout Eurasia during Neolithic and ancient times, but the survey is not comprehensive. For example, China's ancient Peiligang culture is omitted. An endnote clarifies that the authors intended in a future volume to discuss Africa's egalitarian cities such as Jenne-Jenno (571; McIntosh 2009).

Signs of egalitarianism in the Neolithic include a rough equality in burial goods, house sizes, and skeletal conditions, as well as an absence of palaces and grand temples. Graeber and Wengrow point to such indications of equality throughout the Southern Levant, Anatolia's Çatalhöyük, and, moving into the Bronze Age, the Indus Valley's cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, and the pre-state Sumerians.

I do not agree with all of the authors' interpretations, least of all their flimsy evidence that Mohenjo-daro's Great Bath was used by a "priestly caste" (317).

Given that there was no concentration of wealth or aristocratic burials in Mohenjo-daro, it seems odd for the authors to postulate the existence of caste, a term that didn't enter the region's written record until 1,000 years later (316-7). Nor am I convinced that Minoan Crete was as hierarchical as they suggest. In fact, the decentralized economy and rapid circulation of luxury goods convinced some scholars that Minoan Crete was "an egalitarian matriarchal society based on consensus" (Mann and Goettner-Abendroth 2019).

Graeber and Wengrow courageously defend the scholarship of Marija Gimbutas, a prominent archaeologist who taught at Harvard and UCLA, and fell out of favor among fellow academics for her writing about the egalitarian and goddess-worshipping culture of Old Europe. To the delight of ecofeminists and matriarchalists everywhere, recent DNA studies have validated core parts of Gimbutas's analysis (216-220).

The Dawn of Everything further supports Gimbutas' assertions by providing evidence of egalitarianism among Old Europe's Cucuteni–Trypillia cities by the Black Sea, where the circular arrangement of houses ensured that no family was at the head and that there was plenty of room in the middle for communal assemblies and celebrations. Although the houses looked roughly the same on the outside, the varied insides suggests the culture strongly valued creativity and innovation (293-5).

The Dawn of Everything posits an analogy between the shift from playful farming to full-time agriculture and the transition from "play" states to real ones (429). But the authors could have gone further and made explicit the material connection between these two processes. Such an explanation would have echoed James Scott's account of the first state, Uruk, forming due to increased aridity around 3500 to 2500 BCE. By making irrigation more laborious and forcing people into more concentrated areas, this climatic change "diminished many of the alternative form[s] of subsistence, such as foraging and hunting" (Scott 2017, 120-121). In other words, people became stuck in these societies when it no longer became feasible to leave and become foragers again.

Fortunately, there are plenty of examples of farmers who managed to reverse hierarchy. Graeber and Wengrow point to the city of Taosi, where commoners razed the city walls around 2000 BCE. They turned the palace into a trash pit, and buried their dead in the elite cemeteries. For two to three hundred years, commoners appear to have enjoyed prosperity in a self-governed city.

But when Graeber and Wengrow call Taosi's transformation "the world's first documented social revolution" (326), they omit, for example, a similar process that apparently occurred at Çayönü around 7200 BCE: mansions and temples burnt down, the temple turned into a municipal dump, the slums replaced with comfortable houses (Brosius 2004). Similar signs in 300 CE show Teotihuacanx in present-day Mexico City desecrating the temple, halting pyramid construction, and shifting resources toward building massive public housing accompanied by egalitarian symbolism in artwork (341-2).

The most dramatic and durable reversals of hierarchy occurred in societies such as the Haudenosaunee confederacy, formed in 1142 CE, and the Wendat confederacy which was established afterwards. Farmers remained relatively mobile, while low population densities made it possible “to shift back to a mode of subsistence more oriented to hunting, fishing and foraging; or simply to relocate entirely” (472).

Iroquoian societies are also important for Graeber and Wengrow’s contention that the “Indigenous critique” of Europe contributed to the Enlightenment. *The Dawn of Everything* notes how French and English settlers in North America marveled at the freedom of Indigenous societies and on many occasions even sought to join them, it was less common for natives to choose assimilation among settlers (19).

From the perspective of Wendat spokesperson Kandiaronk, who apparently visited France, it was Europeans who seemed to live in a Hobbesian condition of permanent conflict. Kandiaronk reportedly expressed incredulity at Christianity’s belief in damnation: “I find it hard to see how you could be much more miserable than you already are. What kind of human, what species of creature, must Europeans be, that they have to be forced to do good, and only refrain from evil because of fear of punishment?” (53). Sharply criticizing France’s social hierarchies, he defended Wendat’s “leveling equality” which proved conducive to “the qualities that we Wendat believe ought to define humanity – wisdom, reason, equity” (56).

Kandiaronk’s ideas, as recorded and embellished by Baron de Lahontan, influenced the French Enlightenment’s notion of social equality. Rousseau almost certainly read Lahontan’s writings, and he definitely cited Lebeau’s summary of them (536). When discussing Kandiaronk, Graeber and Wengrow draw on the scholarship of Seneca historian Barbara Alice Mann (aside from being a skilled scholar, Mann is an intellectual renegade who has collaborated with Ward Churchill and Heide Göttner-Abendroth).

Graeber and Wengrow seem unaware that by highlighting the influence of Indigenous thinkers on the Enlightenment, they are adding to an existing discourse of “Enlightenment from below.” Historians of Latin America—such as Bianca Premo, S. Elizabeth Penry, and Nick Nesbitt—emphasize how eighteenth-century subjects in Spanish America and Haitian revolutionaries advocated for natural rights, secularization, free elections, and equality.² This is an exciting field, potentially adding everyday expressions of the desire for decolonization, equality, and abolition of slavery to the radical Enlightenment canon.

Graeber and Wengrow understate the influence of European commoners, asserting that social equality “did not exist as a concept” among the continent’s “medieval thinkers” (32). I wonder how Graeber and Wengrow would interpret

² See Bianca Premo’s *The Enlightenment on Trial*, S. Elizabeth Penry’s *The People are King*, Nick Nesbitt’s *Universal Emancipation*.

fourteenth-century chronicler Jean Froissart's account of John Ball's sermon: "And if we are all descended from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve, how can the lords say or prove that they are more lords than we are—save that they make us dig and till the ground so that they can squander what we produce" (Cohn 1970, 199). I'm also curious what they'd make of Cosmas of Prague's portrayal of egalitarian Taborites: "Nor did anyone know how to say 'Mine' [...] there existed neither thief nor robber nor poor man" (Cohn 1970, 214).

Moreover, unless an elitist definition of "thinker" is used, medieval thought surely includes common Europeans articulating "folk egalitarianism" through carnivals, festivals and rebellions (34). Since Graeber repeatedly cited and recommended Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, including in *Dawn of Everything*, he was surely familiar with her assessment that from the thirteenth century onward, "vast communalistic social movements and rebellions against feudalism had offered the promise of a new egalitarian society built on social equality and cooperation" (Federici 2004, 61). From the thirteenth century onward these movements articulating radical alternatives to religious and economic hierarchy, were disproportionately led by women, not unlike previous transformations of human society.

World-transforming events, each advancing egalitarian ideals and initiated at least equally if not disproportionately by women, were what made us human, farmers, and Enlightened. Each revolution was followed by a counter-revolution: the Paleolithic counter-revolution transformed hunting weapons into weapons of domination, the Neolithic counter-revolution turned agricultural surpluses into the tools of statecraft, and the radical Enlightenment was largely superseded by a conservative tendency that my friend Laura Schleifer calls the "En-white-man-ment."

Disappointingly, *The Dawn of Everything* has its own conservative tendencies. For instance, there's the bizarre claim that private property is as old as "humanity itself" (163). There's also a strange comparison of history's egalitarian cities to Ursula Le Guin's highly dystopian city of Omelas (290). Given the horror revealed at the end of Le Guin's story, I can only read this comparison as a suggestion that Graeber watered down his anarchist aspirations in his final years. Had Graeber and Wengrow wished to make their point about imperfections persisting in egalitarian societies, they could have done so without expressing extreme pessimism about the possibility of equality, by citing Le Guin's nuanced anarchistic utopias of Anarres and the Kesh, or the matriarchal Athshe.³

It's odd that Graeber and Wengrow position "How did we get stuck?" as the "real question" (112) but go on to provide only a highly impressionistic answer. They argue the origins of domination involved the "connection—or better perhaps, confusion—between care and domination" (514). As evidence of the transformation from care into control, they point to Sumerian temples offering

³ See Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, *Always Coming Home*, and *The Word for World is Forest*.

a home to orphans and widows while demanding their subservience and labor (308). Though their hypothesis is intriguing, the authors might have offered a simpler answer involving mobility.

The anthropology of egalitarian foragers emphasizes that becoming and remaining unstuck requires, perhaps above all else, the ability to leave a hierarchical relationship.⁴ Leaving—even just threatening to leave—is the greatest protection people have against would-be rulers. The fact that sizable segments of the population could pack up and become foragers again ensured the first millennia of farmers remained stateless. It also explains how some farmers in pre-colonial North America, who in many regions had a low population density and higher mobility, were able to get unstuck from hierarchical relations.

In his earlier writings, Graeber often emphasized the importance of mobility for combating hierarchy. Describing border control as part of capitalism's long sequence of attacks on worker mobility, he predicted in 2004 that "if the system ever really came close to its own fantasy version of itself, in which workers were free to hire on and quit their work wherever and whenever they wanted, the entire system would collapse" (Graeber 2004, 61). Graeber employed similar logic to critique so-called "anarcho-capitalism." He imagined an island with an anarcho-capitalist society on one side and an egalitarian society on the other: "What possible reason would those slated to be the night watchmen, nurses, and bauxite miners on the anarcho-capitalist side of the island have to stay there? The capitalists would be bereft of their labor force in a matter of weeks" (Graeber 2013, 297).

In *The Dawn of Everything*, Graeber and Wengrow's pessimism tarnishes their monumental effort to show that other worlds are (and were) possible. Dismissing hopeful implications of accounts of foragers' egalitarianism they lament, "At best, we could perhaps imagine (with the invention of Star Trek replicators or other immediate-gratification devices) that it might be possible, at some point in the distant future, to create something like a society of equals once more" (129).

We don't need to wait for Star Trek technology to replicate the mobility and abundance of immediate-return societies. The technology for decentralized production of needs has been available for some time. As Graeber famously pointed out, today's machines are so obscenely productive that more than half of our workweeks are devoted to "bullshit" work (2018).

Getting unstuck involves the creation of alternatives for those who wish to leave an exploitative relationship, be it with a boss, a landlord, a husband, or whomever else. Grassroots institutions—from MakerSpaces and community gardens to communal living arrangements and worker cooperatives, through such projects as the Global Ecovillage Network, and Right to the City Alliance—

⁴ James Woodburn, "Egalitarian Societies," *Man* 17, no. 3 (1982): 435. Boehm, *Hierarchy*, 74. Power, "Gender Egalitarianism."

provide paths for people seeking to live, as Paleolithic humans did for millennia, outside exploitative relations of (re)production.⁵

As in the past, women and egalitarians are at the forefront of social transformation. A longtime Wobbly, Graeber would have recognized the future being built in the old world's shell.⁶

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⁵ For an overview of such projects in theory and practice, see Kevin Carson, *Exodus: General Idea of the Revolution in the XXI Century* (Tulsa: Center for a Stateless Society, 2021).

⁶ In their constitution's preamble, the Industrial Workers of the World, “the Wobblies,” famously declared themselves to be “forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

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Book Review: *Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City*

Review author: Isaac K. Oommen

***Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City* by Darren Byler, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press. (Paperback, 296 pp. US \$26.95).**

In Vancouver's Joyce-Collingwood area is an Uyghur eatery—Beijiang Restaurant—that sports a signboard in English, Chinese and Arabic. Walking in, you get a waft of cumin that punctuates particularly the meat dishes, a warm and wholesome flavor that sets the tone of Uyghur cuisine and hospitality. Other Uyghur restaurants around the Vancouver area, found in similarly East Asian areas such as Richmond and Metrotown, provide muted (they usually just advertise themselves as Chinese Halal restaurants) but warm welcomes.

In 2017, when I told my colleague from mainland China that I was going to Beijiang Restaurant (a visit that led to many more), I mentioned that it featured Uyghur cuisine. Since he didn't know who Uyghurs were, I mentioned the protests I had seen regarding their status as a persecuted minority in China. He seemed quite confused until I told him about the province from which they came – Xinjiang. He texted on WeChat for a few minutes before looking up at me.

“Ah, these people are not a minority,” he said. “They are criminals.”

Darren Byler's *Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City* is a deep examination of this dual perspective – the state narrative that casts Uyghur people as a suspicious population that can produce terrorists; and that of Uyghur individuals caught in a state mechanism bent on controlling every aspect of their existence, from language to movement.

Chinese state rhetoric around its actions toward the Uyghur population is mirrored across the world, from Kenya to Israel-Palestine to India: denial.

Byler notes the distinctiveness of Chinese state philosophy. “Because China was partially colonized in the past, it is impossible for China to colonize others in the future. Instead, in a manner similar to Japanese justifications for their colonization of parts of China and Taiwan, the colonization of Uyghurs is presented as an act of rescue,” he writes (10). This rhetoric has been parroted across social media platforms by supporters of China who appear unable to discern the difference between socialism and authoritarianism.

What is happening in Xinjiang is clearly colonization. As decried in protests around the world, and as discussed by Byler, Muslims in Xinjiang (who are mostly Uyghur but of other ethnicities as well) are subject to ethnocide that seeks to not wipe out the population but rather control and manipulate it to

Beijing's specifications (11). These controls include forced labour (14), re-education camps (32) and police roundups (128).

The point of these exercises in control are to terrorize the Uyghur population into coercion within the state project of colonization. Just as in Tibet, China is bringing in Han ethnic majority settlers to change the landscape of Xinjiang, while controlling the Indigenous population, including attempts to control religion and language.

Mandarin is enforced as the language one must learn to move ahead and Uyghur language and Islamic expression is monitored on social media such as WeChat, while halal food is disrespected. Byler recounts how he saw six-foot tall Chinese characters advertising pork in a major Uyghur town that was “an anti-Islamic political and economic statement; it told everyone in the neighbourhood that Han migrant settlers had arrived and that they would not respect the Native knowledge and values of the Muslims who called this space their homeland” (61).

As much as terror makes up one part of the equation, it goes hand-in-hand with capitalism (a combination that would shock and cause denial amongst the aforementioned supporters of China). The state dispossess and controls Uyghurs to direct them into various factories set up by entrepreneurs and Han businesspeople in Xinjiang.

“Uyghurs were seen as not yet disciplined enough, and thus not deserving to even be included in the wage labour market where their work could be exploited for its surplus value. Instead, the majority of them were only worth using in devalued forms of social reproduction work such as food service and waste management,” notes Byler (14). Within this capitalist frame, the state ushers an entire population towards work in factories and elsewhere, all of which are private companies. Byler explain that “terror capitalism works explicitly to reeducate the population as industrial workers and implement a forced labour regime” (33).

Alongside government-business partnerships, data serves as another ongoing link between the state and private enterprise. The Chinese state has given large contracts to firms that are able to gather and analyze vast amounts of data that are taken from social media and physical checkpoints, all in an effort to control Uyghur culture and movement.

Byler summarizes how “the digital enclosure worked to convert Turkic Muslim populations into parsed data streams, making them available for assessment, subtraction and further dependency” (54). *Terror Capitalism* notes state investment into this sort of technology is so vast and deep that “the Chinese technology industry is shaped via state capital used in surveillance projects” (43).

Terror Capitalism is worth the read just to fully understand the depth of the linkages between state and private enterprise in Xinjiang.

In the face of this surveillance, control and incarceration, Byler finds two modes in which his interviewees are fighting back: via friendship (among Uyghurs) and solidarity (by Han allies).

Byler looks at friendship between Uyghur men (who are the ones often migrating to large cities for work) who are subject to surveillance and labour control, and sees how strong platonic bonds helped them cope. He notes that “friendship was something that prevented them from panicking. It helped them to remember to keep breathing. Without it, life in the city seemed impossible” (156).

In terms of solidarity, Byler introduces the idea of “minor politics” (168) that is being practiced by Han allies in the form of witnessing the experiences of Uyghurs in the face of state repression – validating and voicing what is happening to them in the face of state denial about ethnocide.

Terror Capital is a book that looks deeply at the level of terror unleashed on a minority group by the state and private enterprise, all for control and capital gain. By representing the voices and experiences of Uyghur people, it not only helps combat state narrative but also shows the impact of Chinese state attempts to control Uyghur populations and dissent outside of the mainland.

About the review author

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Book Review: Diego Castro & Huáscar Salazar, América Latina en tiempos revueltos: Claves y luchas renovadas frente al giro conservador

Review authors: Armando Bravo and Ricardo Miranda

Diego Castro and Huáscar Salazar. América Latina en tiempos revueltos: Claves y luchas renovadas frente al giro conservador. Montevideo, Cochabamba and Morelos, México, ZUR, Excepción y Libertad bajo palabra. (Paperback, 264 pp.)

Uno de los movimientos más importantes de los procesos políticos latinoamericanos de las últimas décadas ha sido la emergencia, auge y agotamiento de diversas propuestas políticas que conforman una izquierda progresista que se opone, en su discurso, a las formas de depredación neoliberal, pero que en la práctica reproducen y, en varios sentidos, amplían, las lógicas extractivistas y excluyentes del modelo del que pretenden distanciarse.

América Latina en tiempos revueltos: Claves y luchas renovadas frente al giro conservador es un libro con un abordaje crítico desde la sociología, con aportes de analistas de Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador y México que será de interés para los lectores de estudios feministas, antropológicos, ciencia política, derecho, economía, sociología, entre otros.

El libro nos ofrece interesantes reflexiones sobre lo que se ha dado en llamar la “crisis de los progresismos” latinoamericanos, a pesar de los más recientes triunfos electorales de ciertas izquierdas en la región. Asimismo, aborda la “recomposición de las derechas” en la región, dentro del marco del neoliberalismo latinoamericano. En este sentido, nos ofrece un campo fértil para profundizar líneas de investigación en ciencias sociales y humanidades sobre el fracaso o extravío de los mencionados progresismos a partir de ciertos conceptos clave tales como la *gestión de política estadocéntrica*, el *patriarcalismo de izquierda*, la *subjetividad desarrollista*, entre otros,, que nos permiten entrever cómo, a pesar de las diferencias aparentes, la izquierda electoral latinoamericana comparte un mismo inconsciente político con las derechas.

Así pues, el libro abre la interrogante sobre las incompletudes que llevan a cierta imaginación de izquierda a este impasse, así como sobre las vías y herramientas para hacer frente a esta crisis con miras a construir alternativas que nos permitan poner, en primer lugar, a la reproducción de la vida, frente a la depredación capitalista. América Latina es quizá la región del mundo donde los efectos del neoliberalismo capitalista han sido los más profundos y desastrosos.

No sorprende que Latinoamérica sea, a la vez, la región que más gobiernos progresistas ha generado y que buscaron el fin del neoliberalismo: Hugo Chávez en Venezuela, Evo Morales en Bolivia, José Mujica en Uruguay, Luiz Inácio Lula

da Silva en Brasil, son los nombres más recordados de la llamada primera ola de gobiernos progresistas de la región, a los cuales, en los tiempos actuales, se suman Andrés Manuel López Obrador en México, Luis Arce en Bolivia, Gabriel Boric en Chile y Gustavo Petro en Colombia, en lo que es considerada la segunda ola de este tipo de gobiernos.

La clave más general para adentrarse a *América Latina en tiempos revueltos*, editado por Diego Castro y Huáscar Salazar, es comprender lo que, siguiendo el artículo de Horacio Machado, podemos llamar el extravío de cierta izquierda (70). Para Machado, antes que hablar de fracaso, debemos hablar de extravío debido a que los progresismos latinoamericanos terminaron promoviendo, más bien, un “neoliberalismo progresista”, en donde se confunde *crecimiento* con *emancipación* con lo que se reactivó *fantasía colonial desarrollista* –la creencia de que la eliminación de la pobreza, la superación de la dependencia y la construcción de sociedades más igualitarias y democráticas pasa por la redistribución estatista de la renta primario-exportadora– y, en consecuencia, se profundizó el extractivismo neoliberal (71-72). En este sentido, podemos afirmar que los gobiernos progresistas latinoamericanos, que se presentaron a sí mismos como antineoliberales, han dejado estructuralmente intocado el modelo neoliberal, así como sus dinámicas de extractivismo y despojo, las cuales siguen dominando en América Latina y en todo el mundo.

Ninguno de estos gobiernos ha sido capaz de construir una salida al modelo neoliberal y, antes bien, han confirmado la crisis del neoliberalismo como modelo económico, político y social e, igualmente, han dejado al descubierto la crisis del propio progresismo lo que, en última instancia, refleja, como señalan María Noel Sosa, Mariana Menéndez y Diego Castro en su aportación a *América Latina en tiempos revueltos*. Los autores subrayan que la crisis de la izquierda misma pues “la crisis del progresismo es también la de la izquierda toda” (20), por lo que se vuelve urgente deconstruir a la izquierda misma. Sus prácticas, discursos y presupuestos hegemónicos, pareciera, están agotados.

Ante este agotamiento de la izquierda hegemónica, la derecha no ha perdido el tiempo y rápidamente se ha reposicionado como una opción atractiva para ciertos sectores de los pueblos de Nuestra América, reciclando sus viejos discursos de sexismo, xenofobia, racismo, clasismo y elitismo, en una nueva cruzada a favor de los “tiempos idílicos” y en contra de la “pérdida de valores” por culpa del “marxismo cultural” de los tiempos actuales.

Las condiciones materiales, que sirven de apoyo a los discursos populistas del neoconservadurismo, son las consecuencias que nos ha heredado el neoliberalismo: mayor desigualdad, concentración de la riqueza, desempleo, trabajos mal remunerados, pérdida de prácticamente todo sistema de seguridad social, falta de acceso a educación y servicios básicos, sobreexplotación del trabajo de mujeres y niños.

El nuevo impulso del movimiento feminista contra la debacle neoliberal y patriarcal ha sido uno de los factores fundamentales que han mostrado el agotamiento de la izquierda hegemónica. El aporte principal de *América Latina*

en tiempos revueltos en torno al feminismo antineoliberal es que éste nos propone abandonar, de una vez por todas, la creencia de que la izquierda, por el simple hecho de ser izquierda, es aliada del feminismo. Antes bien, existe un “patriarcalismo de izquierda” que, a pesar de declararse en contra del estatus quo, no hace sino negar la vida a través de la violencia. Así, el feminismo ha traído al frente del debate lo que, siguiendo a Nancy Fraser, podemos llamar *condiciones primordiales de posibilidad* de las relaciones de producción capitalistas (2020: 20). Esto es, lo que está “detrás” de las condiciones de producción sin lo cual éstas no serían posibles.

De esta forma, en su capítulo, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar nota que “Feminismo es Revolución”, y hace énfasis en los efectos del movimiento feminista al interior del “patriarcalismo de izquierda” (39). No es posible lucha guerrillera alguna si, previamente, no se han dado ciertas tareas de cuidado, reproductivas y afectivas.

Las luchas feministas nos recuerdan que hace falta deconstruir de la izquierda sus modelos e imágenes patriarcales. Es increíble cómo la izquierda hegemónica sigue sin comprender en absoluto las luchas feministas, un botón de muestra es Andrés Manuel López Obrador, el presidente de México quien señaló, en una de sus conferencias matutinas, desconocer a qué se refieren las feministas con la consigna de “romper el pacto”:

“Ahora con la simulación del feminismo empiezo a escuchar ‘rompe el pacto, rompe el pacto’, les digo, sinceramente, me enteré de lo que era eso hace 5 días porque mi esposa me dijo; ‘oye, ¿qué es eso de rompe el pacto?’ y ya me dijo ‘rompe el pacto patriarcal, deja de estar apoyando a los hombres’ [...] ¿Saben qué sucede? Son expresiones exportadas, importadas, copias. ¿Qué tenemos nosotros que ver con eso si nosotros somos respetuosos de las mujeres, de todos los seres humanos?”.

Esta izquierda parece pensar la lucha feminista en la forma de “guerra de sexos”, muestra de su carácter aún patriarcal, por ello es necesario insistir, nos recuerda Gutiérrez, en que “esto no es una guerra de sexos”, siendo necesario, a la vez, “reconocer que los mandatos patriarcales de control del tiempo y trabajo, de silenciamiento del agravio y la agresión hacia las mujeres son mayoritariamente ejercidos por seres humanos que habitan cuerpos de varón” (45).

Si la izquierda sigue atrapada en esa forma de ver las luchas feministas, no sorprende que la derecha, en alianza con la iglesia, emprenda una nueva embestida familista y patriarcal en nuestra región que busca demonizar lo que es una de las nuevas expresiones reaccionarias en nuestra región: la ideología de género (46).

El texto de Cristina Vega, Lorena Castellanos y Joseph Salazar muestran cómo la retórica de la ideología de género ha logrado avanzar su agenda en el Ecuador a partir de “una alianza (antes impensable) entre evangélicos y católicos movilizados contra los desórdenes de género” (110), alianza que no sólo ha pasado a la acción en la calle sino también a diversos frentes político-institucionales con lo que el activismo religioso fundamentalista ecuatoriano, a través de la judicialización de sus demandas, “ha convertido a las cortes y a los juzgados en los principales escenarios de batalla” (135).

Igualmente, este movimiento reaccionario en América Latina ha avanzado en el poder legislativo, por ejemplo, la destitución de la presidenta Dilma Rousseff en Brasil se dio “con una mayoría de votos proclamados públicamente ‘en nombre de Dios’ o ‘Jesús’ y por el ‘bien de la familia’ (Segato, 2020:26). En suma, asistimos a la aparición y consolidación de un activismo político religioso, fundamentalista y reaccionario basado en una “guerra espiritual” que cuestiona, cada vez con mayor fuerza, la separación entre la esfera estatal y la religiosa.

Otra de las claves de inteligibilidad y lucha que nos ha heredado el feminismo es comprender que “uno de los nudos más profundos del orden patriarcal” es “el que construye para sí el poder de excluir, pues sobre ese poder se ha levantado siempre la prerrogativa de ungir y jerarquizar otras diferencias para imponer su legitimación” (48).

Es aquí donde encontramos una conexión entre el Estado y el patriarcado dejada intacta por los progresismos latinoamericanos, el Estado procede, en tanto que patriarcal, precisamente de esa manera excluyente. Los progresismos latinoamericanos han caído de lleno en el estadocentrismo, con lo que terminan por reproducir la exclusión entre los movimientos sociales o lucha social y el Estado o la lucha político-institucional. Desde la perspectiva estadocéntrica, las luchas sociales sólo cumplen una función de desgaste y deben estar subordinadas a la lucha por el poder político-institucional como recuerdan Sosa, Menéndez y Castro (29).

Si bien las autoras y autores del libro no son explícitos en este aspecto, a partir de sus reflexiones podemos ver que sus puntos de vista presuponen que los gobiernos progresistas latinoamericanos, a pesar de sus pretensiones, no han hecho sino reproducir la separación radical entre gobernantes y gobernados típica del liberalismo y neoliberalismo.

Todo sucede como si una vez “tomado” el Estado, se acaba la historia, y la lucha social y los movimientos populares, feministas, estudiantiles, no tuvieran más razón de ser. Es más, cuando estos movimientos protestan contra los progresismos estatales son acallados por éstos, en lugar de tratar de dialogar con ellos, con una de las consignas favoritas de la vieja izquierda: “le están haciendo el juego a la derecha”.

En este sentido Gaya Makaran nos habla de cómo los gobernantes de los progresismos siguen atrapados en una relación paternalista con sus bases con lo que se refuerza el culto a la personalidad del líder y la representación monopólica de la nación de parte del partido en el poder (223). Así, como nos

recuerda Luis Tapia, en periodos breves de tiempo los integrantes de los partidos progresistas gobernantes pasan a ser una nueva burocracia (238), aceptando por completo todos los privilegios inherentes a dicha posición de poder.

De esta forma, el Estado se convierte en un aparato de captura que aspira a atrapar las líneas de deseo y resistencia que recorren el espacio social, pretende desarticular el disenso mediante la inclusión de ciertas consignas populares en el discurso oficial pero, en la práctica, el límite de sus concesiones está en aquello que los grupos conservadores de la sociedad están dispuestos a aceptar como concesión transicional de la reconfiguración del neoliberalismo. Por ello, siguiendo a Machado, habría que radicalizar nuestra noción de democracia en el sentido de que un orden social no es democrático sólo por el hecho de seguir cierta forma institucional-procedimental de elección y regulación de gobernantes sino, más bien, un orden social será más o menos democrático en la medida en que permita la reproducción social de la vida o no (96).

En efecto, la izquierda de los gobiernos progresistas es una vieja izquierda, sus presupuestos ontológicos, “antropocéntricos, productivistas, cientificistas y tecnocráticos, estadocéntricos” (72) pueden ser firmados sin problema alguno por cualquier neoliberal, pero a las aparentes diferencias que puedan decir unos y otros que existan entre sus planteamientos. Estos presupuestos son de larga data y pueden ser rastreados hasta la revolución bolchevique (Del Barco, 1980) o el propio Marx. El efecto más devastador de estos presupuestos que forman parte integral de la práctica de los gobiernos progresistas es “la profundización y la ampliación del extractivismo en América Latina” (72).

Estos presupuestos productivistas, tecnocráticos y cientificistas de la vieja izquierda quedaron de manifiesto, quizá como en ningún otro lado, en el caso boliviano como demuestra Huáscar Salazar. El gobierno del MAS ha cumplido a cabalidad una función desorganizadora de las luchas no estadocéntricas con lo que es posible “dar cuenta no solo del agotamiento del progresismo como un modelo de gobierno con un fin determinado, sino, principalmente, entender la articulación y continuidades que existen entre el momento progresista y el momento conservador, en los cuales [...] se hacen cosas muy parecidas” (149-150).

Desde el análisis presentado por Salazar podemos entender que el Estado boliviano, con el MAS, ha servido como un dispositivo de disciplinamiento de la lucha popular para debilitarla y reencauzarla dentro del terreno de la política estatal a la vez que ha adoptado el papel de mediador para las clases dominantes con el resultado final del afianzamiento del modelo de extractivismo primario exportador. De tal suerte, el caso boliviano nos muestra, con toda claridad, una de las características estructurales de los progresismos latinoamericanos pues “se modifica la relación Estado-sociedad de una manera tal en la que se instala una inercia política que impulsa la ampliación de un capitalismo depredador” (150) con lo que se crean las condiciones para que el aparato estatal “requiera cada vez menos quedar encadenado a una forma específica de gobierno -de izquierda o de derecha-, lo que importa es que la inercia se sostenga” (150).

Algo similar al caso boliviano parece estar sucediendo en México pues, más allá de toda la retórica antineoliberal del primer gobierno de izquierda en más de 80 años, no existe en el discurso del oficialismo, como bien apuntan Mina Lorena Navarro y Lucia Linsalata, “una problematización de corte estructural, ni mucho menos una orientación rupturista con el modelo económico capitalista y, en particular, con el patrón extractivista primario exportador” (170). En particular, para estas autoras, los megaproyectos de la autodenominada cuarta transformación deben entenderse dentro de la “actual ofensiva extractivista” en América Latina que tiene un pasado largo en tanto que, como modalidad de la acumulación capitalista, se remonta hasta la conquista y el saqueo de nuestros pueblos (171). Y ello es así en tanto que el discurso que acompaña a tales proyecto cae también, como mencionamos antes, en la confusión entre crecimiento y emancipación pues no sólo parten de una narrativa, típica del desarrollismo, que busca convencer de los beneficios y bondades de aquellos sino, además, comparte la premisa desarrollista de que los procesos modernizadores capitalistas generan abundancia (190).

Desde este abordaje, nosotros agregaríamos que los megaproyectos de López Obrador están destinados a someter a un mayor control estatal nuevos territorios alcanzar un nuevo pacto regional de estabilidad con el capital, ello debido, precisamente, a que se ve a estos territorios periféricos, desde la lógica del desarrollismo extractivista, como atrasados o poco productivos. La imposición de los megaproyectos de la cuarta transformación, y del horizonte de sentido desarrollista que implican, se ha dado con una total violencia contra los procesos y formas de autonomía que resisten el embate del despojo neoliberal, así, incluso desde un punto de vista jurídico estatalista, podemos sostener que se ha violado sistemáticamente el derecho a la consulta de los pueblos y comunidades indígenas, y se ha cerrado la posibilidad de cualquier mecanismo en que la perspectiva de estos actores pueda ser tomada en cuenta en la construcción de la realidad social.

En el mismo sentido, el partido oficialista, MORENA, y el mismo presidente, no han creado nuevos mecanismos para apoyar y ampliar el poder popular y no estadocéntrico sino, antes bien, han reproducido una y otra vez las viejas maneras de hacer política del viejo partido de Estado, el PRI, con lo que terminan por invertir el principio ético zapatista de “mandar obedeciendo” al desprestigiar y hostigar cualquier lucha social que no se subordine a los objetivos políticos estatales. Ante estos embates de los progresismos estatales, es siempre necesario insistir en las formas de acción política colectiva articulada por sectores populares y de movimientos comunitarios e indígenas que son las que crearon las condiciones de posibilidad de los propios progresismos (229).

El pensar una nueva izquierda, más allá de las contradicciones inherentes al modelo de izquierda progresista estatocentrista, requiere recuperar “la tradición antiestatal tanto como horizonte de deseo, pero sobre todo como una estrategia política de aquí y ahora” como escribe Gaya Marakram (ibídem: 226-227). Lo anterior implica pensar a la política desde abajo asumiendo un antiestatalismo activo que se articule a través de procesos de “confrontación-negociación,

rechazo-uso alternativo, resistencia-ofensiva, autonomía-interpelación; tácticas tan conocidas y practicadas por los pueblos indígenas” (226-227).

En síntesis, *América Latina en tiempos revueltos* apunta a la deconstrucción de los mitos desarrollistas, patriarcales, republicanos y nacionalistas que han cooptado el discurso de las izquierdas latinoamericanas, y se han configurado como una nueva máscara de la producción de las nuevas formas de dominación capitalista, a la vez que se precisa la necesidad de inventar nuevas alternativas de organización social que se pongan del lado de la reproducción y la procuración de la vida.

Los artículos que componen el libro se centran en los mecanismos mediante los cuales la política estadocéntrica, tanto de izquierda como de derecha, opera como un aparato de captura. Pretende totalizar la imaginación política, pero no proporciona elementos suficientes para la configuración mínima de nuevas utópicas y para la construcción de un inconsciente revolucionario que trastoque las lógicas mediante las que el capitalismo mundial actual se ha apropiado de la subjetivación y el deseo como instancias reproductoras del poder y de la monolítica visión del mundo y la vida que sostiene la dinámica existente de la lucha política, en lo que parece hasta el momento un callejón sin salida.

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