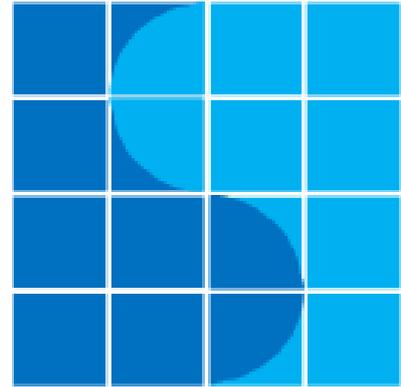


# Trajectories

Newsletter of the ASA  
Comparative and Historical Sociology Section  
Vol 33 No 1 · Winter-Spring 2022



## Chair's Message

Nitsan Chorev

**Brown University**

In 2016, under the leadership of then-chair Monica Prasad, comparative and historical sociologists thoughtfully discussed whether the sociology they do could save the world – and, relatedly, whether saving the world could save comparative and historical sociology (Prasad 2016). Starting in 2020, members even more explicitly discussed what then-chair Anthony Chen called “the perils and opportunities that face our subfield intellectually” (Chen 2020). In an informal meeting for comparative and historical sociologists organized during the Social Science History Association annual conference by Julia Adams and Ann Orloff

that year, Robert Braun reports that “two questions returned repeatedly.” One was, “What are the unique strengths at the core of our subfield?” The other was, “how will a further development of these strengths enable us to improve our position in the discipline and academy?” (Braun 2020). More recently, however, CHS members have recognized that to save comparative and historical sociology – whether such saving is measured by impact on the world, impact on the discipline, or otherwise – we first need to self-reflectively appraise and change comparative and historical sociology from within.

## CONTENTS

- [Page 4](#) **In Memory of Richard Lachmann**  
*A.K.M. Skarpelis, Rebecca Jean Emigh, Tim Gill*
- [Page 9](#) **Two Articles on Russia's Invasion of Ukraine**  
*by Andrew Buck & Jeffrey Hass, and by Alya Guseva*
- [Page 16](#) **Solving Empire**  
*by Monica Prasad, Julian Go, Daniel Immerwahr, Katrina Quisumbing King, Yannick Coenders, Pepe Roswally, and Luna Vincent*
- [Page 34](#) **Studies in Historical Sociology Book Series: Interview with the Editors Stephanie Mudge and Anthony Chen**  
*by Simeon J. Newman*
- [Page 39](#) **2021 CHS Section Award Winners**

## SECTION OFFICERS (2021-22)

### **CHAIR**

Nitsan Chorev, *Brown University*

### **CHAIR-ELECT**

Sarah Quinn, *University of Washington*

### **PAST CHAIR**

Mabel Berezin, *University of Washington*

### **SECRETARY-TREASURER**

Didem Türkoğlu, *NYU Abu Dhabi/Kadir Has University*

### COUNCIL

Robert Braun, *UC Berkeley*

Karida L. Brown, *UCLA*

Marco Garrido, *University of Chicago*

Aliza Luft, *UCLA*

A.K.M. Skarpelis, *Berlin Social Science Center (WZB)*

Adam Slez, *University of Virginia*

### STUDENT REP.

Kristin Foringer, *University of Michigan*

Yueran Zhang, *UC Berkeley*

### WEB EDITORS

Şahan Savaş Karataşlı, *University of North Carolina*

Shani Davis, *Columbia University*

Perdana Roswally, *Northwestern University*

### NEWSLETTER EDITORS

#### **New Members**

Berfu Aygenç, *New York University*

Peter Ore, *University of Arizona*

#### **Retiring Members**

Bariş Büyükokutan, *Koç University*

Mathieu Desan, *University of Colorado, Boulder*

Efe Peker, *University of Ottawa*

In the two CHS townhall meetings we had this year, members identified a type of a “Prada problem” that is related to but still quite different from the one first coined in *Remaking Modernity* (Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005) and highlighted by Monica Prasad (2006). The original challenge that triggered the comparison of comparative and historical sociology to an overpriced luxury item was that “we tend to be located [only] at major research institutions,” arguably because “we are very far from having convinced mainstream sociologists that social inquiry demands a fundamentally historical approach.” Historical and comparative sociology – the pursuit of which “requires markers of cultural capital (e.g., theory, multiple languages, art appreciation)” – is attractive mostly to sociology departments that seek “‘distinction’ in the university setting” (Adams et al. 2005). Prasad (2006) later collects data on jobs advertised that confirm that “CHS remains confined to research universities.”

Practices of distinction across different types of academic institutions and departments certainly take place and they are important to identify. Yet, in the course of this past year we have also learned that it is not that comparative and historical sociology is found only in elite institutions and done only by sociologists with the privilege of inherited cultural capital, but that comparative and historical sociology sees itself and reproduces itself as rightfully belonging in “elite” institutions and as rightfully done by those with visible markers of cultural capital. What we have finally learned this year is that our section’s “Prada problem” is to a large extent our own doing. We create a “Prada problem” by reproducing boundaries that welcome some scholars and institutions and exclude others, and by reproducing boundaries that welcome some concerns and exclude others. One result of such exclusionary practices is the marginalization of scholars of color. More broadly, sociologists who conduct historical and/or comparative research but who do not see themselves as belonging to the “elite,” consequently do not consider themselves comparative and/or

historical sociologists. And this is the experience not only of ASA members who avoid the CHS section altogether, but also the experience of those who, in spite of feeling unwelcome, are still members.

In the two CHS townhall meetings we had this year, members suggested important initiatives the section could take in addressing inequalities and making the section more inclusive and more representative of what comparative and historical sociologists do. Members also suggested ways to more centrally position all comparative and historical work in the larger field of sociology. The CHS council is committed to implement these suggestions – through governance reforms, substantive initiatives, and professionalization support.

In addition, and in preparation for the ASA conference in Los Angeles, many CHS members have devoted much labor for creating a more open and inclusive program. Among other initiatives, I’d like to highlight the CHS mini-conference on “Engaging History: Legacies, Omissions, and New Directions in Comparative Historical Sociology,” a panel on “Collective Memory, (De)commemoration, and Selective Forgetting,” a panel on “Understanding Racial Orders from Global-Historical Perspectives,” a mentoring event, a reception, and, lastly, a longer business meeting, where we will continue our discussion on urgent CHS issues.

None of this can be achieved without many members’ commitment and active participation. This applies also to this newsletter. Special thanks for editors Barış Büyükokutan, Mathieu Desan, and Efe Peker for their work on this issue, and welcome to incoming editors, Berfu Aygenç and Peter Ore. Enjoy!

## References

Adams, Julia, Elisabeth Clemens, and Ann Orloff. 2005. "Introduction." in *Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology*, edited by Julia Adams, Elisabeth Clemens, and Ann Orloff. Durham: Duke University Press.

Braun, Robert. Spring/Summer 2020. "Creative Marginality." *Trajectories*. Volume 31, No. 3. Pages 8-9.

Chen, Anthony S. Spring/Summer 2020. "The Future of CHS." *Trajectories*. Volume 31, No. 3. Pages 1-2.

Prasad, Monica. Fall 2006. "The Prada Bag Problem." *Comparative & Historical Sociology*. Volume 18, No. 1, Pages 9-14.

Prasad, Monica. Summer 2016. "Can Saving the World Save Comparative Historical Sociology?" *Trajectories*. Volume 27, No. 4. Pages 1-5.



## In Memory of Richard Lachmann

1956-2021



*The CHS community was deeply saddened by the untimely passing of Richard Lachmann in September 2021. In this segment, A.K.M. Skarpelis (Berlin Social Science Center, WZB), Rebecca Jean Emigh (UCLA), and Tim Gill (University of Tennessee) discuss the personal and scholarly legacy of the great historical sociologist. To continue this conversation, join the joint Political Sociology and Comparative-Historical Sociology panel at the upcoming ASA Annual Meeting:*

### **“The Legacy of Richard Lachmann: A Joint Panel by the Sections on Political Sociology and Comparative-Historical Sociology”**

**Mon, August 8, 8:00 to 9:30am**  
**LACC, Floor: Level 2, 404B**

**Organizer:** Fabio Rojas (Indiana University-Bloomington)

**Presenter:** Rebecca Jean Emigh (UCLA)

### **Remembering Richard Lachmann**

A.K.M. Skarpelis

**Berlin Social Science Center (WZB)**

Obituaries are micro-narratives that set out to do several things at once: they revere, they mourn, they reminisce. Befitting to Richard Lachmann’s standing in the field and his importance in his home department at the University at Albany, SUNY, obituaries about Richard’s life and work have appeared in several venues. In many of these, his doctoral students – often international students, with few family networks in the United States – mentioned how exceptionally kind and welcoming he was to them, how he made them feel at home in a foreign country and advocated for them freely and generously. Within comparative historical sociology more generally, my peers and *senpai* have related how they would meet with him around the big conferences; how he would take hours out of his time to read and discuss their papers, from first draft to full book manuscript. This magnanimity of spirit and time and attention is rare in the field.

A first stab at posthumous biography, obituaries are a public expression of grief that is usually written by family, close colleagues, or famous scholars in the field. As an ordinary junior sociologist, I fall into none of these three

categories. Why then contribute to this memorialization of Richard Lachmann? What I found striking alongside testimonies of his own students and the looser networks within comparative historical sociology, and the reason why I felt compelled to write, is that in many ways, Richard's influence extends far beyond these immediate circles in ways unusual for the field: His presence was calming and generative all at once. I remember the first time I gave an ASA talk in front of an actual and large audience – almost a hundred people – and how I scanned the room, nervously, looking for something, a reference point, a calming landmark. At some point I spotted Richard Lachmann, just sitting there with that permanently smiling expression and friendly face we all recall so well. Immediately, my mind stopped racing and I felt ready to speak.

Richard was an exceptional person in this ability to inspire and motivate by his mere presence. When I somewhat embarrassedly related this memory to my writing group and other colleagues, several in the group – none of whom were advised by Richard, or even knew him very well – shared almost identical feelings. Of a calming presence, of the courage to talk, unbothered by the constant swirl of questions and doubts facing especially scholars working on non-US cases (how is this sociological?," "How does it matter to the US?"). Richard's existence in the field has made countless of us feel at ease, confident and – dare I even put it this way – joyous in our pursuit of knowledge, in our taking apart of power relations and analogical reasoning beyond the West. Obituaries as genre are ephemeral; Richard's influence is not. We will miss you, Richard, but you left us with the greatest gift: With a manual on how to proceed as mentor, colleague and friend, with kindness, impeccable reasoning, and generosity.

## Remember Richard Lachmann as Great!

Rebecca Jean Emigh

UCLA

I was deeply saddened by Richard's untimely death. When he died, we (with David McCourt) were working on editing a new *Oxford Handbook of Comparative and Historical Sociology*. During the pandemic, in one of our many zoom meetings, we were exchanging anxieties about catching the novel disease, and Richard joked that at his age he was more likely to die of a heart attack than COVID. Little did we know at that time that would turn out to be true. On Saturday, September 18, just hours before Richard died on the 19<sup>th</sup>, we had been emailing back and forth about details of the handbook, as is typical with academics engrossed in a new project. We were surprised when he didn't respond to our emails by Monday, and when one of our colleagues emailed us asking if he was dead, we were shocked. Richard was always very much alive! How could he be dead? As a memorial, I want to remember Richard Lachmann as great on multiple levels! I'm going to run with a multisylabic alliterative scheme: remembering Richard as great with three "g's": genuine (personal), generous (collegial), and genius (scholarly).

As a person, Richard was genuine. I first met Richard when I was a graduate student, and we were both working on the debates surrounding the historical rise of capitalism. He was an assistant professor at Madison Wisconsin, and I was a graduate student at The University of Chicago. He struck me immediately as someone completely without pretense, interested in a genuine exchange of ideas, even with a graduate student, clearly his junior, with only half-baked thoughts to offer him in response to his knowledge and well worked out theory. Many years later, we happened to have published our histories of "how we became comparative and historical sociologists" in the same issue of the *ASA Comparative and Historical Sociology Newsletter* (2007, 18[2]:32–36). We had very different backgrounds. When Richard claimed in

his article he lacked sophistication as a graduate student, I remember thinking that he had orders of magnitude more than I did! Indeed, Richard was genuinely interested in everyone, connecting with them where they were at.

Richard and I met often over the years, despite living on opposite sides of the country. Richard was genuinely kind and thoughtful. He enjoyed real conversations about real topics. He loved to have a meal and discuss topics both serious and heavy. We had meals at ASA conferences, when I visited his home city, and when he visited mine. The conversation ranged from travel to politics to theater to family to sociology. When asked his opinion, he gave it, unfiltered. But it was always genuinely thoughtful and measured. What is more surprising about this demeanor, however, is that he held very strong opinions and views, and he was not easily (ever!) swayed. Yet, he could deliver these ideas in a personable way. In addition, he responded to his critics, while holding fast to his approach. Once, he told me how he had collected entirely new evidence for a piece, because “the reviewers were right about that.” In fact, Richard and I disagreed fundamentally about the sociological role of elites and nonelites in social life. At an epistemological level, I am convinced that elite theory is misleading, at it focuses its methodological sight on elites, thus blinding itself to the role of nonelite actors. Once, when we were still young, I asked him about what some certain piece of historical evidence implied for our theories. I remember objecting that, in contradiction to his explanation, Florentine elites did transform economic relations, and it was in fact capitalist relations themselves that led to their undoing in Tuscany. He calmly went on to give his view of what the bit of evidence might imply for our respective approaches. I was amazed. He could summarize how his theory might be wrong, what it might mean for a revision of his work, but also reviewed the same points about mine. It was honest, respectful, and above all, genuine.

As a collaborator, Richard was generous. I was on multiple projects with Richard, including panels and edited volumes. Richard always contributed generously. He answered every email, in a deep and meaningful way. Near the beginning of one such project, when the lead editor was trying to get things up and going, the emails were flying fast and furious. Very few of them made any sense. I was a bit puzzled as to how to respond, what to say, or what to add. I think most of the other participants were too, as their responses were equally unfocused and unhelpful. But then I saw Richard’s responses. They were pointed and specific, moving the project along with real substantive points. He could read through what others had written, take the points, and weave them together into some guidelines that we could implement to create a coherent work. He built genuine consensus through his generosity. Richard was always dependable. I could count on him to get things done. So could everyone else.

Thus, my experience with Richard’s generosity was hardly unique. Richard had many colleagues and collaborators. He was also particularly active in fostering interest among up-and-coming scholars of comparative and historical sociology, and he avidly participated in the mentoring program of the ASA-CHS section. Richard was there to the very end of such meetings. How many times did I speak with someone who said, “Oh yes, Richard was very helpful!” He sparked their interest in the topic, especially with the way that he could link the historical material to contemporary social issues. At the ASA and SSHA meetings, Richard was always listening to paper sessions, participating in the business and network meetings, and in between, meeting with colleagues and drawing in new members.

As a scholar, Richard was genius. His work presents the best developed contemporary elite theory, drawing on and synthesizing classic elite theories as he updated and tightened his version of it. He consistently worked out this approach throughout his entire career, applying it to

multiple different empirical cases. As a consequence, Richard's work was always comparative and historical. His major works usually traced the historical trajectories of several regions/nation states. This breadth was impressive, especially in comparison to many other works in this field that take either the historical or comparative approach. This breadth is quite difficult to accomplish in this sort of work, as it is painstakingly slow to gather evidence and learn enough detail about the cases to write them with facility.

Richard theorized that the alliances among elites was the key to understanding social trajectories. Where elites can consolidate and unify, they can grab power. Once they have power, they can transform economies, politics, and societies. Thus, Richard's work, like mine, honed in on the real actions and relations among social participants. Richard's insistence, however, was on how elites, not classes or any other nonelites, were key to understanding how transformations occurred. Thus, he carved out a unique space for political sociology: capitalist accumulation cycles could not explain social transformations. Nor could class mobilization, class inequality, class consciousness, or, indeed any other aspect of class, explain such transformations. Even more generally, neither could any aspect of nonelite relations.

His theory was also particularly elegant: the same theory could explain transformations (e.g., how capitalism developed) as well as nontransformations (e.g., where capitalism failed to develop). For example, in his work on the rise of capitalism, he examined the successful case of Britain, as well as the unsuccessful cases of France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Tuscany. This is, to a large extent, because the same mechanisms explain both the successful and unsuccessful cases. Elites must first consolidate and unify and then they must transform social relations. If both conditions occur, then dramatic social change occurs. If they do not both occur, then no such change occurs. He also used this theory to explain entire social trajectories, that is,

the rise and fall of a social formation. For example, in his work on empires, he examined Spain, France, the Netherlands, Britain, and the United States, and explaining why some of the empires lasted longer than others by examining elite conflict. The theory explains both the rise and fall, again, because Richard theorized that they are governed, at least to a large extent, on the same mechanism. If elites did consolidate and transform relations, they were loath to give up their power, so they then tended to lose out in competition with elites in other locations who were not entrenched. Thus, it was the consolidation of US financial elites politically that explained both the rise and fall of US hegemonic power.

The sweep of the work empirically and theoretically is genius. And I say this as someone who does not share Richard's approach. My quibbles would be, to name a few, his focus on elites that largely fails to take nonelites seriously, his political sociological approach that mostly ignores culture and economy, his a-temporal application of theories, and his universalization of European cases. But I am probably wrong, and more importantly, I wish Richard were still here to tell me so, in his great—genuine, generous, and genius—way.

### **Obituary for Richard Lachmann**

Tim Gill

#### **University of Tennessee**

I'm honored that I was asked to share a reflection on Richard Lachmann. There are so many aspects of Richard's life and work that I cannot speak to, and I wouldn't claim the ability to do so. There are no doubt countless others who knew him far more deeply than I ever would have. I only knew Richard for a few short years, but his presence made an impact on my life.

As a junior scholar and a postdoc on the job market in 2016, I was incredibly nervous about anything I published or put out on the Internet. One of the first items I published in a purely

public sociology outlet included a few posts on our section's defunct blog Policy Trajectories.

In the wake of Trump's election, I published a piece on the role that neoliberal policies might play in the new administration's policy program. To my surprise, Richard Lachmann responded. He disagreed with some of my thoughts, but we had a courteous exchange. It wasn't a small thing to me. It made me feel validated. I didn't feel like anyone at all. But here was a prominent scholar taking me seriously and engaging me as an equal.

Since that time, Richard and I began exchanging emails about scholarly work, joking and talking about films and TV over Facebook, and meeting up at conferences. Over the course of our friendship, Richard and I continuously discussed the nature and future of U.S. Empire. That was the primary thread that bound our work and thoughts together. We agreed on many things but disagreed on others. At all times, I truly felt comfortable expressing all my thoughts on these issues with him, without the threat that he might act unkind or pompous or otherwise.

It wasn't just the scholarly conversations that I will remember him for.

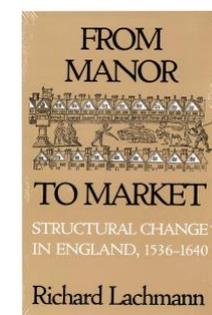
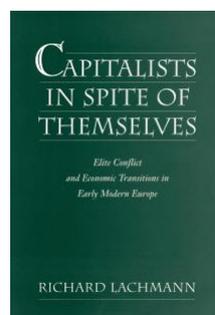
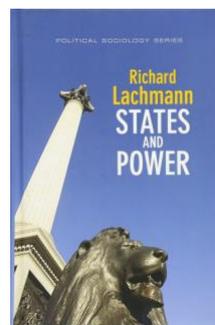
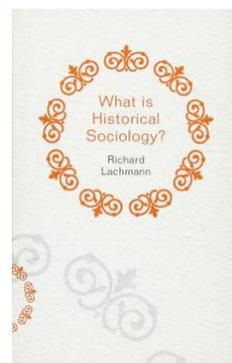
The last time I saw Richard was at an ASA pre-conference in Brooklyn in August 2019 just before the pandemic. We talked a little bit about our classes and teaching political sociology, but we mostly just spoke about my young son, parenting, and raising a family.

Richard was surely an intellectual titan, but he was also a genuinely human person. His willingness to engage with me, read my work, and write letters of recommendation for me has meant very much. But his friendship and seeming desire to know me as a person has meant so much, too.

Many of us have countless stories of folks looking at our badges at conferences – maybe as a grad student, postdoc, or faculty, and clearly having little interest in talking with us. Richard

was the exact opposite of this disposition. I honestly had nothing beyond conversation to offer him. I couldn't provide him with any opportunities or grant-funding or anything of the sort. But it didn't matter.

As I engage with my own students and other graduate students and faculty now as a professor, I will always remember Richard for the kindness he showed unto me at an early stage in my career. We only shared a small amount of time together in the few years we knew each other, but it was a critical moment in my life – becoming a new parent and working through the job market. Richard was there for me, and I'll never forget him.



## Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Two articles analyze the recent conflict



### Understanding the War in Ukraine

Andrew Buck

**University of Southern Indiana**

Jeffrey Hass

**University of Richmond**

If Twitter is a valid representation of academic discourse on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, then journalists, military scholars, and some economists and political scientists are go-to experts for insights. What can sociology add? The Russian invasion seems up our alley (states, organized conflict, political identities, transformations creative and destructive). Comparative-historical sociology ("CHS") tends to explore broader social contexts and histories that channel proximal institutions and actors (e.g. Moore 1966). Without long-term forces that created nations and states, bureaucratic militaries, and economies, we would not have capacities for such violence. Yet historical analyses of institutional and structural evolution, and comparisons that reveal significance, can seem too broad or distant to help make sense of conflict here and now. If this is a valid worry, it also sells us short. CHS provides key tools for

making sense of the Ukrainian tragedy. One lesson is to make regimes and coalitions more important to analyses—not as individual psychologies in particular institutional positions, but as concrete networks and groups with access to capital and coercive power of the state (Buck and Hass 2018).

CHS brought states back into the picture, which informed analyses in political sociology and political science about economic development, revolutions, political change, and other subjects (e.g. Haggard 1990; Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1992; Markoff 1996). As some form of democracy and markets spread across Europe and the globe in the 1990s, most sociologists turned their attention to global economic and political structures that compelled regimes to follow neoliberal and quasi-democratic policies. Globalization was driven by digital technologies and dominant trans-national organizations (the IMF and World Bank, multinational corporations, the US government). With the global economy as a (supposedly) homogenizing field, and the global polity presumed to follow

(echoing thoughts before World War I), differences between countries became more about conflicts of interests and positions in the new global order, rather than varieties of regimes. If anything, forces of globalization and interdependency would mean regime differences would wash out.

Such scholarship produced important insights. Yet this says too little about *proximal* forces that contribute to reproduction, transformation, or catastrophe. We can accept that “leadership,” personal qualities of leaders, matters; but this hides social forces that facilitate, hinder, or reveal those qualities. We should follow the late Richard Lachmann (2000) to explore how social groups (especially elites, classes, and movements) interact: the nature of relations and resources they have. As Tilly argues in his work about democratization (2003), the trick is to measure variation in coercion, capital, and *coalitions*. Given coercion and capital, how do coalitions crystalize into regimes that can use or reshape the distribution of capital and coercion?

### **Coercion and capital**

Let’s start with coercion and capital. According to Tilly (1992), some states achieve high capacity through coercion; others orient to capital, using trade to achieve high capacity. Historically, Slavic countries of the USSR were weak on capital and heavy on coercion (a bureaucratic military and internal police). In the 1990s, post-Soviet Russia let its military degrade, as was evident in both Chechen wars; Russian victory was possible only by razing Grozny, terrifying local populations, and installing a local dictator. After 2007, Putin’s regime increasingly asserted its reliance on coercion vis-à-vis capital in subsequent conflicts in Georgia, Crimea, Donbass, and Syria. In terms of capital under Putin, leaders of finance and profitable industries (“oligarchs”) received special treatment and access to the corridors of power. Oil and gas production remained important, although prices were near record lows in the 1990s. After de-privatizing large parts of the hydrocarbon industries and coercing

oligarchs to pay more taxes, Putin’s regime began to see benefits of its growing control and increases in hydrocarbon prices, which improved Russia’s trade balances and state budget, facilitating massive reserves (much now frozen abroad) and possibilities for military and economic investment.

Ukraine, for its part, lost much coercive capacity after giving up its nuclear weapons in 1994. Ukraine no longer has easy hydrocarbon profits; institutional instability meant oligarchy and corruption. Ukraine has been among the poorest parts of Europe since 1991, without profitable exports to buoy its regime. The regime’s capital became increasingly tied to the country’s geographic position as a transportation corridor of pipelines from Russia to Europe. After the humiliation of losing Crimea and the Donbass in 2014, the Ukrainian government has invested in its military, including imposing military service. Ukraine also made overtures to enter NATO’s sphere of influence and perhaps gain membership. At the same time, post-Euromaidan Ukraine has improved trade with Europe and lessened its dependency on Russia. These planned and ongoing attempts to improve the Ukrainian state’s capacity and regime’s freedom of movement were part of Putin’s pretext to invade and “de-militarize” Ukraine.

If we focus on coercion and capital, we see that Russia had more resources at its disposal, and, even if these were less impressive in the reality of war, Russia still could bring much more to bear. Much like its historical predecessors of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, Putin’s regime abandoned the “free-trade” route to achieve high state capacity and relied on coercion again using military incursions into neighboring countries and threatening Europe with its natural resources. That is, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine reflects the ability of Putin’s regime to threaten wider conflict with nuclear weapons and to turn off oil and gas supplies. Yet this “just-so” story elides two important questions: 1) Why did Putin decide to go to war, and 2) Why have Russia’s efforts at pursuing

war—both in the field and in presenting their case—been so problematic to the point of incompetence and tragedy. We suggest the reason lies in coalitional histories, which channeled decisions and practices in different directions.

### Coalitions

Hiding under all of this are the coalitions that ran these countries and who made the choices about whether and how to invest in remaking the state. Coalitions have social bases of different elites, classes, movements and outside actors. Immediately after the fall of the USSR, Russia and Ukraine both had fragile coalitions of competing political and economic elites that could swing regimes from one direction to another. Their regimes were riven by factionalism that made it hard for the state to do much, from successfully implementing reforms (beyond destroying the old) to collecting taxes. Putin and his coalition emerged as a reaction to the instability of 1990s offering to bring order to society. The goal from the beginning of Putin's regime was not to have a single party state, but, according to one architect of Putinism (Pavlovsky 2014), a “one and a half party state” with formal trappings of democracy. Representatives of an opposition could complain, but never enough to make a serious change. This set-up has been remarkably stable. Putin remained in power for over 20 years, through five American presidents and five British prime ministers. Despite the instability of 1990s, the Kremlin has not had a transfer of power to an opposition since the fall of the communism. Yet what made this coalition successful also undercut its advantages of coercion and capital.

Initially, the Putin coalition was not homogenous. He came to power with the support of oligarchs, technocratic reformers, and fellow *siloviki* (security forces, literally a “power elite”). This initial coalitional structure was not static, and before long a coalitional structure emerged that, for all members' differences in specific policies, shared a *dirigiste* approach to

economic reform (Hass 2011). A market economy was not negative, but markets had to serve the state. And so those in the coalition who would not play by these new rules were purged, first when Putin and *siloviki* turned on some oligarchs (especially Mikhail Khodorkovskii).

Over time, Russia's ruling coalition transformed, *siloviki* in the core and technocrats and others in an outer circle. Putin and *siloviki* invested in internal coercion under democratic façades (e.g. “managed” elections), from laws against dissent, to organizational expansion. Since 2014, Putin augmented the *siloviki*: giving more legal and financial means to the FSB and Federal Protective Service (akin to the Secret Service) and creating a praetorian guard (Rosgvardia). This had key effects. First, as the coalitional structure shifted from competing elites to an inner circle on the same page, Putin has worried less about dissent. Second, Putin was not initially a dictator; he became a dictator as the coalitional structure narrowed, raising his degrees of freedom. Third, thinning discourse at the top denied Putin counter-arguments against preconceived notions; *siloviki* increasingly told Putin what he wanted to hear, unlike earlier, when reformers might advise Putin to be more moderate to gain legitimacy or foreign investment. Additionally, managed democracy reduced open discourse that could signal problems and compel policy innovations. Finally, one consistent trait of Putin's regime is systemic corruption that led some to label Russia a “kleptocracy” (Dawisha 2014). Much capital theoretically available for coercion, it seems, did not find its way into proclaimed investments, including the military, as Russian setbacks in Ukraine reveal: immense logistical errors, low-quality resources, and absence of newer-generation weapons suggest coercion lost out to corrupt capital flight. Tilly (1985) was more correct than he realized: state-making really can be like organized crime.

The contrast with coalitions in Ukraine is revealing. Successful popular mobilizations against corruption occurred twice while Putin's

ruling coalition narrowed and consolidated power. If Putin's regime sometimes had to negotiate with oligarchs, they shaped popular mobilization via repression and co-optation. By contrast, confrontation in Ukraine between movements and competing elites during elections led to significant shifts in the structure and direction of the regime. The contentious politics of the Orange Revolution led to new presidential elections when opposition protests showed systematic corruption of the first results. After new elections in 2005 forced out the original (disputed) winner, continued swings between elites from western and eastern Ukraine came to a head in the dramatic, contentious events of 2013-2014 (Euromaidan), which forced president Yanukovich to flee Ukraine and destroyed the pro-Russian coalition. Even though goals of movements were not fully realized, confrontation forced elites to expand coalitions—just as Putin's regime did the opposite. New coalitions that allowed open politics strengthened a sense of Ukrainian nationhood and popular buy-in facilitating mobilization against Russia; coalitions that facilitated closer ties with NATO and the EU meant more weapons to fight Russia.

The tools of CHS regarding states, organized violence, elites, and movements reveal how Russian versus Ukrainian regimes were going in different directions. An analysis of regimes offers a perspective on this conflict situated between globalization and the decisions of leaders in institutions. Recognizing underlying drivers of regimes—coercion, capital, and coalitions—reminds us that even if leaders change and global integration resumes, structural forces still shape regimes. Even among critics of globalization, few predicted in 1991 that democratization and marketization of Ukraine and Russia would lead to war between them thirty years later. Would war had been averted with different leaders? Most likely, yes, but Ukrainian, Russian, and global leaders still have to confront what faces these regimes after war: bureaucracies for coercion, hydrocarbon inheritance, and building coalitions.

## References

- Buck, Andrew and Jeffrey Hass. 2018. "Coalitional Configurations: A Structural Analysis of Democratization in the Former Soviet Union." *Demokratizatsiya* 26/1: 25-54.
- Dawisha, Karen. 2014. *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Haggard, Stephan. 1990. *Pathways from the Periphery*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hass, Jeffrey K. 2011. *To the Undiscovered Country: Power, Culture, and Economic Change in Russia, 1988-2008*. New York: Routledge.
- Lachmann, Richard. 2000. *Capitalists in Spite of Themselves*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Markoff, John. 1996. *The Abolition of Feudalism*. University Park: Penn State Press.
- Moore, Barrington. 1966. *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pavlovsky, Gleb. 2014. "Interview." *New Left Review* 88 (July/August): 57-58.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." Pp. 169-191 in *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, Charles. 1992. *Coercion, Capital, and European States*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Tilly, Charles. 2003. *Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## The Horrors and the Ironies of Russia's war in Ukraine

Alya Guseva

**Boston University**

In the finest traditions of science papers, I would like to report a gigantic conflict of interest in writing about the war in Ukraine. I was born and grew up in Kharkiv, Ukraine, a city of 1.5 million people, and received my undergraduate degree at Kharkiv State University. I have family and friends in Kharkiv, many of whom have fled since the start of the war, but some are remaining in the city, including my 80-year-old father. My heart is broken. My country is being relentlessly destroyed: tens of thousands of civilians are feared dead, including hundreds of children, and several hundred more children are severely injured. Millions are traumatized. Volnovakha, a small town of 20 thousand people in the Donetsk region is completely gone, 90% of Mariupol, a beautiful city on the sea of Azov with a prewar population of half a million people, has been encircled and mercilessly bombed by Russian artillery. It now lies in ruins. Hundreds or thousands of its residents, including orphaned children, were illegally deported to Russia, and about 100,000 people are still trapped inside the city. The Russian army has shelled residential buildings with people huddling in basements, as well as theaters, schools, hospitals, parks, lines of people waiting to get humanitarian aid, and private cars and evacuation buses trying to get people to safety. Russian soldiers raped, tortured and murdered civilians, including children, and plundered their belongings. The legacy of Soviet soldiers as liberators, heavily promoted for several generations after WWII, has been firmly replaced by the Russian soldier the invader and the looter.

More than a quarter of Ukraine's prewar population have left their homes (11 million people, by UN estimates), and about half of them made it abroad, mainly to Europe. According to UNICEF, this includes two thirds of the 7.5 million Ukrainian children. The loss of life and the destruction of cities and towns are heartbreaking, but equally tragic are the cultural

losses, the brain drain, and the blatant robbery of Ukraine's future.

However, there is a silver lining. Ukraine has never been more united than now. The level of solidarity is astounding, and the support for President Zelensky, the Ukrainian army and the Ukrainian language is at its highest. You may have heard that one of the stated goals of this "special operation" as the Russian propaganda machine insists on calling this war, was to protect Russian-speakers in Ukraine, who were supposedly oppressed. I grew up speaking Russian in a predominantly Russian-speaking city. We were taught Ukrainian in secondary school, but not well enough for anyone I know to be fully fluent. Today, many if not most of my Russian-speaking friends from secondary school and the university embrace Ukrainian: they post on social media in Ukrainian, and some made a conscious choice to switch to Ukrainian in their day-to-day lives. But, notably, the mayor of Kharkiv, Ihor Terekhov, who was also born and grew up in Kharkiv, continues to speak Russian. And right before the start of the war, President Zelensky encouraged him to speak Russian and not be ashamed of that. Zelensky himself switched to Russian when [he addressed Terekhov](#) at a meeting in Kharkiv: "We know that in Kharkiv, many speak Russian, but they nevertheless think in Ukrainian, in a pro-Ukrainian way."

The European Union and the proverbial West dubbed "weak" and "divided" by the Russian propaganda have demonstrated both the resolve and the ability to unite on many issues, including sanctions, weaning themselves from Russian gas and oil, providing military and humanitarian help to Ukraine, and welcoming millions of Ukrainian refugees. In the ever politically polarized United States, the public support for aiding Ukraine, including militarily, is bipartisan.

In fact, this is the biggest irony of this war: Russia is achieving the exact opposite of what Russia wanted from it. A widely publicized

document entitled “[What Russia Should Do with Ukraine](#),” published by Kremlin-controlled RIA News, explained the ideological grounds and goals for the ongoing war: denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine. Upon a close read, it becomes clear that what was meant by “denazification” was actually de-Ukrainization - stripping Ukraine of its national identity, culture, language and history, no doubt in line with Putin’s own claim that Ukraine is nothing but an artificial make-believe formation, essentially populated by ethnic Russians, which have been pressured by the West to become anti-Russian (“anti-Russia” is literally what the Kremlin spokesperson Peskov called Ukraine in a recent interview with Christiane Amanpour). De-Ukrainianization is not a new idea: the Russian state has orchestrated more than 300 years’ worth of these efforts, starting with Peter the Great’s 1720 decree to ban printing in the Ukrainian language and seize Ukrainian church books, and Catherine the Great’s move to ban teaching in Ukrainian in Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, followed by the closings of Ukrainian-language schools, persecution of Ukrainian language and culture. The Soviet regime continued in the same vein but amplified the brutality. Millions of ordinary Ukrainians died in 1932-33 as a result of the state-orchestrated famine of the Holodomor. And a generation of Ukrainian poets, writers and artists, part of Ukraine’s [Executed Renaissance](#), perished at the hands of state repressive apparatus, their creative work destroyed or censored and their legacy completely erased for decades. (No wonder I grew up not speaking Ukrainian).

If the stated goals of Putin’s regime were to de-Ukrainianize and to de-militarize, which is to weaken Ukraine militarily, what is it actually achieving? Lifelong Russian speakers in Ukraine are abandoning the Russian language in favor of Ukrainian, and Russian culture is suffering a backlash not only in Ukraine, but worldwide. The Ukrainian National Academic Theater of Russian Drama named after a famous Ukrainian writer Lesya Ukrainka in Kyiv, the premier

Ukrainian theater founded in 1926 where all performances were in Russian, was recently renamed the Lesya Ukrainka National Academic Theater, and its first resumed performances after the start of the war were in Ukrainian. Russian grocery stores, Russian restaurants and Russian math schools in the US are, too, being renamed. And even the Russian Boston Facebook group is no longer Russian, but “international”. Some may decry this as evidence of Russophobia -- the knee-jerk cancelling of all things Russian. Yet I cannot help but wonder whether these name changes are more than justified. The very fact that these schools, stores and restaurants were called “Russian” while their founders hailed from Ukraine and Moldova, and sold and served food from Poland, Georgia and Armenia, reflected a particular imperial worldview, not unlike the use of “Russian studies” in the academy as a catchall label for all things Slavic, East European or post-communist.

The goal of demilitarizing Ukraine is looking more and more like the demilitarization of Russia. Once considered the world’s second most powerful military, the Russian army turned out to be all glitz but little substance, a Potemkin village that is much better at staging military parades than actual fighting (The Pentagon recently reported that Russia already lost a quarter of its combat power). Some of the Russian army’s substandard performance can be attributed to massive corruption: while Russia’s annual military budget is reported to be slightly over \$60 billion, it may be that only a small part of it actually reaches its intended purpose, the rest is paying for mansions and yachts for top military personnel. And thanks to the bravery and spirit of the Ukrainian army that destroyed a large part of Russia’s military equipment as well as the steady supply of foreign military supplies, Ukraine may now have [more tanks on the ground](#) than Russia.

One other goal of the war in Ukraine, which was publicly stated by Putin and eagerly repeated by both Russian TV talking heads and ordinary Russians on the street, was to protect Russia

from being closed in by NATO. Here too, what Russia is achieving is exactly the opposite of what it wanted, as Sweden and Finland, with whom Russia shares the 830-mile-long border, have expressed their desire to join the Western military alliance.

All wars eventually come to an end. How or when this war will stop is the most important question on everyone's mind. Until recently, a common call was for the war to end at the diplomatic table, but after the world found out about the Russian army's atrocities in Bucha, the tune has changed to "this war can only end on the battlefield." "Ukraine must win" declares [Anne Applebaum in the Atlantic](#), echoing the refrain repeated by journalists and politicians alike. The changed mood is also reflected in an increased international military aid to Ukraine, which for the first time since the start of the war includes heavy artillery and military aircraft to enable Ukraine to go on the offensive. There is also news that the negotiations have stalled. Meanwhile, the Russian army is regrouping in the east, preparing for a battle over Donbass. The Russian regime fixated on the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, is under pressure to "deliver" Russia's victory by this year's May 9<sup>th</sup> military parade. Anything less than that would make Putin look foolish and weak. What will Russia try to accomplish next, and what will it try to pass as "victory" to save face? One thing is clear: because the language the Russian elites understand best is that of power, diplomatic negotiations will not be successful unless Russia is significantly weakened militarily and/or economically to the point where the bargaining is no longer about the Ukrainian land, on which Russia has made unreasonable demands, but Russia's own economic survival. Not "war will end once Ukraine agrees to lay down arms and give up its territories," but "some sanctions will be lifted once Russia withdraws its troops and agrees to reparations." The question is what price Ukraine and its allies are willing to pay to get to this point.

## Solving Empire

Introduction by Monica Prasad, Northwestern University



*Two sets of discussions have emerged in recent sociology. Several comparative historical scholars, in sociology as well as neighboring disciplines, have shown how legacies of empire, colonialism, and settler colonialism are central to the structuring of contemporary societies (Go 2008, 2011, 2013; Immerwahr 2016, 2019; Quisumbing King 2019). At the same time, other sociologists have wondered whether sociology can solve, not just describe, social problems (Watts 2017, DiPrete and Fox-Williams 2021, Prasad 2021).*

*On October 15, 2021, the Problem-Solving Sociology Workshop and the Comparative Historical Social Science Workshop at Northwestern University held an event on “Solving Empire” to bring these two developments within the discipline into dialogue. Julian Go, Daniel Immerwahr, and Katrina Quisumbing King were asked to respond to this prompt: “does sociology have a role to play in addressing the legacies of*

*empire? Is description enough, or should scholars explicitly ask how these imperial legacies can be overcome? Is changing society too dangerous a prospect, and if so then how should we think about emancipation?”*

*Three graduate students from the Northwestern Sociology Department, Yannick Coenders, Pepe Roswally, and Luna Vincent, then responded to the panelists’ comments.*

### Solving Empire?

Julian Go

**University of Chicago**

Can empire be “solved”? My intuition is that it is impossible to solve empire. I say this for various reasons. First, empire is so embedded in our lives that it doesn’t constitute a singular “problem.” Empire is a transnational constitutive system; a formation of power and relations that has shaped and continues to shape nearly everything, from global economic inequality to the weak capacities of postcolonial states to

domestic race relations to even the very idea of “race” itself. The historical legacies and effects of empire are everywhere. This is, after all, one of the points of postcolonial thought: to acknowledge the constitutive nature of empire as it has existed in the past and as it persists into the present. And it means that “solving empire” is probably not the best way to think about it. I recognize the term has rhetorical value. But my point is that empire needs to be understood for its vast complexity; its long-ranging layered effects and legacies. Empire does not pose itself to use as a single “problem.” It is a formation of multiplicities. The so-called refugee problem or migration problem: these are not disconnected from the logics of informal imperialism or histories of colonialism. The question of critical race theory in schools, or monuments and statues, whether in the US or in England – such as the Rhodes statue – these are all about empire and its legacies. And here we are on the Northwestern campus on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa nations, among others. This is a legacy of empire too. We can’t even *talk* about solving empire without reproducing it.

The second difficulty is this: the very subject position of the authoritative paternalistic knower capable of solving society’s problems has itself been, if not a product of, at least firmly tethered to the imperial episteme; intimately connected to empire itself. This is another example of empire’s far reaching and deep effects: our system of sociological knowledge was born as a mode of thought in, of and for empire. The idea of the ‘social’ as a space of action and determination between the religious/spiritual realm and the biological realm first emerged in the nineteenth century and first resonated with European white male elites in imperial metropolises because it offered a way of explaining and hopefully “solving” the so-called “problems” of social disorder, revolution, workers’ uprisings, recalcitrant women, and, yes, those teeming masses of brown, black and

yellow people in Europe’s colonies who needed to be regulated, managed if not repressed.

I have written about this elsewhere, and about how American sociology in particular was born in, of and for empire. The early US sociologists, many of them located in my own institution – the University of Chicago – spent much of their time supporting US imperialism, not least as a possible solution to the so-called ‘race problem’ that was for them not only domestic but also global. It is a fundamental misconception that the early US sociologists were abstract theorizers only. To the contrary, they dived deeply into issues of imperial and colonial administration in a concerted effort with other rising disciplines at the time to “solve” empire.

Sociology thus emerged in Europe and in the US as indeed a problem-solving discipline - but it was one with an imperial subjectivity shaped by the imperial episteme. The founders of social science were white male metropolitans (some of whom were actual colonial administrators) studying revolting mobs and crowds, thereby producing our present-day crowd control theories, so as to best figure out how colonial states can maintain white supremacy – or what was simply called at the time (and was later called by Parsonian sociology) “social order” or “social stability.” These were men in the US desperately trying to make sociology relevant by figuring out how to best “solve” the so-called “Negro Problem” (which meant for them “assimilation” or keeping African Americans separate but orderly). These were men contemplating how the Filipino was similar to or different from the “Malay” or “Indo-Malay” so that they could better know how to rule them. These were men seeking ways to intervene into colonial and imperial policy, not to reject it but to make it “better” – viz., to make it best serve the interests of the imperial metropole.

In this sense, the idea of the objective problem-solver, full of hubris, who sits atop or somehow outside the world, views its problems, and seeks to solve them through policies was not only a

part of imperialism; it was – and to a certain degree still is – an expression of empire’s subjectivity, a manifestation of the imperial episteme and its will to know in order to control. So for these reasons, I find this prompt about “solving empire” exceedingly difficult to address.

All of that said, I don’t want to take the easy way out and just throw up my hands. So let me here lay down some thoughts for how, if we are to take on this task of solving empire, we might begin to approach it. And here I have two thoughts.

First, we must recall that there has always been an alternative tradition in sociology to the imperial and colonialist one I’ve referred to. In the US, there was DuBois and Jane Addams, among others, who did not seek to sit on high and objectively solve problems, but rather to explore problems from the ground-up; to see the world through the eyes of the victims of empire rather than the eyes of the colonial administrator. These are the traditions discussed by ASA Presidents Mary Romero and Aldon Morris in their recent Presidential addresses; I find it a shame and a loss for sociology that such traditions too easily get dismissed by critics as unserious unscientific ‘social justice’ sociology, identity politics or the sociology of complainers (sometimes, what seems like ‘complaint sociology’ is really just a sociology that is willing to acknowledge and describe the full depth of systems of power and see social issues as products of those systems, thereby revealing that the only way to solve problems is to abolish the systems that produce them). I think that, when it comes to solving social problems, we still have much to learn from these traditions; traditions that recognize that knowledge is not only the domain of the university professional but also the domain of subaltern subjects offering subjugated knowledges that the expert derides as inferior.

I don’t want to be an epistemic relativist about this; I do believe in rigorous “scientific” methods. But I also think we might learn as much

if not more from the knowledge and experiences of subjugated populations - as a starting point for “solving problems” - than we do from the expert-on-high.

I also include here anticolonial and postcolonial thought as part of those traditions, which leads to my second and final point. It has to do with “description” as a mode of sociological analysis for addressing problems.

I certainly agree with Professor Prasad that causal explanation is one part of solving problems. I myself have adopted explanation as a crucial part of sociological analysis, and I agree completely that addressing any problems requires a specification of “causes.” But I don’t agree with the implication one might get from this; that is that “description” is of lesser value, or that it isn’t also a form of explanation. The thing we call “description,” I submit, often allows us to see things that conventional causal explanation does not. And it is description that allows us to do what causal explanation might not be able to do: warn us of pernicious effects, and even alert us to “problems” to which we might have been blind amidst our eager efforts to solve a problem we think we already know.

One example comes from my experiences in studying and researching American empire. It all began with my dissertation in 2000, which was on the US colonial empire in Puerto Rico and the Philippines. This was a very difficult project for me. It was a time when historical sociology was so firmly Eurocentric and methodologically-nationalist that it had barely noticed that empires were things. Many historians at the time too still operated from the assumption of American exceptionalism, and vehemently rejected any notion that the US is or ever was an empire (they also worked from the asociological and frankly weird assumption that if political actors don’t *intend* to create an empire or call what they’ve created an “empire”, it’s not an empire).

One of the things this meant for me was that graduate school was tough. Graduate school is

lonely enough. Studying American empire as a grad student in the late 1990s was even lonelier. I therefore spent a lot of time at the University of Wisconsin where there were important historians of Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Because they were historians of Puerto Rico and the Philippines, they of course *already knew* that the US is and has been an empire.

This also meant that I had to spend a lot of my time “proving” to my fellow social scientists that the US is and has been an empire. When I did my job talks, for example, I unfortunately could not get into the nitty-gritty of my examination of the dynamics of colonial meaning-making in Puerto Rico and the Philippines because most of the questions I got were about whether or not the US was “really” an empire. In other words, most people, including historians and American political scientists, did not even recognize the “problem” of American empire, because they could not *see* American empire at all. And ‘proving’ to them that American empire is a thing and that it is connected to problems meant *description*. Description, albeit informed by concepts and theories of empire, was thus crucial for even beginning to identify something called “American empire,” much less something that created “problems” to be solved.

Let me give another example, after which I promise I will conclude. Here I also want to discuss the importance of description, but I want to discuss the importance of describing not American empire specifically but something more broadly: *the connectedness of being*.

You all know that in the 1970s and 1980s a big part of the feminist movement in the US was aimed at solving women’s “problems.” And to solve some of those problems, no small part of the feminist movement sought policies and programs in the corporate sphere that would give them economic independence. Rightfully, these feminists pushed for liberation from the confines of the home and domestic labor (the domestic labor that their husbands, probably well-meaning but ultimately clueless, refused to do). Feminists

wanted freedom. And one part of that meant freedom from domestic labor.

Black feminists of course pointed out how “white” this movement was: black women had been in the workforce for centuries, and they knew that paid work is not necessarily liberatory. But another movement offered new descriptions that highlighted the possibly pernicious effects of this movement to escape domestic labor. This was the movement of postcolonial feminists coming from the perspective of the global south; the inheritors of the anticolonial tradition. Their critique highlighted how white women’s liberation in the US was not untethered from the exploitation and oppression of women in and from postcolonial societies. For as women moved into the workforce, husbands still refused to do domestic labor, and so who was to step up and do the domestic labor instead? And who was *cheap* enough to make the arrangement profitable for families? You all know the answer by now: brown, black and yellow women, most of them from the former colonies of the very metropolises wherein women’s “liberation” was to occur.

What postcolonial feminists did, therefore, was *describe*, and what they did in particular was describe the *connections* that empire generates; the connections between the women’s movement “here” and the unequal conditions in the ex-colonies over “there” that made the exploitation of brown, black and yellow women’s domestic labor possible and indeed desirable. This is what postcolonial thought does, after all, or at least one of the things it does: it illuminates the sprawling connections between metropole and colony, colonized and colonizer, the domestic and the foreign. It stresses the interconnectedness of power relations and the relationality, extending across time and space, of our social practices. And by these kinds of *descriptions*, postcolonial feminists were able to pinpoint a new “problem” – the exploitation of postcolonial labor – that many in the metropole did not even know about or see, much less know

or see how their own movements were part of the problem and contributing to it.

In short, *description* is crucial; if only to reveal what is too often overlooked: our connectedness.

I think sketching the connectedness of being is a vital part of the sociological imagination, if not definitive of it. I'm also suggesting here that it is one way in which we must think about something like "solving empire." The issue arises when sociology dismisses description or does not take it seriously enough. In our desperate attempt to scientize our knowledge and narrow our task to identifying so-called causal variables as we try to solve problems we think we fully understand already, we end up controlling for variables and ignoring the variables we so eagerly "controlled" for. Yet often those variables are important causes; often they are necessary conditions of outcomes and investigating them is what can lead us to see previously unseen connections around the globe. Sometimes, causal explanation is good. But sometimes it is bad, blinding us to the things that description can illuminate and which are critical for causal explanation anyways.

And who has been *better* about description and illuminating the connections that empire has wrought? The answer is plain: anticolonial, antimperial thinkers whose work has largely been ignored by sociology. After all, it was postcolonial feminists working in the humanistic tradition or working *in* and *from* the colonial world who sketched how women's liberation in the metropole was facilitated by colonial exploitation. (Similarly, it was not Arlie Hochschild who discovered the "care chain" of migration; it took her student, Rhacel Parreñas, a woman of color from one of America's former colonies, the Philippines, to show it to her, describe it to her, help her see it).

In sum and to conclude, if we do want sociology to solve problems of empire, we need to start with descriptions that allow us to better see the connectedness of being. And for that, I submit

we might do well to look beyond the confines of traditional sociology, with its blinders of methodological nationalism, its ignorance of imperial relations, and its dismissal of thinkers who don't engage with Parsons or Bourdieu. For 'solving' empire, we might fare best to look to anticolonial and postcolonial thinkers; those thinkers rooted in the subjugated knowledges of peoples who have struggled for centuries against empire. For thinking about "solving empire," who better to turn to than those thinkers?

### **A Puzzle or a Power Struggle: What Type of Problem is Empire?**

Daniel Immerwahr

**Northwestern University**

The question is whether the social sciences should solve, rather than just describe, social problems. And whether, in particular, we should solve the problem of empire rather than merely complaining about it.

Karl Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* ends with a famous line: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." I remember first reading that, as an aspiring intellectual, and feeling the weight of its accusation. It suggests that, by dealing in description, we intellectuals are evading a more important task. Cue, in my young mind, stereotyped visions of scatterbrained and chalk-dusted professors debating Lacan while an insurrection is taking place in the streets.

And I've felt the weight of that accusation more recently. I spent years working on a book about empire, but I did so really as a scholar, not as an activist. It was only after the book came out that I got closer to people working on similar issues outside of academia. They pulled me into their orbit somewhat, and as they did it became clear to me how unprepared I was to enter the realm of policymaking. I'd studied the U.S. empire for years without focusing on making recommendations. It's not as if academics are incapable of such things; there are many among us who excel at crafting policies, weighing the

evidence for their efficacy, and advising decisionmakers on their implementation. It's just that scholars of empire don't tend to do those things—certainly I don't. Still, maybe we should. "Let's stop grumbling about empire and solve it," would be the thinking.

It's tempting, but I have hesitations about that model, which assumes a known, agreed-on problem with an unknown solution. When you're facing that sort of puzzle, it makes good sense to assemble a team of researchers to, say, develop a vaccine for a virus. If the research succeeds, you get a cure for the malady, which you can then bring to the attention of the relevant authorities. The underlying assumption there is that this is a problem that people in power want to see solved. And, when it comes to empire, I'm not sure that they do.

I'd like to sketch for you my understanding of what kind of a problem empire is, because I think that has serious implications for how we should address it. *Empire* can be a nebulous concept. Canonically, it refers to a country with colonies. By that narrow definition, empire is a retreating problem worldwide, because the number of people living in colonies is far smaller than it used to be (though the United States maintains five inhabited territories with 3.5 million inhabitants!). But if, like many scholars, you accept a broader definition, perhaps thinking of empire as an enforced international hierarchy in which some countries exert commanding power over others (and there are other, still broader definitions), empire remains very much with us.

Empire, in this broader understanding, is visible most of all in the outsize global power of the United States. It's not an accident that one country has the world's largest armed forces, possesses more overseas bases than all other countries combined, has the headquarters of global governance institutions on its soil, secures worldwide adoption for its language, sees its currency used worldwide, and has its norms and standards taken up everywhere. It is, the "indispensable nation," as Bill Clinton, Barack

Obama, and Joe Biden have all put it—a polite term for the United States' centrality within the world system.

Polite terms abound. The e-word, which is the less polite way of saying it, is virtually taboo among U.S. leaders, and the country's five inhabited territories are something of an embarrassing subject. Instead, politicians speak of "American leadership" or "American exceptionalism," invoking the unique fitness of the United States to superintend world affairs (or, as they more commonly put it, maintain global "security"). Whatever name you want to call it, there is a bipartisan consensus within the policy elite around the notion that there should be an international hierarchy with Washington atop it.

Such are the unshakeable assumptions of "the Blob," as Barack Obama's aide Ben Rhodes referred to the decisionmakers of U.S. foreign policy. Among that set, there are real and important disagreements—such as about whether the United States should have invaded Iraq or left Afghanistan. Within the Beltway you'll find hawks and doves. But what you won't find in that aviary is anyone suggesting that the United States should sit anywhere but at "the head of the table," as Joe Biden has repeatedly put it.

It's understandable that the Blob would not want to see the United States relinquish its global position in support of a more level international playing field. In fact, its members have whatever the political equivalent of a fiduciary responsibility is to *prevent* that from happening, because global equality would by definition mean a loss of U.S. power. Empire for them is thus not a "problem" but a presupposition. A feature, not a bug.

And that makes talk of "solving" it sound, to my ears, not quite right. That language suits afflictions where everyone agrees that there's a problem but no one knows the solution. For

empire, the opposite is almost true: we know the solution, we just can't agree that it's a problem.

Empire isn't the only problem of this sort. There is a whole class of issues where just acknowledging the problem is halfway there to identifying a solution. Mass incarceration? Stop locking so many people up. Firearms everywhere? Make guns harder to acquire and own. Economic inequality? Tax the rich, distribute the revenues.

I don't mean to minimize these problems by suggesting that their solutions are straightforward. Rather, I want to distinguish them from puzzles like developing a vaccine for COVID-19. Addressing mass incarceration is indeed difficult, it's just that what's difficult isn't finding a solution. It's difficult, for those who regard it as a problem, because it's a power struggle. Puzzles are problems we don't know how to solve. Power struggles crop up where we don't agree on whether they *should* be solved.

Of course, I'm naming ideal types and thus trucking in caricature. And, of course, even for problems where the solution seems apparent, there are second- and third-order problems we'll need to puzzle out. For gun control, we might ask the way to win legislators or voters over, or whether it's better to prohibit firearm sales or restrict ownership. Yet despite all this, I think we can still meaningfully distinguish puzzles from power struggles, and categorize empire as the latter.

We scholars don't always talk about empire this way, as an easy problem. At times, we almost fetishize its inconceivable vastness, emphasizing its deep traumas, enduring afterlives, and cascading effects, to the point where it seems so complex, so insidious, so immovable, that we can't address it, just bear inadequate witness to it. Occasionally, in our telling, empire becomes almost metaphysical, a force that taints all it touches, so that even the act of scholarly inquiry becomes a further perpetuation of empire—and

decolonization becomes an eternally fraught, never-complete form of soulcraft.

It's indisputably true that the harms of empire are many, that they are not merely economic or even material but psychological and spiritual, too. But I believe it would be a mistake to let this lead us to the conclusion that empire is too ineffably vast to comprehend—or to coherently oppose. There's a long and productive history of colonized intellectuals pointing to empire not as an all-pervasive field from which there can be no escape but as an identifiable set of actions, laws, and practices by powerful people in powerful countries. For Kwame Nkrumah, empire instantiated in coups and other U.S. attempts to control African politics; for Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart in the torrent of propaganda with which the United States flooded Latin America; for Pedro Albizu Campos doctors' use of Puerto Ricans as unwitting test subjects. In all these cases, the solution isn't elusive but rather almost painfully obvious: *stop doing empire*.

In the case of the U.S. empire today, that would include dismantling the United States' basing structure, ceasing its airstrikes and drone flights in foreign countries, sharply shrinking its military, stopping its indiscriminate global arms sales, allowing binding status referenda in its inhabited territories, stopping its surveillance of global communications, ceasing its covert action programs in foreign countries—and many things besides. I don't expect that, even if the United States stopped all this, we'd be living in a fully equal world. Nor would ending empire's active impositions thereby heal the damage it has done in the past. But I do expect that this de-imperialized world would be significantly fairer, in material ways, than the one we inhabit.

Is such a world possible? We may despair, but recent history is full of victories over empire, including most notably the global decolonization movement that nearly drove the colonial form of empire to extinction. We have that movement to thank for the fact that imperialism, once a proud ideology, is now a dirty word.

What is more, I think there's every reason to be hopeful about anti-imperialism today. There are many ways forward in our broad struggle to beat back empire, but I want to focus on just one—one that seems to my eyes especially promising for scholars in U.S. universities.

The foreign policy elite in Washington remains committed to empire, in whatever sanitized terms (“exceptionalism,” “leadership,” “indispensability,” etc.). But in a country with representative government, that elite requires at least some acquiescence of the public for its projects, and that's where I think it's weak. Voters appear to be increasingly apathetic about empire. The idea that the United States is the world's greatest country, once an article of exceptionalist faith, is now affirmed by only a bare majority of U.S. inhabitants; younger adults, especially those under thirty, find it particularly hard to agree. Most voters—indeed, most *veterans*—now think that the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were mistakes. And at the presidential level, running against the Blob is good politics. In 2008, Barack Obama defeated Hillary Clinton in part by pointing out that he'd opposed the Iraq War while she supported it. In 2016, Donald Trump also defeated Hillary Clinton, also claiming (far less credibly) to have been an Iraq War opponent. It would be wrong to conflate retrospective disapproval for an unpopular war with a wholesale rejection of the U.S. hegemonic project, but it would also be shortsighted not to recognize the sprouts of anti-imperialism growing within the U.S. populace.

What can be done to nourish those sprouts? Right now, anti-imperialism is a strongly felt cause among scholars, but it is loose and diffuse in the public mind. There's a lot of translation work to do. We need to help people understand the United States' oft-euphemized forms of power as empire. And we need to explain, in terms that resonate with people who aren't of a scholarly bent and who don't share our political instincts, why we regard empire to be so pernicious. Academia, which prizes knowledge

acquisition over knowledge distribution, doesn't always reward us for this, as it tends to incentivize research above all else. But if you accept my proposition that empire is less a puzzle than a power struggle, then what we're really in search of isn't answers so much as an audience.

Which brings me back to Marx. In keeping with his final thesis on Feuerbach, Marx was an activist as well as a social scientist. He sought to change the world, not merely interpret it. Yet it is as an interpreter that he's best remembered. Marx's contributions as a leader in the International Workingmen's Association—the First International—pale in comparison to what he achieved during the same period by writing *Capital*. The *Communist Manifesto* is neatly divided into a historical section, in which he and Friedrich Engels describe capitalism, and three forward-looking sections, where they suggest tactics, issue demands, and criticize rivals. It's that first section, which offers a cogent analysis in legible (indeed, poetic) terms, not the three tactical sections that follow, that most endures.

The point is to change the world; but sometimes the way to do that is to interpret it.

### Who Should Solve Empire?

Katrina Quisumbing King

**Northwestern University**

What does it mean or what would it take to solve empire? Reflecting on this led me to a series of questions:

- I. Do we know what kind of problem empire is?
- II. What can social science bring to the conversation?
- III. Who should be tasked with solving empire?

As I attempted to think through these questions, a few themes emerged: first, that problems of empire are many, but they are also global and interconnected. Second, which follows from this first point, that solving empire is a collaborative

task. And third, this may mean decentering our academic selves in the struggle for decolonization.

What kind of problem is empire? The answer to this question may depend on to whom we speak. The debates we have in academia about how to study empire and different imperial forms do not easily translate to how people recognize it in everyday life. Last year I taught an upper-level undergraduate course simply titled “Empire.” I asked students on the first day why they enrolled in the course. Despite the course description, some of them thought I would be teaching on Rome and Egypt, while others were more interested in what we call informal empire. What struck me was the range of interests in the classroom and a general recognition of the problem of power and domination across forms of empire.

Power and domination. I came to empire as someone interested in race, classification, boundaries, and citizenship. So perhaps it makes sense that I cannot think about empire and its problems without thinking about us–them divisions, closure, partitioning, power, and subordination. For me, the problem of empire is hierarchical, differentiated rule and exploitation that rests on such justifications (even when they are not or no longer explicitly racial).

The problems of empire are not always named as such. Even as more people may become critical of empire in name, the United States has a long history of erasing the explicitly hierarchical and racist language of empire. But the structure and roots remain. Nationalism or patriotism may seem less problematic to some than imperialism. Yet as we know the growth of the U.S. nation as one for white men was built on expansion and subjugation of nonwhite people on the continent and overseas. Implicit in empire is the idea that some people are entitled to conquer (or control global affairs), that they are better equipped to rule and teach others to govern. We see this very clearly in U.S. rule over American Indians and the Philippines. More recently, as we’ve been

reminded, we see this too in Afghanistan and Iraq.

There’s an entitlement that comes with empire, a profoundly hierarchical belief, an arrogance that, in these cases, the United States just knows best. This is something all too similar to what race scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois have diagnosed as the problem of whiteness. In “The Souls of White Folk,” Du Bois elegantly diagnoses white entitlement and its role in justifying war and exploitation around the world.

Empire is not just a problem of white entitlement, but also one that is built on laws and policies. To understand how to solve empire, we must look to how law has been constructed. This is something that social science can bring to the problem of solving empire. We can ask: why have we passed racist, colonial, and unequal laws? With what kind of interests? I’ll give an example, one that scholars of US empire, like Julian and Daniel, are all too familiar with. But it’s a powerful illustration of how empire is built on law, and how these laws have profoundly hierarchical and racially motivated roots.

In 1901, the U.S. Supreme Court—the same court, save one justice, that heard *Plessy v. Ferguson*—heard a case about a crate of oranges to be imported from Puerto Rico. The question was whether the United States could collect taxes (per the terms of the Puerto Rican Organic Act, also known as the Foraker Act) on an import of oranges from Puerto Rico. Its implications would extend to other imports, including sugar. American Sugar actively opposed free trade for Puerto Rican imported sugar and therefore did not want the United States to annex the territories as states and give them free trade. If Puerto Rico were annexed and considered domestic, then the Foraker Act could not hold, meaning that imports would *not* be taxed. If it was foreign, imports would be taxed. How, you might wonder, is this case about race?

This case, *Downes v. Bidwell*, is one of the *Insular Cases*, which determined the relationship of Spain’s former colonies to the United States.

While most of the *Insular Cases* centered on the status of Puerto Rico and the rights of Puerto Ricans vis-à-vis the United States, the decisions extended to other territories and were haunted by debates over the Philippines and Filipinos' racial status. Virtually no one at the time thought Filipinos could be incorporated into the U.S. on equal terms. They were racially other and the thought of incorporating nonwhite people after the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was implausible to imperialists and nativists alike.

In their decision on *Downes*, justices argued that people in the former Spanish territories were "alien races" who were unaccustomed to "Anglo-Saxon principles." Recall that this was a case about the import of oranges. But racial concerns were front and center in deciding the territorial status of Puerto Rico. The USSC thus transformed existing concerns over race and nation into law that was not explicitly racial. Instead, *Downes* created a new legal category of an "unincorporated territory" so that imports from Puerto Rico would be taxed, which is what American sugar wanted. Puerto Rico and the other colonies would be "foreign" in this sense, but the territories would also be "domestic." In fact, one justice called it "foreign in a domestic sense." The territories "belonged to, but were not part of the United States." And while there were capitalist interests in this case, these were also racial.

Socio legal history isn't the only way social science can help us understand empire. What social science has to offer depends in part on what kind of social science we are talking about. Different subfields and disciplines encourage different approaches to the study of social problems. For example, even though my concern and interest in empire is motivated by concern for those who are excluded and subordinated, I have tended to focus on how people in power create social problems, define race, exclude unwanted populations. I've taken this approach because I believe it is powerful for demonstrating how we got to where we are, how race is socially constructed and the material

consequences that result from classification. I also believe in calling out and naming power. Nevertheless, often when I talk with my friends and colleagues in American or ethnic studies, this way of studying seems less popular today. Studying the subaltern, people on the ground, people engaged in everyday resistance is not only empirically important but empowering to those of us invested in changing the world.

I think most social scientists would agree that we aim to explain the world around us, and perhaps in this room, a related aim is to transform or affect the world. Of course, scholarship, whether it has explicit aims to transform the world does affect it, often not for the better. And here I'm thinking of histories of statistics and eugenics, the development of American sociology as a justification for slavery, the ethnographic study of colonial places and populations that helped justify rule.

Given this, what should our role be? My take is, perhaps, somewhat at odds with my investment in this profession and what brought me to it. If you'll indulge me a brief story about my changing understanding of sociology: The sociology department at my undergraduate institution was dedicated to social justice. At the time, it was a tagline of the program. I was also part of a student organization called the Global Justice Project, and our most dedicated supporters were by and large sociology faculty. They'd come to actions with us; several got arrested during protests. I understood sociology as deeply engaged in making the world a better place and sociologists as people willing to make sacrifices to do so.

In graduate school and in these early years of my career, I've been disciplined and socialized into a broader understanding of the field. Sociology—especially U.S. sociology—is, after all, a profession. I feel this acutely as I transitioned from graduate student to postdoc to faculty. And I've also learned about the problematic histories of our discipline. I hold my

young experience of sociology in tension with how I now see the field as a whole.

As academia becomes more diverse, I am hopeful for the potential of seeing things from different points of vantage, as feminist, anti-colonial, and Black radical scholars have long advocated. This is important beyond representation, but the presence of people from different social positions can enrich and improve the ways we construct and understand social problems. Still, we're a part of the institution, and I'm not wholly sure we can escape its racist and imperial histories.

I'm hesitant to think that we—if not embedded in and taking guidance from communities and movements—should have power or voice in these matters. How we see empire and its problems in the academy may not reflect how people on the ground see it. We may be a voice, but we must be a voice among many. Our identification of empire's problems, our diagnoses, and the possible solutions can be refined not only through ethnographies, interviews, historical studies, but in conversation and in action with communities. Social action is a way of knowing. Learning in community helps us better understand the problems before us and how we might address them. Social scientists can participate in the project of solving empire, but they must also decenter their academic selves and knowledge.

This presents yet another challenge: should those most impacted by empire be charged with creating a new, more just world? It is easy to say that the subordinated, excluded, and dominated people of the world should guide our project. But how should we value their labor? And what should be the role of people who themselves or whose ancestors had a role in creating the problems in which we find ourselves today? Translating the concerns and needs of marginalized people into action items for broader society is difficult. How do we convince politicians, business owners, or ordinary Americans that empire is a problem? And that it is their problem to solve? Citing U.S. Supreme

Court cases from the early 1900s, as I have, is probably not the way to convince most people that empire is a problem to solve. We also know that xenophobia and racism prevent white Americans from seeing their struggles as bound to those of immigrants and non-white people.

Let me close with the last question asked of us: "how should we think about emancipation?" I'm curious what the phrase "solving empire" would conjure for third world solidarity movements, for organizers of the Bandung Conference, for Pan Asianists and Pan Africanists. Can we see their freedom dreams, in the language of Robin Kelley, as attempts to solve empire?

I think there are guides and lessons to be found in the work of organizers and activists engaged in experimenting and building other worlds, but I don't yet have a clear picture of what solving empire looks like. I think our guidance must come from global movements for decolonization. Not only can we study resistance and learn from their models, but we can listen to people actively engaged in the struggle. We can be thankful for all that they gave us while still recognizing the work yet to be done.

As a student of empire, I still have questions—ones that I wrestle with in scholarly venues, but also in organizing spaces: How should we think about the local and the global as they matter for models of social change? The well-worn phrase "think globally, act locally" comes to mind. But more than that, how can we bring local organization efforts into conversation with one another? How do we link and scale-up our struggles? I hope social science can lend a hand to answering these important questions in organizing and solving empire.

### **Solving the West**

Yannick Coenders

**Northwestern University**

A solution to a problem suggests in many ways that we presuppose the thing to be solved to be an aberration and not a principle structure of

social and political life. As Julian Go helpfully clarifies, empire does not constitute a singular problem and indeed its deep embeddedness into our lives makes it seem to me unavailable for a “solution” in conventional policy sense. Yet, this does not mean that empire cannot be protested and challenged and thereby altered and even abolished. I will argue for one way in which scholarly knowledge production may be of assistance to anti-imperialists. Drawing on ideas from the three panelists, I argue that residues of methodological-nationalism may prevent a more comprehensive identification of “the problem” of empire and thereby of its challenge. I suggest decentering any one nation-state and centering “the West” as a political formation to account for the durability of the current imperial global order.

Katrina Quisumbing King points out that central to the functioning of modern empire is differentiated and hierarchical rule. This differentiated rule – perhaps better understood as racial rule – is in my understanding rooted in the project of Western colonialism that took off in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. To identify the problem of this rule, I think it is important to interrogate the “Western” element of this so that we can make it available for further analysis to aid its undoing. Crucial to any understanding of the West is Go’s suggested methodology of centering the connectedness of being. The interconnections between colonized and colonizer, metropole and colony need to be marked and highlighted to illuminate the very object of empire in similar ways that an analysis of capitalism demands the continuous uncovering of the relationships between the capitalist and exploited classes. Moreover, as Go mentions studying these relationships avoids the trap of methodological nationalism, by pointing out the transnational networks that ostensibly nationally operating elites depend on. Yet, there are more interconnections worth studying. Quisumbing King mentions the lessons we may draw from the historical endeavors of colonized populations across the globe to band together in solidarity against colonial rule. In addition, drawing from

her own work, she also brings up the need to study the elites, the administrators, those who design, produce and carry out imperial rule. I believe, as she does that “naming power” is an essential step towards dismantling it. Yet, it seems here that methodological nationalism continues to haunt us, by conflating Western empire with the United States.

Despite all of the wars that European states have fought from the renaissance to World War II, or perhaps often as a prerequisite to those wars, there was prior agreement about a number of things. Not in the very least, there was an agreement about the fundamental alterity of peoples, lands, culture, climates that Europeans discovered, exploited and exterminated e.g. “Africa”, “the Indian” “the Orient” etc. These categories homogenized objects of rule and in turn suggested a commonality amongst those considering themselves the legitimate rulers self-identifying as European/white/Christian/civilized etc. While these dynamics of racialization and European solidarity across nation-states have been identified by Stoler and Cooper (Stoler and Cooper 1997) as essential to the production of colonial knowledge, this may sometimes remain underappreciated in more concrete political histories that often tend to center a nation-state based conception of empire. This presents us with scholarly accounts of US Empire, British Empire, French Empire etc. While the specificities that they offer are very important and we may in addition get some analytic advantages out of comparing them as separate political entities, this mode of analysis may obscure a fundamental solidarity that produced the west as a political entity exceeding any one single nation-state. To identify this force and analyze how it acts upon the world, a transnational relational analysis is necessary.

To make the necessity of centering the West as a political formation clearer, I will give just one obvious example of how imperialism is irreducible to one particular nation state. A nation-based conception of empire would be insufficient to understand the transnational

circulation of Western grief after 9/11. I grew up in the Netherlands where politicians and media proclaimed that the planes hitting the World Trade Center in New York were a direct attack on “our Western values.” This transnational grief that circulated across Europe, the US and beyond, justified an imperial war against Islam. This war manifested primarily through a twenty year invasion of Afghanistan by a NATO coalition. Yet, it spiraled inward as well through the policing of Muslims’ public visibility by the introduction of bans on Muslim women’s attire in almost all Western European countries, moral panics around the construction of mosques from the New York “Ground Zero Mosque” to the London “Mega Mosque” and the Swiss minaret ban. Finally, the war against Islam meant that Muslims became subject to continuous suspicion for plotting against the West, leading to an immigration ban in the US that coincided with limiting the admittance of Syrian refugees to the European Union. These and the many other ways in which this war has manifested in strikingly similar ways on both sides of the Atlantic and across different nation-states should dissuade analysts from a nation centric approach and invite an interrogation of political coordination and the circulation of discourse. While such scholarship is relatively rare, it is not novel. Recent work has for example interrogated how Western coordination and circulation influenced immigration policy (Bashi 2004; Lake and Reynolds 2008), the policing of anticolonialism (Brückenhaus 2017), racial categories (Kwon 2017; Thompson 2016) and the suppression of Black self-governance (Charles 2020).

This is not to deny the facts that Daniel Immerwahr presents. It is hard to overstate the outsized power of the US by the command of its military, the dollar and its cultural production. It is also important to note, as Immerwahr does, that there is little disagreement amongst US elites regarding its perception of self in the world and as needing to sit “at the head of the table.” However, given its power and possibilities to go at it alone, it is worth pondering the metaphor of the table that US president Joe Biden invoked. A

head of a table implies that there are other seats. We may want to know why those other seats would be there in the first place. Who is allowed to sit in them? What are the criteria for inclusion? While the US sits at the head of the table, the collectivity seated at it may be as crucial to the maintenance of empire as its momentary leader. Who sits at the head has changed several times for the past 600 years, yet the composition of the table has been remarkably stable. Go points out that conceiving of the US as an imperial project has been recent and marks a significant intellectual shift in sociology. Yet, the (re)discovery of the US as an imperial force should not overlook the larger political project it perpetuates, namely Western empire. In my mind one central task for sociologists that want to speed up the dismantling of this empire will be to identify the conditions of possibility for the political formation that we may call the West that we may call whiteness or otherwise. A research agenda that asks what binds the West together? What sustains its internal solidarity? What practices could disrupt this ostensibly natural coalition? I appreciate Immerwahr’s call to take as a starting point conceiving of empire as a set of practices. I hope I made a case for further interrogation of the practices that bind different Western nation-states together in solidarity, so it is possible to formulate objections to them and turn the West into a problem.

## **Models of Solving Empire**

Luna Vincent

**Northwestern University**

While I agree with the critiques of the problem solving frame provided by the wonderful panelists, I will argue that it is still useful and describe exactly how I think one might approach empire with “problem solving” intentions. The panelists point out two important issues with the idea of using the problem solving frame, asking us to consider “who defines what issues as problems?” and “who actually even considers empire a problem, let alone one they are willing to solve?” More specifically, Dr. Go points out how academia, and particularly sociology as a

discipline has been a site of active imperial support and was constituted in and of imperial pursuits. This forces us to ask ourselves if sociologists could even possibly exist outside of its imperial origins in a way that hinders or ends empire. Dr. Immerwahr then points to the limits of problem solving sociology of empire as one that works with policy makers: noting that policy makers are primary beneficiaries of empire who are often tasked with maintaining it. I agree with both of these points: historically, mainstream social scientific academia and the majority policy makers have acted in service of empire and imperial pursuits. We thus have a problem or two in our problem-solving approach to the study of empire.

However, even if mainstream academia and majority of policy makers actually act in service of imperial maintenance (and even expansion), I believe a social scientist earnest in their efforts can use social science towards a goal of ending, therefore “solving” empire. The first task would be to find the people who do similarly define empire as a “problem” whose “solution” is its end. As Drs Go, Immerwahr, and Quisumbing King alluded, looking for these people in traditional academics policy-makers’ spaces would likely fail. However, these people exist. Many of the people who conceive of empire at large as a problem can be found in anti-imperial political collectives. As resistance to the modern empire-state has existed as long as the modern empire state has existed, there are groups of peoples with rich histories of anti-imperial political action, knowledge, and strategy. If we consider these groups of people the people a social science to end empire must be accountable to, then the question can be reframed from “how can the social sciences solve empire?” to “how can we use the tools of social science to serve the ongoing struggles to eradicate the imperial global order?”

If we accept this reframe, which I think is in line with Dr. Quisumbing King’s conclusions, then we have several real world models of scholars doing this kind of work that we can learn from.

Dr. Go mentioned Jane Addams and W.E.B. DuBois, Dr. Quisumbing-King mentioned Robin D.G. Kelley and there are many more. Just here in Chicago there are people working alongside movements and holding their work accountable to movement like Barbara Ransby, Beth Ritchie, and Cathy Cohen. Scholars like Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore and so many more work alongside activists and resisters who define empire as problem and consistently act with the ultimate goal of its end.

I bring these scholars up as models for a problem solving sociology of empire. What is worth modeling here, and what I think is essential to “problem-solving” scholarship is not just the way these scholars share their work with movement actors, but how their research agendas are shaped by their movement involvement! They ask, sometimes directly, what questions will yield useful answers in the struggle to “solve” their commonly defined problem. They build systems of adjudication for themselves which ask movement actors to earnestly adjudicate the generated knowledge’s potential utility for, in our case, eradicating the imperial global order.

To Dr. Immerwahr's point that Marx sought to change the world but is remembered for how he interpreted it, perhaps Marx was *able* to interpret it because he tried to change it. He was consistently engaged in organized social resistance and thus had his finger on the pulse of the movement.

I was once told by Dr. Beth Ritchie that a way to make sure you are attempting to answer questions that would be useful for movement was to have two dissertation committees: one regular academic one, and one with people you trust who do political, grass-roots work. I found this advice particularly useful and applicable far beyond the dissertation phase; if we keep asking movement actors how our work can be of service to anti-imperial political movement then our work will more likely be of service to anti-imperial political movement. In this way, I think

a problem solving sociology of empire is possible.

## Dissolving Empire

Perdana P. Roswaldy

Northwestern University

How should one solve empire? This question has haunted many scholars of plantations and (post)colonialism across disciplines; some answer with pessimism and uncertainty. Truthfully, I, on my own, do not have an answer to such a question, because just like Julian Go argues correctly: we cannot talk about empire without reproducing it. However, my informants in Indonesian plantations and customary forests may do. I have been an ethnographer of Indonesia's agrarian politics and economies for the last seven years. One thing that strikes me is the gap between how scholars frame problems and "solving" and the very people who must face empire in a dead-or-alive situation. For many indigenous people and precarious farmers whose livelihoods are threatened by the expansion of plantations and imperial definitions of wealth, empire *must* be solved. As a matter of fact, the empire *must* be destroyed because it is at the core of so many problems they face and how it devalues their very existence.

While the solution for empire is clear (its destruction), the solving process requires a massive amount of work, with trials, errors, and potentially many backfires. Daniel Immerwahr deduced correctly, empire is a nebulous concept; it can mean anything from gender, sexuality, wealth, race, and ability. The meanings also entangle to one another; solving one may perpetuate others, complicating any attempts to cease the problems of empire. Describing the problem, then, is still crucial because the description of problems sets the course for solving them. However, descriptions alone are not enough and may even provoke frustrations for the victims and survivors of the empire. Dianne Rocheleau, a political ecology feminist, researched about the gendered power relation in a Kenyan forestry village. When she introduced

her problem descriptions to the Kenyan audience (mostly women, both academics and activists), they were upset. The descriptions, for many Kenyan women, are not new, and they did not understand why their bodily experience of anti-indigeneity and colonialism only became a theoretical playground for Rocheleau. Describing this is insufficient, even more upsetting for the Kenyans that they had to cite a white woman from the first world country to explain about their pain. Description, argues Katherine McKittrick, is not liberation; but may I add, not by itself.

I reflect on my work to solve the problems of plantations, another node of empire economies, that have plagued Indonesian economies for over a hundred years. Like the rural Kenyan women, I grow frustrated with how many well-meaning scholars describe the problems of plantations in Southeast Asia and later offer solutions (or not) to the plantation issues. I know that solving plantations must involve uprooting rural feudal property ownership, slowing down the flows of goods and capital between rural and urban areas, and heavy investments and incentives for farmers instead of the agro-corporations. In that sense, solving empire then requires a limit: which part of empire that we want to solve? There is only so much that a sociologist can do anyway. However, designing steps to end plantations also reveals the bitter truth of how much plantations have ingrained in the Indonesian vision for growth and development as a nation. Hence, my possible and nascent solutions also force me to think about whether ending plantations means reshaping Indonesia – which is beyond the scope of my research.

My case then shows another layer of empire that we have to grasp: its adaptability. What once were the means for Dutch colonialism to fund its metropole's welfare, plantations have transformed into a postcolonial, and sometimes ironically anticolonial, institution. Solving empire then will take a long time because there will be no guarantee that it will stop even with radical movements and policies. Accounting for

empire's adaptability requires what the philosopher Rocío Zambrana calls "historical reckoning" or the long process of detangling and (re)describing and (re)framing problems to produce initial steps for actions even for a short period. Here is for me where the role of sociologists can also be powerful beyond describing and solving problems: that our skeptical mode of knowing can see the potential problem with the solving part or even the solutions. Such a process is a good reminder that solving is not a linear process; there will be mishaps, successes, and complete failures that should not prevent one from imagining and designing another possible world.

If our method is not convincing enough for problem-solving, our informants will force us to do so anyway. Katrina Quisumbing King correctly reminded us about humility: who are we to "tell people what to do"? However, as an ethnographer, I have lost count of how many times my informants asked me what to do. When I study gender restructuring in a post-conflict community, women I interviewed and who grieved about their new precarity always reminded me that I had something to help them. "How can we make our labor count in our village? The plantation company took everything and now I am so exhausted from surviving, I can't think. You learn something to help us in school, right?" asked Paulina. She is right: I have the resources to think about solutions, even for the short-term period. Paulina's plea is also a cruel reminder that social problems afflict many and exist beyond academia's armchairs and seminar rooms. Problem-solving is also a device to respect my informants' intentions in helping me, so I will not be the only one who extracts the knowledge from them.

Solving empire is an almost impossible task but a mandatory one for many; only by examining and participating in the struggle against empire beyond the ivory tower and our academic peer reviews, I finally understand what Walter Benjamin calls "organizing pessimism." My

informants are mostly pessimistic about the future. Still, it does not discourage them from exercising their rights through whatever channels they have, starting from legal battles or land occupation in the plantations. Every defeat means re-strategizing to prevent the worst, precisely because they now know what could have happened. They know and embody how progress often does not have a clear path and will involve wounds afflicted upon them or others. Fanon has predicted that decolonization will be violent because our convenience is ingrained in imperial pain and dispossession of others. Solving empire then requires another pressing question: can we imagine and build growth that is not adjacent to capitalism, whiteness, and imperialism?

Learning from others before me, my informants, and echoing Katrina Quisumbing King, the dissolution for empire will involve connecting the dots and weaving our shared struggle. It will also involve voices typically absent from our academic institutions: our own interlocutors, activists, non-Euroamerican scholars, and artists. Sometimes, the solving process has been running, the solutions may have always been there. They are just beyond the methodologies of social science and the scrutiny of unnecessarily time-consuming academic peer reviews.

## Conclusions (and Beginnings)

Monica Prasad

**Northwestern University**

I was struck by Perdana Roswally's observation that when we embed ourselves in communities that are experiencing oppression, the first thing they ask is: "Can you help me?" That is, when we do what several panelists suggest, and turn to "anticolonial and postcolonial thinkers" and the "subordinated, excluded, and dominated people of the world," often they turn back to us and say: what can you bring to this effort?

What Roswally's respondent Paulina is asking is straightforward. She knows that the situation she is experiencing is not right. But she does not

have the time, the resources, and the luxury to figure out why the world is producing this situation, what the alternatives to it are, and how those alternatives can be brought into being. She is asking us to contribute those insights. In fact, she is asking us to do sociology: sociology that identifies the causes of problems, the potential solutions to problems, and the mechanisms that can move the world closer to the solutions (Prasad 2021). Comparative historical methods are central to all of these tasks, because comparison is the secret weapon for examining how issues as seemingly intractable as empire can be overcome.

If “anticolonial and postcolonial thinkers” have solutions, of course we should consider those solutions. But in many cases indigenous intellectuals are giving the same excuses we give for not trying to solve the problem.

The path forward is to figure out what we do not yet know. If we know the solution to empire, but the problem is “Voters appear to be increasingly apathetic about empire” then *that is the problem to be solved*: why are voters apathetic about empire? What can make them change? Indeed, as Luna Vincent notes, even if our goal is only to produce good descriptions, like Marx, the best way to get there is by genuinely trying to change the situation, like Marx.

In the end, it is again Roswally who has identified the issue in the clearest of terms: empire must be solved. For anyone interested in the effort, and in thinking through what sociologists can do beyond describing problems, join us at

<https://www.problemsolvingsociology.com>.

## References

Bashi, Vilna. 2004. “Globalized Anti-Blackness: Transnationalizing Western Immigration Law, Policy, and Practice.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27(4):584–606.

Brückenhaus, Daniel. 2017. *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905-1945*. Oxford University Press.

Charles, Jean Max. 2020. “The Slave Revolt That Changed the World and the Conspiracy Against It: The Haitian Revolution and the Birth of Scientific Racism.” *Journal of Black Studies* 51(4):275–94.

DiPrete, Thomas A., and Brittany N. Fox-Williams. “The Relevance of Inequality Research in Sociology for Inequality Reduction.” *Socius* 7 (2021): 23780231211020199.

Go, Julian. “For a postcolonial sociology.” *Theory and Society* 42, no. 1 (2013): 25-55.

Go, Julian. “Global fields and imperial forms: Field theory and the British and American empires.” *Sociological theory* 26, no. 3 (2008): 201-229.

Go, Julian. *Patterns of empire: The British and American empires, 1688 to the present*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Immerwahr, Daniel. “The greater United States: Territory and empire in US history.” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 3 (2016): 373-391.

Immerwahr, Daniel. *How to hide an empire: A short history of the greater United States*. Random House, 2019.

Kwon, Yaejoon. 2017. “Transcolonial Racial Formation: Constructing the ‘Irish of the

Orient’ in US-Occupied Korea.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 3(2):268–81.

Lake, Marilyn, and Henry Reynolds. 2008. *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality*. Melbourne Univ. Publishing.



Prasad, Monica. 2021. Problem-Solving Sociology. New York: Oxford University Press.

Quisumbing King, Katrina. "Recentring US empire: A structural perspective on the color line." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 1 (2019): 11-25.

Stoler, Ann Laura, and Frederick Cooper. 1997. "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda." Pp. 1–56 in *Tensions of empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler. University of California Press.

Thompson, Debra. 2016. *The Schematic State*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Watts, Duncan J. "Should social science be more solution-oriented?." *Nature Human Behaviour* 1, no. 1 (2017): 1-5.

## New Book Series: Studies in Historical Sociology

### An Interview with the Editors

Simeon J. Newman, University of Michigan

## Cambridge Studies in Historical Sociology

*Stephanie Mudge* (University of California, Davis) and *Anthony Chen* (Northwestern University) recently assumed the editorship of *Studies in Historical Sociology*, a new book series by Cambridge University Press. Since this development is likely to be of broad interest to historical sociologists, I approached them for an interview. I was interested to know their views about historical sociology in general and their vision for the series in particular. Here's what they said.

**What are your views about the current state of historical sociology? What do you like about it? What trends worry you?**

**Mudge:** I think historical sociology is doing great — expanding its horizons geographically and temporally, taking up new topics (and old topics in new ways). I'm especially excited about the potential to finally, and hopefully permanently, blur the hard line that is sometimes drawn between quantitative versus qualitative methods in historical research. The trend that worries me, and which I hope this new series will help to address, is the dispersion of works of historical sociology across topical fields, rather than having a shared home for historical sociological work — and, more importantly, a shared conversation.

**Chen:** I'm greatly heartened by the growing number of talented, young sociologists who are

choosing to take a historical approach to their sociological investigations. Giving them a place to publish their best work is definitely one of the key motivations for launching the series.

**What do you expect the near future to hold for the field? What kinds of books would you most like to publish? I'm sure you don't expect submissions to conform to your every wish. But what are your wishes?**

**Chen:** I think we would most like to publish books that make high-quality contributions to historical sociology, broadly conceived. This means, among many other things, books that raise important new questions, books that provide original and compelling evidence of theoretically meaningful claims, books that change our angle of vision on a well-tilled problematic, books that significantly shift the conversation in a certain area of inquiry, or books that introduce innovative theories or concepts that deserve wide exploration. We certainly have our own interests and preferences, and naturally we would be delighted if books that fit them wind up getting published. But what we care the most about is quality.

**Mudge:** There are many ways of writing great works of historical sociology. I'm particularly interested in seeing manuscripts that are outstanding in terms of careful, explicit theoretical grounding, and attention to matters of explanation. I also hope to see plenty of

submissions that push out historical sociology's boundaries in terms of topics, time periods, geographies, concepts, and methods. Last but not least, given the crisis-ridden historical moment in which we now find ourselves, I'd love to see work that has the potential to be public-facing — that is, work that can be translated into journalistic formats and op-eds for general audiences, informing contemporary debates about how to think about the past and orient ourselves toward the future.

**In recent years, historical sociologists have turned to primary sources much like those with which historians often work. Will this orientation persist? How important do you feel primary sources will be to the historical sociology of the future?**

**Chen:** I hope that serious research using primary sources is here to stay for the long term in historical sociology. But I wouldn't want to see it become an object of fetish or a badge of authenticity. Working with primary sources is indispensable to historicizing (by which I roughly mean "placing into historical context") many different pieces of your analysis, ranging from what you are trying to explain (or interpret) to what you think is propelling the causal or interpretive action. It is essential to reconstructing and setting into spatial and historical context the things specific people said, did, or thought. But it is certainly possible for historical sociologists to gratuitously cite primary sources they don't need. At the same time, there are plenty of talented and important historians who have done spadework of their own in the primary sources, and historical sociologists risk reinventing the wheel if they fail to become familiar with the relevant historiography before citing everything they found during their plunge into the archives.

**Mudge:** I'm sure the turn to primary sources will persist, though perhaps in new forms, especially considering the expansion of digital archival resources and materials, new tools for translation, and computational "big data" modes

of analysis. I completely agree with Chen that, at the same time, we should be wary of fetishizing primary sources — and in particular "the archive." History is everywhere around us, and the empirical resources historical sociologists use should reflect that — while always attending, at the same time, to questions of the quality and appropriate use of different kinds of empirical sources. I also think it's important that historical sociologists recognize the value of existing historical scholarship, across the human sciences — and build on it.

**What about comparison? During a previous era, historical sociologists defended the field against naysayers, in part, by asserting that comparison made the enterprise scientific. Few of those naysayers remain vocal, and practitioners seem to oscillate between calling the field "comparative-historical sociology" and just "historical sociology." Indeed, the word "comparison" doesn't even feature in the name of the series you're editing. Is comparison still a good thing? If it is no longer needed to assuage doubts, what, if any, laudable ends does it continue to serve? And how much comparison is too much comparison (and not enough history)?**

**Mudge:** My feeling on comparison is the same as my broader position on all matters of method: it should be appropriate for the question, and grounded in the history of the subject matter. Comparison is one of the most powerful tools in the historical sociologist's toolbox, but there's no use in doing comparison for comparison's sake.

**Chen:** Comparison has a place in the intellectual armamentarium of historical sociology. It's often a good thing to do; it's often the right thing to do. But I'm not wedded to a single conception of comparison, and I don't think it's the only rigorous method of analysis or the only method of analysis capable of generating high-quality empirical evidence of sociologically meaningful claims. Generally speaking, I think of comparison as a powerful subset of "small-N"

approaches that have a strong family resemblance, but to me it is far from the only important family of approaches out there. As for whether comparison serves laudable ends, I think it can serve laudable ends in the same manner that every other analytical approach can serve laudable ends — when it is applied to questions or problems that it is well-suited to addressing. There cannot be, there should not be “one (methodological) ring to rule them all,” in my view. Of course, abjuring *Methodenstreit* is one way that sociologists signal their intellectual sophistication. That’s not my intent. Our quarrels over method — and epistemology even more fundamentally — continue to recur over the generations, and I don’t see myself operating above the fray any more than anyone else is. I suppose my point is that our ideas about methods and epistemology change dynamically, and our critical appraisal of different investigative approaches (what is strong or weak about them) change dynamically as well. We should lean into these conversations as historical sociologists and then make the best methodological choices we can at the moments we need to make a choice. Right now, for a lot of historical sociologists, some form of comparison continues to make strong sense — and for good reasons.

**Will sociology books keep getting shorter? When does a contribution merit 100,000 words, and when does one merit (or suffer from) twice that? Clearly publishers have their preferences. But what considerations would lead you as series editors to recommend that a work go to press with more words (or with fewer)?**

**Chen:** Books should be as long as they need to be, no longer and no shorter. Of course, it’s easy enough to say that. It can be hard to make a call about length when a decision is needed. That being said, I think authors should be given the length they require to make whatever high-quality contribution they are aiming to make. If they can’t make their high-quality contribution without going longer, then they should go longer. But if they can make their high-quality

contribution in 75,000 words, then 75,000 words (or whatever number) is what they should aim for. I am definitely sympathetic to the argument that certain types of high-quality contributions require a great deal of space. For instance, if a manuscript were based on the discovery of several hitherto untapped manuscript collections and if presenting detailed findings from a close reading of these manuscripts were essential to making a strong case, I could see myself recommending more words. At the same time, if multiple passages of a book manuscript strike me as redundant or irrelevant or insignificant, I would be less receptive to raising the word limit.

**Mudge:** For me, the key considerations are scope, methods, audience, and the quality of the writing. More words make sense when the writing is well-crafted and the book is ambitious in terms of empirical scope, theory, and methods. Multiple cases, long time periods, multiple forms of evidence, narrative modes of analysis, and highly technical work requiring careful explanation are all good reasons for a slightly longer book — that is, as long as the writing is as clear and tight as possible. Finally, a lengthier book may also make sense when it is oriented toward multiple audiences — that is, multiple disciplinary audiences and/or both academic and public audiences — but, if so, there needs to be a very good road map at the beginning.

**How do you weigh a book’s empirical vs. its theoretical contribution? How much case evidence is too much? And at what point does a theoretical apparatus overpower a historical-sociological contribution?**

**Mudge:** Great works in historical sociology inform our understanding of the unfolding of specific processes, in specific times and places, while also drawing out implications in ways that travel to other processes, times, and places. To me this means that the weight and importance of an empirical contribution depends a great deal on how well the analysis is framed theoretically and, more importantly, whether the theoretical perspective makes the analytical story possible

— that is, whether it provides a way of thinking and a conceptual vocabulary that drives the questions asked, the evidence gathered, and the explanations advanced. I think it's not too hard to tell when theory is doing real work, and when it is not. As regards 'too much' case evidence: if a book is tightly formulated, the author's rules of evidence are clear, and there is evidence that bears clearly and directly on an explanatory argument, then I'm not sure there can be too much.

**Chen:** It's definitely the case that books can be too theory-heavy. But it's also the case that they can be too theory-light. There are so many different types of books, and many different ways to strike a sensible balance. As a general rule, if a book is clearly and compellingly motivated — that is, if a strong intellectual justification for the project is laid out at the outset, it is usually straightforward to identify the right balance between theory and evidence. Often, it's when the motivation for a book is not clearly formulated or articulated that imbalances crop up.

**Historical sociology is mostly a subtype of political sociology. Assuming you agree, how do you feel about that? Does this represent a strength or a weakness?**

**Mudge:** I think this is broadly true historically, at least in terms of how historical sociologists have tended to define themselves and their subject matter. But there is a great deal of historical work that is not centrally about politics or political institutions — in economic sociology, sociology of science and knowledge, the sociology of race, and cultural sociology, for instance. The human world unfolds in a historical way, and so my position is that historical sociology's topical net should be cast very widely. I would like to cultivate a series that cuts across topical subfields, showcasing the breadth and strength of historically-minded sociological analysis.

**Chen:** I agree. I think that historical sociology these days is much more than a subtype of political sociology, although a great many historical sociologists are interested in power and politics. This breadth is a strength. Historical sociologists are free to follow their sociological imaginations and investigate a wide range of outcomes and processes. But this breadth is also a weakness. It can obviously exacerbate some of the centrifugal forces that run through the subfield. We were partly motivated to propose the series in order to counteract these centrifugal forces by establishing a common intellectual venue where the most exciting, agenda-setting books in historical sociology might be published.

**Are there major topics that have not featured prominently enough in American historical sociology that you envision entering its purview and becoming major concerns?**

**Mudge:** I'd frame this a little differently; I'd say that among authors who do historical work, not enough of them identify themselves, specifically, as historical sociologists. I hope that this series provides a space for authors who approach the formulation of questions and the analysis of evidence historically, in a temporally-sensitive way, who might ordinarily consider themselves topical specialists, to situate themselves *also* under the (hopefully) ever-broadening tent of historical sociology.

**Chen:** Not surprisingly, I agree with Mudge. There is important scholarship that not only takes a historicist approach to defining and investigating problems of sociological interest, but also touches directly on the interests and concerns of historical sociologists. In many cases, such scholarship straddles historical sociology and another subfield. Yet it is only faintly identified as historical sociology. We hope the establishment of the Studies in Historical Sociology series gives future authors of such work the intellectual opportunity and professional incentive to engage with historical sociology more fully than they might have had in the past.

**There is sometimes a perception that historical sociology is an elite affair. And yet many of the scholars who had the largest impact on sociology in the past developed theoretical models of processes and outcomes, much as historical sociologists do today. What do you make of this? Is historical sociology a luxury? Is it just rudimentary? Or is it something else altogether?**

**Mudge:** This is such an important conversation to have! If we think history is important for the present, then historical sociology *cannot* be a luxury; it is essential, and rightfully at the core of the discipline.

Whether, why, and to whom it seems inaccessible or closed-off are questions we need to address in conversation, especially, with graduate students and early-career sociologists. The impulse behind the new series is to widen the space for historical-sociological work, to give it a platform and a broad audience — to connect what’s known and knowable about the past with our thinking about the present and future. If, along the way, we’re able to cultivate a conversation about building a renewed, broad-ranging, inclusive historical sociology, I’m all for it. In the meantime, I hope that this series pushes us in the right direction.

**Chen:** I agree!

## Cambridge Studies in Historical Sociology

Edited by Anthony S. Chen (Northwestern University) and Stephanie L. Mudge (University of California, Davis)

*Cambridge Studies in Historical Sociology* publishes scholarship that seeks to explain sociologically and historically significant processes and outcomes. The series conceives of historical sociology broadly and aims to publish exemplary, agenda-setting work, regardless of intellectual perspective, historical period, geographic focus, analytic scale, or methodological approach.

### Meet the Editors

**Anthony S. Chen** is Associate Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Northwestern University, where he is also faculty fellow at the Institute for Policy Research. Chen is the author of *The Fifth Freedom*, a prize-winning study that chronicles the emergence of affirmative action in employment in the United States; his work has appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Journal of American History*, and *Studies in American Political Development*, which he formerly co-edited.

Contact: [anthony-chen@northwestern.edu](mailto:anthony-chen@northwestern.edu)

**Stephanie L. Mudge** is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California-Davis. Her award-winning book, *Leftism Reinvented* (2018), offers a biographically-attuned historical and comparative account of Western center-left political parties’ programmatic transformations over the course of the 20th Century. She is a former fellow of the European University Institute (EUI), the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), and the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI), and her work has appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *Socio-Economic Review*, the *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Social Science History*, and the *European Journal of Sociology*, among others.

Contact: [mudge@ucdavis.edu](mailto:mudge@ucdavis.edu)

### Editorial Board

Angel Adams Parham, *Loyola University New Orleans*  
Jenny Andersson, *Uppsala University*  
Nitsan Chorev, *Brown University*  
Manali Desai, *Cambridge University*  
Emily Erikson, *Yale University*  
Cybelle Fox, *UC-Berkeley*  
Julian Go, *University of Chicago*  
Wenkai He, *Hong Kong University of Science and Technology*  
Robert Jansen, *University of Michigan*  
Hazem Kandil, *Cambridge University*  
Greta Krippner, *University of Michigan*

Isaac Martin, *UC-San Diego*  
Virag Molnar, *New School for Social Research*  
Alondra Nelson, *Institute for Advanced Study*  
Joshua Pacewicz, *Brown University*  
Christopher S. Parker, *University of Washington*  
Tianna Paschel, *UC-Berkeley*  
Sarah Quinn, *University of Washington*  
Lisa M. Stulberg, *NYU*  
Antoine Vauchez, *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*  
Genevieve Zubrzycki, *University of Michigan*

## Comparative-Historical Sociology

## 2021 Section Awards



*For this issue of Trajectories, we reached out to all the award winners and requested them to write a short piece discussing their work, and what this award means to them. The responses we received are featured in the following pages.*

**DISTINGUISHED CAREER AWARD**

*In recognition of a lifetime of outstanding contributions to comparative-historical sociology. The award is normally named the Ibn Khaldun Distinguished Career Award. In light of the debate over award naming in the Business Meeting, Professor Orlando Patterson received the award from then-Chair Mabel Berezin without the name attached.*

**Winner:** Orlando Patterson, John Cowles Professor of Sociology at Harvard University

**Committee:** *Andreas Wimmer (Chair), Columbia University; Julian Go, University of Chicago; Philip Gorski, Yale; Monica Prasad, Northwestern University.*

**BARRINGTON MOORE BOOK AWARD**

**Winner:** [Elisabeth S. Clemens, \*Civic Gifts: Voluntarism and the Making of the American Nation-State\* \(Chicago 2020\).](#)

**Honorable Mention:** [Yuen Yuen Ang, \*China's Gilded Age: The Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption\* \(Cambridge University Press 2020\).](#)

**Committee:** Stephanie Lee Mudge (Chair), University of California-Davis; Robert Braun, University of California-Berkeley; Angel Parham, Loyola University-New Orleans.

**CHARLES TILLY ARTICLE AWARD**

**Co-Winner:** [Hana Brown. 2020. "Who Is an Indian Child? Institutional Context, Tribal Sovereignty, and Race-Making in Fragmented States." \*American Sociological Review\* 85\(5\):776-805.](#)

**Co-Winner:** [John N. Robinson III. 2020. "Making Markets on the Margins: Housing Finance Agencies and the Racial Politics of Credit Expansion." \*American Journal of Sociology\* . 125\(4\): 974-1029.](#)

**Committee:** *Shamus Khan (Chair), Columbia University; Eddy U, University of California, Davis; Alexander Kentikelenis, Bocconi University, Milan.*

### THEDA SKOCPOL DISSERTATION AWARD

**Winner:** Benjamin H. Bradlow, “Urban Origins of Democracy and Inequality: Governing Sao Paolo and Johannesburg, 1985-2016.” Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University 2020.

**Committee:** Lyn Spillman (Chair), University of Notre Dame; Tad Skotnicki, University of North Carolina, Greensboro; Lotesta, Johnnie Anne, Harvard University, Ash Center.

### REINHARD BENDIX STUDENT PAPER AWARD

**Winner:** Omri Tubi (Northwestern), [“Kill me a mosquito and I will build a state: political economy and the socio-technicalities of Jewish colonization in Palestine, 1922–1940”](#) *Theory and Society*: 50, pages 97–124 (2021).

**Honorable Mention:** Wen Xie (Chicago), “Generation as Structure: Market Transformation in China’s Socialist Industrial Heartland”

**Committee:** Jonathan Wyrzten (Chair), Yale University; Maryam Alemzadeh, Princeton; Simeon J. Newman, Michigan.

---

### On Writing *Civic Gifts*

Elisabeth S. Clemens

University of Chicago

It took a long time. *Civic Gifts* began with a question born of frustration: why was American government so complicated? In my earlier work on political history and social policy, I had repeatedly encountered the abyss between how things worked in particular cases and the plausibility of an elegant system of checks and balances, of constitutional order. The complications were multiplied by comparisons to the stylized welfare state, composed of a suite of public benefits and social insurance programs.

My efforts to delineate a crisp research question about the American state collapsed time and again, as a menagerie of other kinds of organizations and actors crowded into my provisional maps of the political system. Public social provision involved voluntary organizations, foundations, and firms along with political parties and government agencies. Eventually, I realized that my research questions had to confront rather than clear away this complicated organizational mix.

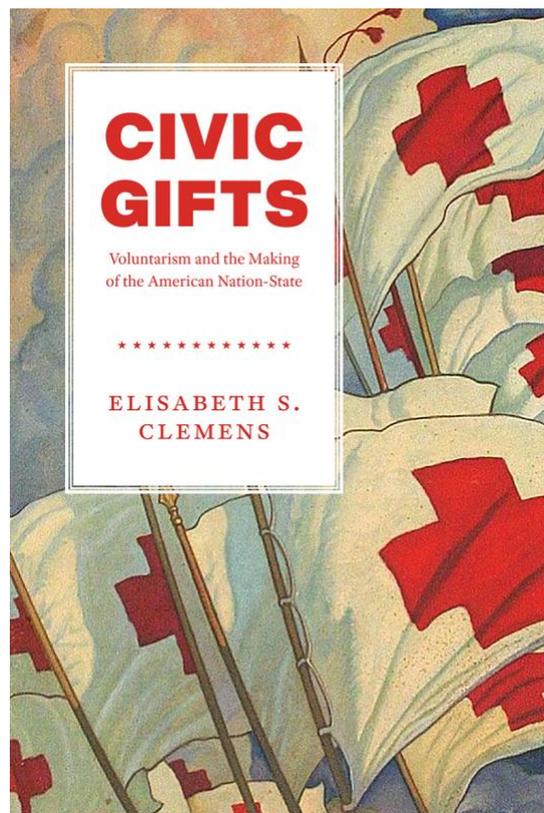
But “it’s complicated” isn’t much of an argument. An adequate answer would require flipping the conventional understanding of the relation of voluntarism to the state. Often characterized as an alternative to, indeed in Tocqueville’s analysis a bulwark against, the development of a strong centralized administrative state, American voluntarism developed as a profoundly necessary complement to the state across all levels of government. These pervasively private, but often performatively civic, elements had frustrated my efforts to understand the development of the American state in terms of public institutions and capacities and authorities.

This reorientation benefited from Michael Mann’s important concept of infrastructural power, but added awareness of the “constitutive contradictions” that such governing arrangements entail. State institutions are not ideologically innocent. They embody and are authorized by understandings of when and why authority is legitimate, of how rights and duties and accountability are to be organized. Consequently, the construction of governing arrangements comprising substantial private elements may embed deeply resented dissonances into the political order. In American development, this dynamic is particularly intense when voluntarism appears in the form of benevolence or charity. As Georg Simmel argued in “The Poor” and Hannah Arendt contended in her comparison of the American and French Revolution, receipt of charity generates dependence, an expectation of

gratitude or reciprocation, and consequently does damage to the recipient's self-understanding as a free and equal citizen.

Tracking these configurations from the early Republic through the Civil War and on through the Second World War, this analysis helped to resolve multiple puzzles about American political development. How did the allegedly weak state of the nineteenth century, which Stephen Skowronek famously described as a "state of courts and parties," become a formidable world power? How did that formidable world power develop within a political culture that was and continues to be importantly anti-statist? In the United States, the state repeatedly made war but, until the onset of the Cold War, war did not reliably and robustly make the state. Finally, how have elites, in an increasingly unequal society, exert power within a democracy comprised of formally equal citizens? Voluntarism, I came to understand, enabled an important political alchemy that transformed the wealthy into leading citizens.

*Civic Gifts* ends with the decade following the Second World War and anticipates the state-building of the Great Society which was accomplished through greatly expanded contracting to non-profit organizations as well as private firms. But this mode of state-building is with us still and not only in the United States. A growing body of scholarship on European welfare states, even in their most classically Nordic form, has recognized the ways in which benevolent organizations, churches, and philanthropy were entangled in the expansion of public – or possibly civic – social provision. Most recently, the global pandemic has provided vivid evidence of the ways in which voluntarism figures in responses to crisis across a variety of political regimes. Under authoritarian regimes and in liberal democracies, the response to the first wave of Covid was marked by the proliferation of voluntary efforts: to collect and manufacture personal protective equipment or to provide mutual aid. Mayors and governors oversaw new collaborations of hospitals, now-



emptied hotels and convention centers, and insta-firms providing (or claiming to provide) testing and other medical services. In some places these efforts were celebrated with glowing media coverage of volunteers; elsewhere, these grassroots endeavors were quietly shut down as governments imposed greater central control over the response to the epidemic.

Over the past months, we have again seen the proliferation of complex configurations of governments, firms, and voluntary organizations in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These latest eruptions of pandemic and war remind us that state capacity is not determined by officially political agencies alone. But such eruptions of voluntarism are not simply additive, extensions of state capacity through infrastructural power. They also represent potential inflection points in political development, moments when an awareness of the limits of formally governmental power collide with the deeply felt experience of collective action or mutual aid. As Mann noted,

one Roman emperor had denied a request to form voluntary fire brigades on the grounds that what began as well-intentioned voluntary effort might well turn political and therefore dangerous. The possibilities of such political implications, of whatever form, are central to the questions that we should pose to the seemingly endless crises of our collective present.

## China's Gilded Age

Yuen Yuen Ang

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

I sincerely thank the award committee for their support and recognition. Even though I am a political scientist by discipline, I read and have benefited from sociologists' work on comparative historical analyses of large, complex processes, not least capitalism and inequality. It is an honor to be part of this scholarly tradition.

*China's Gilded Age* deliberately poses a false paradox in the subtitle: the coupling of economic boom and vast corruption. According to conventional wisdom, corrupt countries are usually poor—so why does China appear to be an anomaly?

My short answer is that China isn't actually an anomaly. Or if it were anomalous, then it is only as exceptional as the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—during the period of the Gilded Age (1870-1900), when an industrial boom coincided with corruption, grotesque inequality, labor abuses, financial crashes, and the rise of a new class of super rich.

To compare the differences and similarities between China and the U.S., I first advance an “unbundled” typology of corruption, divided along two dimensions: corruption involving elites and non-elites, and corruption with theft or corruption with exchange. The intersection of these two dimensions generates four varieties of corruption, which each exerts a different effect on the economy and society. I characterize them using the analogy of drugs. [See Figure below]

### CORRUPTION COMES IN DIFFERENT TYPES WITH DIFFERENT HARM

	NON-ELITES	ELITES
INVOLVES THEFT	Petty theft = toxic drugs 	Grand theft = toxic drugs 
INVOLVES EXCHANGES	Speed money = painkiller 	Access money = steroids 

Image © 2021 by Yuen Yuen Ang

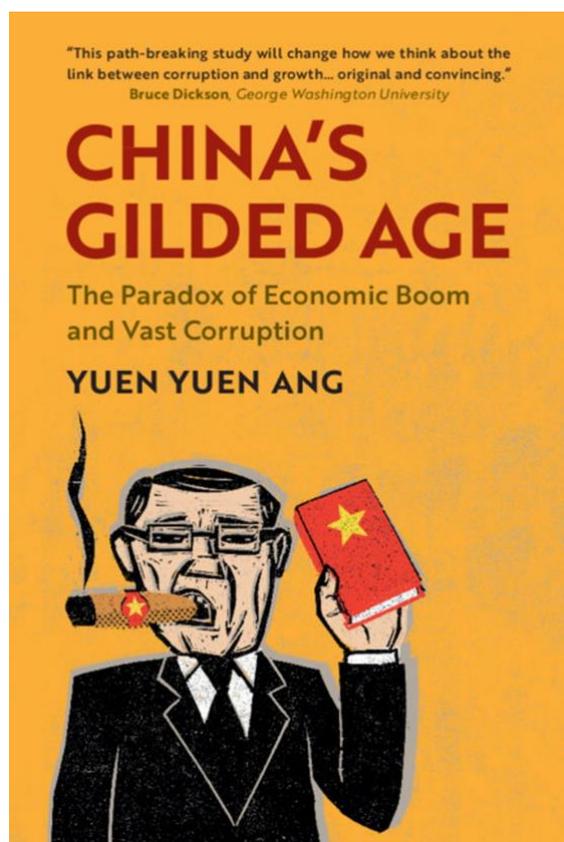
Petty theft (e.g., extortion) and grand theft (e.g., embezzlement) are like toxic drugs that produce no benefits for society. Speed money (e.g., paying petty bribes to overcome red-tape and delays) is akin to painkillers; it may relieve a headache but doesn't improve one's strength. Access money (e.g., paying massive bribes or lobbying to obtain exclusive, lucrative privileges), on the other hand, is like steroids. It spurs muscle growth and allows one to perform superhuman feats, but it comes with serious side effects, including the possibility of a complete meltdown.

One key similarity between China and the U.S. is that over time, the dominant form of corruption evolved away from growth-damaging types of corruption—petty theft, grand theft, and speed money—toward access money. By rewarding politicians who serve capitalist interests and enriching capitalists who pay for privileges, this form of corruption stimulated commerce, construction, and investment, all of which contribute to GDP growth. But it also exacerbated inequality and bred systemic risks. As a result, contemporary China and the 19<sup>th</sup> century America are not just high-growth economies but also high-risk and out-of-balance economies.

To say that the US and China are similar does not mean that they are identical. Obviously, one is a two-party democracy and the other is a single-party autocracy. In the U.S., public backlash

against the excesses of capitalism led up to the Progressive Era, animated by political activism, muckraking journalism, and electoral reforms. In China, on the other hand, President Xi is summoning China's version of a Progressive Era by commands and campaigns—under the banner of “common prosperity.”

For scholars of comparative historical analysis, the take-away is this: Contrary to popular beliefs, the rise of capitalism was not accompanied by the eradication of corruption, but rather by the evolution of the quality of corruption from thuggery and theft toward sophisticated exchanges of power and profit. Compared with countries that prospered earlier, China is still a relative newcomer on this evolutionary path.



Put differently, applying a comparative historical perspective debunks two myths about the relationship between corruption and capitalism.

\* Myth 1: Corruption is necessarily growth-impeding.

I maintain that all corruption is harmful, but not all forms of corruption impede growth in the short term. Access money can stimulate growth but generate deep structural problems.

\* Myth 2: Corruption is a problem exclusive to poor countries.

Corruption did not necessarily disappear as countries became richer—rather, I argue, like in China and the U.S., that they became more sophisticated in forms. In the U.S., excessive political influence takes on a legalized and institutionalized nature that conventional indices ignore.

Confronting these two myths, I propose, will go a long way not only toward understanding China's political economy, but also that of advanced capitalist economies. Problems of inequality and populism that beset rich democracies today are expressions of modern-day Gilded Ages.

### **Urban Origins of Democracy and Inequality**

Benjamin H. Bradlow

**Harvard University**

I am both honored and flabbergasted to have my dissertation recognized by the Comparative Historical Sociology section. I am grateful to the committee for their work in deliberating over the submissions and for choosing to acknowledge my work in this way. I am indebted to my dissertation committee chair Patrick Heller, and members Nitsan Chorev, Peter Evans, and John Logan.

Individual accolades obscure collective contributions. I therefore want to highlight that many members of the CHS section have contributed to the development of this project over the course of my PhD. I have workshopped various parts of this project at the last two mini-

conferences of the section at ASA conventions, as well as at meetings of the Social Science Historical Association, where many CHS section members are also active participants. One of the most rewarding aspects of being part of this scholarly community has been to have my work engaged by colleagues whose own work spans many different time periods, geographies, and theoretical concerns. I have experienced an open-minded, pluralistic community that has enabled me to consider this section an intellectual home throughout my doctoral and now post-doctoral career.

My dissertation project, now under contract at Princeton University Press, begins with the question of why some cities are more effective than others in reducing urban inequalities. I provide a comparative-historical analysis of the divergent trajectories of urban public goods distribution in the largest cities in two of the most unequal countries on earth. In Brazil and South Africa, protests over inequality — especially urban inequality — fueled struggles for political democracy. An alliance of industrial trade unions with neighborhood-based organizations fighting for rights to urban public goods formed the social basis of democratic transition in the 1980s and early 1990s in both countries. As a result, Brazil and South Africa are rare for their constitutional commitments to reduce poverty and inequality, as well as for empowering local governments to deliver on these commitments. São Paulo and Johannesburg, each country's largest city, have had strikingly different trajectories in reducing inequalities in the distribution of three urban public goods: housing, sanitation and collective transportation. São Paulo has achieved striking gains in each of these policy arenas, while Johannesburg has lagged far behind, despite starting from similar bases at the point of transitioning to democracy.

This work bridges comparative politics of development, urban sociology, and political sociology, and therefore sheds new light on the relationship between states, democracy, and inequalities. Prior work has generally focused on

state-society interactions or the internal workings of government institutions as independent explanations for distributional outcomes. Instead, I argue that social coalitions and state institutions transform each other. In order to do so, I describe how movements based in the most marginalized neighborhoods become critical to the internal bureaucratic capacities of newly-decentralized municipal government.

I draw on data collected from 16 months of fieldwork in both cities, comprising over 220 semi-structured interviews with informants in bureaucratic agencies, political offices, social movements, private developers, bus companies, water and sanitation companies, and consultants. These interviews are supplemented by hundreds of archival documents from government agencies, legislation, industry publications, and newspaper reports. Finally, I use spatial data collected from public agencies in both Brazil and South Africa for a series of maps that illustrate changes in the distribution of urban public goods across both São Paulo and Johannesburg.

The empirical heart of this work takes readers inside the political and professional conflicts within and between movements, bureaucratic agencies, private companies, and political parties to illustrate how they have changed over the past approximately thirty years in the governance of these goods. I further explore how configurations of “embeddedness” of the local state in a sphere of movements and the internal “cohesion” of the local state can be used to explain divergent governing outcomes in cities across the globe, referencing cases in North America, Europe, South Asia, and East Asia. In doing so, I show how this framework builds a new “global urban sociology” focused on variation in the coordination of local governing power.

Questions about state formation, development, and distribution, have long been central to the analytical repertoire of comparative and historical sociological research. However, these questions have largely been pitched at the

methodological unit of the nation. And the geography of analysis has tended to be in the metropolitan core — that is, cases in the United States and Western Europe. Given the preoccupation of comparative and historical sociological work with generating strong theoretical accounts, both the unit and geographies of analysis of work in our section have meaningful implications for the broader discipline’s theoretical horizons.

When I was asked to write this reflection on receiving the 2021 dissertation award, I sought out the list of the 16 previous recipients, including honorable mentions. My dissertation is one of two on the list to take the urban scale as the primary unit of analysis. The other is Hilary Angelo’s, which received the 2016 award. Her dissertation was just published as *How Green Became Good: Urbanized Nature and the Making of Cities and Citizens* (University of Chicago Press, 2021). Robert Jansen’s dissertation, which received the 2011 award, is the only other awardee to focus on a Latin American case. His dissertation was later published as *Revolutionizing Repertoires: The Rise of Populist Mobilization in Peru* (University of Chicago Press, 2017). Mine is the first to introduce a case from Africa in comparative perspective.

I therefore humbly hope that this recognition for my dissertation might open some new avenues of inclusion for research in our section. Namely, that our section’s emphasis on theory might enable new approaches for theorizing “from the South.” That is, to not only apply concepts derived from canonical cases in the West. Instead, to take investigations of cases in the kinds of places where most people live as sites through which to generate new theoretical concepts.

This is not merely a question of broadening theoretical horizons for the mere sake of it. It is a question of ensuring that empirically-driven, comparative and historical social science theorizes to address the urgent problems of our

time. By 2050, two of every three humans will live in a city. 40% of those urban residents will live in slums. These estimated two billion people all share the experience of exclusion from urban public goods like housing, sanitation, and transportation.

Urban public goods are therefore at the core of contemporary inequality. The sociological project of analyzing power and politics in a 21<sup>st</sup> century beset by extreme inequalities of work, shelter, race, caste, and gender, is one that will necessarily locate the slum as part of the center of its conceptual outlook.

Thanks so much to the CHS section for recognizing my work in this way. I look forward to many more fruitful conversations and friendships with colleagues in the CHS section in the years to come.

### **Mosquitos, States and CHS**

Omri Tubi

**Northwestern University**

My article, “Kill me a mosquito and I will build a state: political economy and the socio-technicalities of Jewish colonization in Palestine, 1922–1940,” is part of a larger dissertation project that examines the relationship between public health activities undertaken by American Jewish organizations between 1920–1960 and Israeli state-formation. In the article, I draw on Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) to demonstrate the significance of an antimalarial public-health campaign for Zionist colonization and state-formation in British-ruled Palestine. I show that malaria was an obstacle for colonization and for the economic viability of Jewish colonies and that introducing certain socio-technical arrangements to control the disease was vital for establishing Zionist presence and labor in Palestine. I also show how these socio-technical arrangements shaped relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and how the need to control malaria brought the creation of national-medical and political institutions.

There is a lot in this article that shows continuity with existing comparative-historical research. It touches on colonialism and colonization, state-formation, and political economy – issues that so many members of our section study and that have been the focus of some of our classical works. This article also continues recent years’ turn towards a more global and transnational perspective by comparative-historical sociologists.

There are a few ways in which this paper might be relevant for CHS scholars, beyond the theoretical arguments in the article itself. I want to briefly touch on two of them. First, there is the theoretical framework. I think it is safe to say that most of the comparative historical sociologists who conversed with ANT or employed it in their analyses of state formation and colonization are also science and technology (STS) scholars (e.g., Alatout 2009; Carroll 2012; Mukerji 2009; for an exception see Reed 2020).

This is understandable given that ANT grew out of STS, but as Julian Go (2013, 2016) suggested, ANT is highly valuable for CHS. While it is famous for its emphasis on non-human agency, ANT is also an inherently relational theory. As such, it is not analytically limited by the confines by our ‘usual’ units of analysis such as ‘the nation state’ but focuses on networks that connect various actors, materials, and locations. Thus, ANT “can alert us to important relations and connections across space that conventional narratives and theories occlude but that have been critical for the making and remaking of modernity” (Go 2013: 48), such as the relations between metropole and colony, east and west, etc. As my own article shows, one cannot understand Jewish antimalaria and the consequent advancement of colonization in Palestine without acknowledging the importance of American medical-scientific advances in Panama and southern US states. Nor can we conceive of Jewish and Arab societies as wholly distinct from each other despite evident processes of separation between the two groups.

A second way in which my article might be potentially relevant to CHS is its focus on questions of health and medicine as key to state-formation, colonialism, and colonization. To be sure, historians of public health have long studied these issues (e.g., McNeil 1976; Arnold 1993; Anderson 2003), some of them even using theoretical tools borrowed from historical sociology such as the notion of path dependence (see Baldwin 2005). However, comparative-historical sociologists themselves did not give these issues much attention. There are a few recent exceptions to this tendency. For example, Alexandre White has shown how imperial interests shaped local responses to epidemic outbreaks in early 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa (2018) and suggests that legacies of disease-response that are rooted in European imperialism manifest themselves in the current COVID-19 pandemic (2020). Another notable exception is the work of Charles McCoy (2020) who compared the development of disease control capacities in Britain and the US and argued – modifying Tilly – that “states control disease and disease formed states.” While my own article draws on ANT and White takes a postcolonial approach, McCoy draws on the theoretical vocabulary of historical institutionalism. Together, these works show that there are a various ways and theoretical approaches comparative-historical sociologists can draw on to contribute to debates regarding the relationship between state-formation, colonialism, and public and global health.

Beyond its relevance to CHS, this article is deeply personal. There is, of course, the recognition by the section for which I am extremely grateful. But there are other reasons that make this award so special. A part of the article focuses on malaria control in Hefer Valley/Wadi Hawarith (in today’s central Israel, along the coast) and specifically mentions malaria morbidity in Kibbutz Ma’abarot (p. 119). Ma’abarot is my home and the place where I was born, raised and was a member of until I left for graduate school in the US. My parents and sister still live there. Some of the theoretical

developments the article offers (e.g., on p. 119) came from causal conversations with my grandmother about malaria morbidity when she first arrived at the Kibbutz in 1939, as an adolescent fleeing Nazi Germany. It is through her stories about malaria, the Kibbutz, and the Valley that I was able to learn about life in 1930s-1940s Palestine beyond what is mentioned in the documents and secondary sources. My grandmother passed last July, at the age of 99, in a nursing home located about 60 feet from the building that was her first home at the Kibbutz. I dedicate this award to her.

### References

Alatout, Samer. 2009. "Bringing Abundance into Environmental Politics: Constructing a Zionist Network of Water Abundance, Immigration and Colonization." *Social Studies of Science* 39 (3): 363-394.

Anderson, Warwick. 2003. *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Arnold, David. 1993. *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Baldwin, Peter. 2005. *Disease and Democracy: The Industrialized World Faces AIDS*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Carroll, Patrick. 2012. "Water and Technoscientific State Formation in California." *Social Studies of Science* 42 (4): 489-516.

Go, Julian. 2013. "For a Postcolonial Sociology." *Theory and Society* 42 (1): 25-55.

Go, Julian. 2016. *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McCoy, Charles. 2020. *Diseased States: Epidemic Control in Britain and the United*

*States*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

McNeil, William. 1976. *Plagues and Peoples*. Garden City: Anchor Press.

Mukerji, Chandra. 2009. *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Reed, Isaac. 2020. *Power in Modernity: Agency Relations and the Creative Destruction of the King's Two Bodies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

White, Alexandre. 2018. "Global Risks, Divergent Pandemics: Contrasting Responses to Bubonic Plague and Smallpox in 1901 Cape Town." *Social Science History* 42 (1): 135-158.

White, Alexandre. 2020. "Historical Linkages: Epidemic Threat, Economic Risk and Xenophobia." *The Lancet* 395 (10232): 1250-1251.

### Generation, Society, and History

Wen Xie

#### Peking University

The paper for which I received a Reinhard Bendix Award Honorable Mention is titled "Generation as Structure: Market Transformation in China's Socialist Industrial Heartland." The article highlights a key component of my dissertation, which examines the perplexing political-economic transformation that occurred in Northeast China. Against the backdrop of China's economic miracle, the region's economy stagnated, and it became China's first to fall into decline. Showing similarities to deindustrialized areas in developed countries such as the Midwestern United States and Northern England, the region has become the epitome of the Chinese Rust Belt.

The article investigates Northeast China's market underdevelopment phenomenon. As the socialist industrial heartland, the region is thought to have been the most influenced by the "evils" of the socialist system. There are several versions of this influence. The cultural version claims that the people of the region were unable to overcome their "planned economy mentality" and "old command-economy habits." Thus, the locals are "conservative" in their outlook, and lack a "modern personality." However, we cannot assume that the same culture will persist for forty years, considering the significant organizational and institutional changes since market reform. Therefore, the sociological puzzle I explore is: why did four decades of market reform not give rise to the market spirit, but instead reinforced the importance of acquaintance networks, and contributed to the consolidation of a conservative political and economic culture in the region.

I emphasize the pivotal role of the region's sizable postwar baby boom generation (born in the 1950s–60s). This was a transformative generation. They had grown up during the Mao era, and begun working at the start of the market reform era. In the late 1990s, radical reform of state-owned enterprises severed the ties between baby boomers and their work units in their middle- to late-adulthood life stages. This generation's experiences during market transformation resulted in fatalism, demoralization, disbelief in business activities, mistrust of institutions and rules, conflicted moral systems, cynicism toward the state, and reliance on personal networks. Ultimately, this fostered a "rust belt" local culture, and hampered market-based development in the region.

I approach the issue of cultural transformation by focusing on individual experiences in the midst of policy and institutional economic change. This necessitates attention to the co-evolution of generational life trajectories and the evolving social milieu of the location. Two empirical tasks are required as a result of this. To begin, it is necessary to apply a keen ethnographic sense to

meaning-making in action when confronting new situations at various stages of life. During the life history interviews, I inquired about the interviewees' life experiences during times of rapid social change, as well as how they had made major life decisions such as education, job selection, marriage and job searching. Second, the reconstruction of the social structural milieu at various historical epochs is required. I conducted extensive archival research to gather demographic, economic, and social statistics from various historical periods, as well as information on policy, market, and organizational-level change, and their implementation. This reconstruction is critical because the institutions, resources, credentials, and educational opportunities available at various historical points are not always consistent over time.

My article's theoretical goal is to advance understandings of generations in history. I propose an encoding theory. The encoding theory first transcends earlier generation studies' over-emphasis of the impact of events during the youth stage on individuality. Instead, I contend that a generation of people encounter multiple defining historical events during their lifetime, and that the cumulative effects of historical events on individuality formation are critical. Each generation encodes past experiences into its collective endowment, which provides a set of possibilities and constraints for the generation's responses in a historical situation. As a result, the generational constellation serves as the structure of history and reconstitute the social order when social change happens.

In the end, I would like to express my appreciation to the award committee for recognizing me with this honorable mention. Academics are drawn to this profession by occasional bursts of creativity and excitement, but for the most part, life is filled with the daily repetition of writing and rewriting rituals. I want to thank the CHS section again for their words of encouragement, which ignited a spark of hope after what seemed like an endless winter.