REFLECTIONS ON WALDEN BELLO: THE PERSECUTION OF THE GLOBAL LEFT VIS-À-VIS INTERCOMMUNAL SOLIDARITY DURING HEGEMONIC CRISIS

ABSTRACT

The online censorship and subsequent arrest of scholar-activist Walden Bello, is the latest instance of a disconcerting trend during a period of hegemonic crisis. To understand how a respected scholar ended up in jail and in grave legal trouble on very feeble accounts, we have to unpack the full implications of this case, and place it in relation to ongoing structural changes within the world-system – namely, the decline of the United States as global hegemon, the ascendancy of far-right authoritarianism as a popular political framework, and the use of institutions and technologies developed under liberal-democratic rule by authoritarian regimes for purposes of social control during a period of flux. The crisis offers an opportunity to reconfigure systemic arrangements through coordinated solidarity networks characterized by forms of organization and ways of relating that embody prerogatives and values different from those that predominate in the modern world-system and from those that reproduce the capitalist world-economy, which more likely than not, will have authoritarian tendencies in the decades to come. As a conclusion, we offer some of the possibilities the global left has for these upcoming decades in regards of large coalitions aimed at changing the structure of the world-system at large.

Earlier in June, Jefrey Tupas, former Davao City Chief Information officer and media right hand of Sara Duterte, mayor of Davao and daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, presented a case of cyber-libel against vice presidential progressive candidate Walden Bello, for a Facebook post the Filipino scholar made earlier in 2021. Bello implied in his social media post that Tupas had taken drugs at a party and Sara Duterte was aware of it. Bello's Facebook message was published after Tupas was identified by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency as one of the guests at a beach party where 17 people were arrested on drug possession charges; $1.5 million Philippine Pesos (USD $27000) worth of drugs (marijuana and methamphetamine) were confiscated.

The Davao City prosecutor admitted the case in June, arguing that Bello's actions violated all components of cyber-libel as described in the 2012 Cybercrime Prevention Act. Authorities arrested Bello on August 8. He spent the night in jail before being released on bail. Bello is as of right now incapable of leaving the Philippines and incapable of flying back to the United States where he is a respected public intellectual.

The online censorship and accompanying criminalization of Bello, the latest instance in a disconcerting trend during a period of hegemonic crisis, as discussed below, also provides impetus for the advancement of an alternative globalization. Perilous as it is, the crisis offers an opportunity to reconfigure systemic arrangements through coordinated solidarity networks characterized by forms of organization and ways of relating that embody prerogatives and values different from those that

predominate in the modern world-system and from those that reproduce the capitalist world-economy. We argue efforts to protect political speech and deliberation in digital spheres from state-corporate encroachment, along with efforts to defend those persecuted, are perhaps preconditions for transcending hegemony struggles at the scale of the nation-state and at the level of the interstate framework, en route to transformation of the historical system. The transformation takes place in the present, in part, anticipating and connecting people through cooperative self-defense and by way of participatory modes of being that displace or rework systemic structures slowly over time.

To begin to grasp that movement potential over the longue durée, and to understand how a respected scholar ended up in jail and in grave legal trouble on such spurious accounts, we have to unpack the full implications of this case, and how it relates to ongoing structural changes within the world-system – namely, the decline of the United States as global hegemon, the ascendancy of far-right authoritarianism as a popular political framework, and the use of institutions and technologies developed under liberal-democratic rule by authoritarian regimes for purposes of social control during a period of flux. We must also consider the prospects for creating shared spaces of confederated communion and for constructing solidarities of self-defense in light of institutional upheaval. Those prospects are simultaneously contingencies for production of social relations and sensibilities capable of systematically reshaping the contours of structured human experience – and for reimagining the world anew.

Criminalization of Cyber Speech and Defense of Digital Space

In 2010, Philippine voters elected a liberal-centrist, Benigno Aquino, into the Malacañang Palace (Philippines' presidential residency). As president, Aquino supervised the best GDP growth experienced by the insular country in decades. He started a peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. During his administration, in 2012, the House of Representatives of the Philippines, with a liberal-conservative majority, approved the Cybercrime Prevention Act. This law intended to regulate certain cybercrimes that were not typified under previous laws, such as identity theft and child pornography. Yet, one of the offenses established in this new law is cyber-libel. Since its enactment, as reported by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, many journalists, activists and progressive leaders have been prosecuted over feeble instances of defamation. One of the biggest profiles of this mode of attack was Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa, journalist and founder of Rappler. Twice arrested, Ressa faces a cyber-libel conviction that could lead to years in prison, and in bitterly ironic fashion befitting the absurdity of her persecution, she's been subjected to trolling and threats on Facebook.

A more complex instance of this phenomenon has occurred in Brazil under the Bolsonaro administration. In this regard, several laws enacted during the military regime that ruled the country between 1965 and 1985, like "Lei de Segurança Nacional" (National Security Law), remained in place during the democratic period, with some reforms. While these laws were applied throughout the last 37 years of democratic history in Brazil, it has been under the Bolsonaro administration that the aforementioned laws have been invoked to silence political opposition. The imprisonment and torture of Brazillian Worker's Party activist (PT, or Partido Dos Trabalhadores in Portuguese), Rodrigo Brassi, in March of 2021, after protesting with a banner calling Bolsonaro a genocider, illustrates very well how effectively repression has been re-established in Brazilian institutions. Another example surfaced in July 2020, when a report was made public regarding the surveillance of about five-hundred anti-Bolsonaro activists, leaders, community organizers and civil servants, many of them anti-fascists. This surveillance and repression operation was orchestrated by the Ministry of Justice of Brazil. The operation was backed by a decree stipulated in 2000 under Lula Da Silva's neoliberal predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who despite lacking Bolsonaro's authoritarian character, established many of the laws used to criminalize dissent in Brazil currently. Lula Da Silva, his impressive progressive record in the context of Brazilian politics notwithstanding, didn't revoke many of these laws. Some of them, like the National Security

Law, date back to the military dictatorship, an era that also saw Brazil's now-celebrated educator, the late Paulo Freire, accused of subversion, incarcerated and exiled.

Another major example of a crime reform carried out by liberal-conservatives with extreme consequences for leftist activists, this time in the global north, is the imprisonment of Spanish rapper, Pablo Hasél, in February of 2021. The hip-hop artist's arrest follows a trend. After the enactment of the "Ley de Seguridad Ciudadana" by the parliamentary majority of the liberal-conservative party of Spain (Partido Popular, or PP) in 2015, a number of Spanish activists and artists experienced similar issues. This law, popularly known as "Ley Mordaza" (gag law), stipulates imprisonment for people who participate in non-authorized protest as well as for those who "disrespect" public authorities. Of course, under the vague rubric of disrespect of authority, many have been prosecuted, fined or even imprisoned. The case of Pablo Hasel is particularly crude because he was sentenced on the grounds of disrespecting authority as well as for "defamation to the crown" due to some of his song lyrics highly critical of the Spanish police and monarchy. Defamation to the crown was already a crime under Spanish law, however, prior to the enactment of the gag law, violators faced small fines in most cases. Under the new gag law, several violators have faced jail time of up to two years. While it's true that the imprisonment of Pablo Hasél has occurred under the liberal-progressive coalition of the Socialist party and Podemos (this last party ran on an electoral platform to repeal the law), it's likely that in the upcoming elections a coalition of liberal-conservative PP and far-right wing party VOX will form a government. Like in Brazil, these laws were established by a liberal-conservative government only to later be inherited by a progressive-centrist coalition that didn't repeal them. If the far-right enters the government, even through a coalition, the weaponization of this law and its consequences against those who speak up against the system will become even more dire.

These situations illustrate the ineffectuality of the "law and order" crackdown on communications when it comes to actually protecting citizens, and they evince serviceability to apparatuses of state instrumental in sociopolitical control. Recent far-right weaponization of state institutions and practices implemented by erstwhile governments better at concealing overt cruelty and relatively adept at keeping barbarism within bounds amounts to a systemic response to efforts to expand the terrain of freedom and the spectrum of political possibility. As geo-cultures, those constraining norms and values once widespread throughout the system, prove less adept at generating consent for systemic logics to play out apace, amped up state terror at least temporarily helps preserve relations defined by extreme deprivation amid plenty. Intensified aggression acts as a bulwark for endangered (yet still dangerous) structural arrangements characterized by the agglomerated capacity of a select few to determine the everyday realities of multitudes of human beings dispossessed of the agency to participate in decisions affecting them.

Andrew Austin, professor of Democracy and Justice Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, penned an apropos piece in 2018 arguing for a defense of the digital commons, the virtual public sphere. Austin criticized calls in the United States to de-platform and censor even vile views expressed online. He situated his critique within the Left-Libertarian tradition, including the civil rights freedom fighters who conducted sit-ins at privately owned and segregated lunch counters in the fifties and sixties and the throngs of Berkeley students who, after cutting their teeth in those civil rights struggles in the American South as many did, took direct action in the Bay Area against university prohibitions on political speech circa 1964. Austin claimed too many liberal-progressive activists at present flout the values that undergirded those struggles and now seek to subordinate the free speech right to the property right so integral to global capitalism. Social media corporations, as good-faith actors in a putative free enterprise system, ought to exercise authority to remove from their networks objectionable discourse and the individuals spewing it, so goes the prevailing logic Austin interrogated.

Although Austin didn't make this point, acting on those political assumptions risks empowering institutions to become ever-more totalitarian exemplars of what philosopher Elizabeth Anderson terms "private government," with "private" referring not to non-state ownership but rather to relations of rule and governance excluding greater participation from those involved and affected. Likewise, when nation-state representatives capitalize on censor-happy sentiments, they rehabilitate and institutionalize antiquated modes of repression within and through electronically mediated venues now thoroughly enmeshed in a digitally over-determined capitalist world-economy. Criminalization of dissident perspectives, like Bello's and Ressa's and Hasél's, on corporate-owned websites and apps seems to anticipate future instances of authoritarian governance, perhaps prefiguring new modes of "hegemony," in the sense popularized by the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, during a chaotic period of "hegemonic transition," as understood within the framework of world-systems analysis.

Hegemony and Exilic Spaces of Intercommunal-Subaltern Counterpublics

Writing from prison during Mussolini's fascist regime, Gramsci suggested "so-called organs of public opinion," like newspapers at the time, appear to make state-sanctioned violence reflect popular opinion. This helps make the force that maintains an unjust order appear as a legitimate manifestation of majority reason and will. For hegemony to function well, that force must often appear to be based on the consent of most people. Major media, ensconced within the political-economy of the existing system, tend to produce content consistent with those insidious appearances. Despite business models based in part on commodification of user-generated content sold to third parties who can turn around and target the same users with quasi-personalized ads – not to mention Internet popularity and influence still shaped by other dominant institutions – 21st century digital platforms nevertheless enable political expression outside the ideological parameters that have historically helped keep systemic relations intact. Co-opted and compromised as most corners of the world wide web have become, the technology that emerged out of the ARPANET – or, ("Defense") Advanced Research Project Agency network, that publicly-funded 20th-century product of the militarist ambitions of the United States – has made dissemination of heterodox ideas, theory and practice more commonplace. Furthermore, computer-mediated technology compresses space and time in ways that give social movements the ability to coalesce and gain traction beyond borders.

In response to the above, and with the aid of architecture erected under prior circumstances, the use of state power to clamp down on dissent in the digital sphere has emerged as an ostensibly logical reaction to popular pressure. In "Policing the Crisis," Stuart Hall and colleagues discussed a "crisis of hegemony," and a "general crisis of the state," a breakdown in the perceived legitimacy and in the tacit support for how society is constituted. Per the Gramscian analysis they put forward, routine hegemony renders class rule opaque, but when such crises occur "the whole basis of political leadership and cultural authority becomes exposed and contested." When that happens, the state, in this "exceptional moment," tends to shift "away from consent towards the pole of coercion," creating a precariously maintained "authoritarian consensus," as the "masks of liberal consent and popular consent" are peeled away, revealing the coercion and violence upon which the state and the larger system ultimately rely. We seem to be witnessing more of that naked violence throughout the world-system now.

Nation-states within the interstate organization of the capitalist world-economy, however, also perform an educational function, as Gramsci understood when he called the state an "educator." This is especially true if we take "the state" to encompass both political and civil society, as Gramsci did. In that sense, the state engages in what Henry Giroux calls "public pedagogy," the informal and often unacknowledged forms of implicit teaching and learning that occur through culture. States can educate in myriad ways. Far-right politicians can drum up support for aggressive enforcement of law that punishes political expression if it fails to conform to the fledgling authoritarian consensus. Pro-censorship discourses of repression coupled with the sweeping criminalization of cyber speech foreclose the strategic

and liberatory potential for proliferation of what Nancy Fraser, working within and beyond the theories of pragmatic critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, referred to as "subaltern counterpublics" capable of enhancing the politicized "participation of subordinate strata in stratified societies." On the other hand, those political possibilities could be ripe for recovery.

Taking Fraser's suggestion further, publics educated to accept and to fear critical intellectual autonomy as criminal and thus deserving of punitive discipline stymie movements to create non-coercive, cooperative networks of "subaltern counterpublics," spheres outside the official margins for challenging common-sense presuppositions regarding whose concerns count. As Fraser observed, the bourgeois model of the public sphere Habermas and others critically assayed didn't adequately recognize that private issues can be issues of public consequence requiring collective action to address. The model adhered to the liberal separation of state (or politics) from so-called civil society, failing to grasp Gramscian insights into the nuanced operation of nation-states. Moreover, the traditional conception of the public sphere posited citizen empowerment and influence in relation to the state itself.

Drawing on Fraser, the assembly of institutions that together form a nation-state might not be the best formations for empowering communities in the present context. Enriching and preserving a digital commons replete with free dissident expression, deliberation and "dialogos" – described by cognitive scientist John Vervaeke and his colleague Christopher Mastropietro as an "intersubjective exchange of perspectives" conditioning mutual affordances – should fortify subaltern counterpublics and social movements with the potential for transnational reach.

Defense of a digital commons and border-defying resistance to the repressive apparatus of any nation-state ought to not only aid in the formation and fortification of counterpublics constituted by politically neglected advocates in and for parts of the global south and by those dismissed as unproductive lumpen or déclassé sectors of society wherever they may be. Solidarity with Bello and with others who stand up to and speak out publicly against hard-right efforts to regain command through expansive criminalization of networked communication is also a much-needed bulwark in a budding movement to birth "exilic spaces," a term coined by Andrej Grubačić and Denis O'Hearn. The phrase refers to "those areas of social and economic life where people and groups attempt to escape from capitalist economic processes, whether by territorial escape or by the attempt to build structures that are autonomous of capitalist processes of accumulation and social control." More recently, Grubačić has described "exilic spaces" as "spaces of escape from capitalist modernity," "spaces that escape as concentrated spatial forms of mutual aid" and "spaces that escape at least to an extent relations of capital, [the] capitalist law of value and also of regulations and regulatory pressures of the state, especially of the modern capitalist nation-state."

Commodification of network technologies by "Big Tech" giants like Microsoft, Google (Alphabet), Amazon, Facebook (Meta) and Apple notwithstanding, concerted effort to usher in a decentralized, cooperatively self-managed "Web3" era herald renewed opportunity to manifest online "exilic spaces" composed of "subaltern counterpublics" within world-systemic relations they can begin to transform. For example, this could take the form of blockchain-based "regenerative cryptoeconomics," a movement supportive of non-proprietary open source protocols and, importantly, one committed to the funding and participatory coordination of public goods projects (e.g. the Gitcoin community of communities co-founded by software engineer Kevin Owocki) underpinned by values of shared ownership and collaborative decision-making. Conversely, it could simply involve carving out online spaces for theorizing, strategizing and deliberating that produce secular political congregations amenable to transforming social relations. It might entail protecting spaces wherein imposition of the nation-state as the presupposed arena for realizing social change does not abide or compute.

The "crisis of hegemony" conceived at the level of the nation-state invokes far-right responses that put to use technologies invented in the context of a liberal geo-culture. Relevant here and in relation to the above is the theory of "intercommunalism" Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton introduced in the early seventies, a few years after the "world revolution" of 1968 and around the time the late world-systems scholar Immanuel Wallerstein first wrote about anti-systemic movements. Newton argued that emergent technology "can solve most of the material contradictions people face, that the material conditions exist that would allow the people of the world to develop a culture that is essentially human and would nurture those things that would allow people to resolve contradictions in a way that would not cause the mutual slaughter of all of us." He called the creation of that culture "revolutionary intercommunalism," a coordinated response to co-optation of popular technologies by a select few. It contrasts with the prevailing "age of reactionary intercommunalism, in which a ruling circle, a small group of people, control all other people by using their technology." Spaces of exile communicating and cooperating in intercommunal fashion instantiate social relations and forms of organization antithetical to and directly transformative of the relations of coercion, subordination, subjugation and alienation reproduced as normative throughout the existing historical system.

Breakdown in hegemonic consensus at the nation-state scale, uneven as it is across the crisis-riddled residues of the Westphalian system, offers new opportunities to reimagine those previously over-determined relations of domination; however, those hegemonic crises now coursing through a number of increasingly volatile and authoritarian nation-states also threaten to stamp out and enclose novel mechanisms for making and remaking the common good. Historically disparate as the periods are, the danger bears a modicum of resemblance to the enclosure of the commons – recounted in spirited fashion by Marxian historian-from-below Peter Linebaugh and by Marxist-feminist scholar-activist Silvia Federici – that helped consolidate the capitalist world-economy several centuries ago. Intercommunalist community movement building through exilic counterpublics online and IRL (in real life) becomes all the more imperative in light of how crises of nation-state hegemony interact with hegemonic decline or transition at the inter-state scale where the dynamics of the state-structuring modern world-system are actively reconfigured and increasingly subject to contestation.

Interstate Hegemony and Hegemonic Decline

By their own understanding, in "Policing the Crisis," Hall and colleagues aimed to document "the emergence of authoritarian populism as a mode of doing politics after the social democratic consensus," or, more incisively, following the partial collapse of the former. Coeval with hegemonic crises of nation-states (unraveling of hegemony as understood in the Gramscian tradition), the partial collapse also corresponds to the decline, spanning about half a century, in US hegemony vis-à-vis a destabilized international order (a process of hegemonic decline, or perhaps transition, as understood in the world-systems tradition).

To the point, the fall of hegemony is not being experienced only within the boundaries of individual nation-states. Hegemony in the Wallerstenian sense is under a period of major transition in the world-system, the most major one perhaps since World War II. That is, the system has witnessed the diminished capacity and effectiveness of a particular nation-state (or bloc of powerful states) to further the accumulation of capital and prevent other competing states from doing so. Hegemonic status also amounted to the political ability to constrain hostile military approaches even when the hegemon had superior military strength, and it conferred authority to dictate rules for the interstate system and to propagate a vocabulary for contemplating and discussing the world. No nation-state can now exercise that kind of power consistently. The world of US and Western Europe supremacy in the international arena, as well as the universalism that the liberal-political philosophy has enjoyed until now, are coming into question, as contenders from the semi-periphery have increased their military and capital accumulation capabilities. In this regard, hegemony implies, at a national level too, the capability to control class unrest

through subtle ways, which include more extraction of resources and/or commodities from the periphery or semi-periphery. Suppressing social or class unrest through brute force is generally a sign of a weakening social order, or more precisely, a sign of hegemonic crisis.

In this regard, the US and its allies have seen a consistent decline since the nineties in the share of their economies in world GDP. Rivals have likewise undertaken invigorated military actions in the international arena (i.e. China's increased militarization in the South China Sea as well as in the Sea near Taiwan; the invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin). However, these changes affect the ways in which major states try to manage social upheaval. In recent years, core, semi-peripheral and peripheral states alike, often (informally or formally) allied with corporate tech, have tightened the control of social and class unrest through ever-more oppressive electronic systems of surveillance, censorship, counterintelligence and (direct as well as indirect) suppression of progressive campaigns (e.g. Democratic Party establishment and corporate media marginalization of the electoral ambitions of democratic-socialist Bernie Sanders), social movements (e.g. US law enforcement's evictions of Occupy movement encampments in late 2011; Facebook deactivating dozens of accounts maintained by Palestinian, Syrian, Tunisian activists and journalists) and labor organizers (e.g. harassment, threats and raids targeting trade unions in Myanmar after the country's 2021 military takeover) .

A hegemonic transition of this kind comes with certain political-military transitions. According to world-systems sociologist Christopher Chase-Dunn, hegemonic transitions – when the capital accumulation and military power of the hegemon start to become outcompeted by other strong states within the world-system – are also a time of military balancing. Every major hegemonic transition in the world-economy has been accompanied by outbreak of a major global war. The rise of the Netherlands was a product of the Thirty Years' War. The rise of Britain followed the Napoleonic Wars. Then the rise of the United States and its Western allies came after the turbulent period of the two World Wars and the Bretton Woods agreement. The relevant wars also occur when one of the competing strong states tries to establish a world-empire – that is, when rulers of a powerful nation-state act on ambitions to create a single political unit for the entire world-economy. (The Habsburgs, the Napoleonic Empire and Nazi Germany are the three great examples Wallerstein offers as failed world-empire attempts.) Following each of these attempts to restructure the world-system, a new period of capital accumulation starts, according to Wallerstein's contemporary, the late Giovanni Arrighi. Each one of these periods, which Arrighi denominates as systemic cycles of accumulation, has a particular political path and entails creation of a new dominant class. Arrighi suggested that the next great cycle of accumulation would be led by the Chinese system as the center of the world-economy, implying that the ultimate form of global capitalism would be with an authoritarian whip.

While it is early to say if Arrighi's predictions about China will stand for the next decades, it's true that we are witnessing an authoritarian revival and experiencing the hegemonic decline of the United States and its allies, not only in regards to military and economic capacity, but also in their capacity to establish the rules of the international arena. So far, we have not experienced a major direct war between superpowers. At the same, the transition currently underway is one from a unipolar to a multipolar world, with very uncertain ensuing geopolitical consequences. What is certain is that this new period of global capitalism will create another systemic cycle of accumulation, one in which liberal democracy and concomitant ideas might not direct the political process of capital accumulation, and one in which repressive regimes might demonstrate superiority in the development of new commodity frontiers, and one in which those regimes could prove themselves most adept at keeping the rabble in line as living conditions deteriorate and the overall quality of life for many people worsens unabated.

The role of the global left will be at stake. In previous periods of hegemonic transition, social movements in the core and semi-periphery sought to conquer the state or reform it so that part of the surplus value would go to parts of the peasant and working class, as occurred in the early 20th century.

Yet, in moments when the left showed signs it could conceivably carry through transformative reforms and reconfigure the national order, the centrist geo-culture aided by affluent professional-managerial sectors serving the state-corporate-finance-techno-military nexus responsible for their relative power, transformed left-leaning institutions into machineries that decimated the oppositional movements and the liberal institutions they championed. Walden Bello's study of counterevolutions in the Global North and South is instructive. For him, it's clear that when the landed and middle class are pressured by social movements from below, liberal institutions are easy to tumble:

> Just as the real fear of the landed elite in Italy was not a communist revolution but their gradual asphyxiation by the grassroots institutions of reformist socialism, and just as the biggest fear of the Indonesian military was the PKI's coming to power through electoral means, so was the deepest fear of the Thai landlords their tenants learning to use the law to empower themselves and disempower their social 'superiors' (Counterrevolution, the countryside and the middle classes: lessons from five countries; Bello 2017, 20)

When push comes to shove, liberal ideas and regimes are imperiled as middle and landed class machinations respond to pressures from below, forged of course out of adverse conditions maintained by those privileged classes and by subterranean desires for different realities. For Bello too, many of these movements first appeared during the 20s and 30s of the last century, during decades characterized by a hegemonic transition, not unlike what's transpiring at present. Those movements didn't flourish in the West for many decades after the world wars, however, and while it's undeniable that they are now currently on the rise at a global level, in the global south they became a common occurrence throughout the 20th century, and they are likely to recrudesce in the short-to-medium term.

Nevertheless, what cases like that of Walden Bello or María Ressa, in the global south, or those of Jeremy Hammond, Aaron Swartz, Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, Barrett Brown, and Pablo Hasél in the global north, are highlighting is the availability and necessity of networks of solidarity between the geo-culture of the Global Left. As soon as Bello was arrested, several platforms and organizations launched efforts to pressure the American Embassy in aiding his release, as well as several methods of financial aid to his legal team. You can sign onto a statement demanding charges against Bello be dropped here. The statement cautions that the charges against Bello bespeak "not just a legal but more importantly a political battle," "one among many cases of repression," and one requiring us "to forge stronger solidarities" as we defend common people against reprisals. The authors echo our sentiments, calling "on civil society and social movements to continue exercising vigilance," given expectations that those in power will "adopt the same if not a more intensified and systematic approach to repressing ordinary peoples' fundamental rights and freedoms." Bello's team is taking donations via PayPal to help defray expenses from what will likely be a protracted legal fight here.

Our "optimism of the will," à la Gramsci's commentary regarding how he counterbalanced an unavoidably sober "pessimism of the intellect," inclines us to believe repression that national governments mete out to individuals and groups that speak the unvarnished and uncomfortable truth can be effectively overcome through global networks of mutual aid. In this regard, international networks online and corresponding communities offline are perhaps the next phase in which the left can affect and alter the structure of global capitalism over the longue dureé, in a similar fashion to how international syndicalism or global NGOs affected it in the last two centuries. In the past, these movements and publics appeared without the help of mainstream institutions; in most cases, they were created in defiance of them, before they were adapted and accepted by the status quo.

Structural Crisis and Solidarity In/Out of Chaos

The coming geopolitical crisis will alter the structure of the world-system in the decades to come. Instability, crisis and a steady time of troubles of geopolitical, climatic and economic nature is sure to

ensure. Many different geopolitical scenarios can come out after and during the hegemonic decline of the United States and its allies. We might come to a period of no military hegemony among any major state. Yet there exist certain hierarchies and structures preventing a Hobbesian state of affairs in the global arena. Regarding the role that the left can play in influencing the international order, we can spot several scenarios, depending on whether the global left will approach state and international structures to transform them, or through attempts to establish new social relations globally.

In the first scenario, the global left can start to establish a set of organizations capable of contending politically in traditional ways, that is, through electoral politics, massive mobilization and pressure organizations in order to alter national and international political structures before liberal regimes transform themselves into reactionary or fascist machineries of repression. This effort would require a combination and balance of forces between the institutionalized left and its autonomous movements. In other words, synthesize the revolutionary energy of the 1917 and 1968 world revolutions into a single organization, capable of conquering and reconstituting the state through institutional methods, but maintaining its ability to foster and create autonomous movements from below. In this respect, the piece on diagonalism and the possibility of a new international by Christopher Chase-Dunn and Javier Ezcurdia is germane to this conversation. In this piece, the authors respond to the challenge posed by Samir Amin, Walden Bello on how to create an international for the 21st Century. Through an analysis of "horizontalism" and prefigurational movements, understood as movements that try to create alternative social orders to that of neoliberal globalization, outside of the regular flows of institutional and liberal-democratic politics, the authors suggest that these organizations can be organized through a major global institution that contends for power in international and national institutions, called "the vessel". This hypothetical organization could maintain the autonomy of many of these horizontal, anti-systemic movements, while maintaining the capacity to organize, direct and manage institutional reform in the upcoming crisis of capitalism in the 21th Century. Chase-Dunn and Ezcurdia, emphasize how the massive social movements of the last decade (from the Arab Spring to Chilean protests) have won massive appeal through large sections of the population, but have been followed with very feeble instances of political and institutional change. The vessel of these authors, could maneuver these large popular consensus, help develop and maintain prefigurational and horizontal communities on the edge of globalization, and influence the political structure of the world-system by participating and transforming traditional institutions.

The vessel is in this sense, compatible with the establishment of counterpublics in the coming years. These could chart a new path, given what could well be novel circumstances. If Wallerstein was right in suggesting that since the 1970s or thereabouts, the world-system entered a "structural crisis," a period of profound disequilibrium, the time might be ripe to begin to realize new political formations affording a decent, desirable exit from this volatile state of affairs. It was Wallerstein's contention that all historical systems have "lives," so to speak, and the operation "of their normal lives tends, over time, to move them far from equilibrium, at which point they enter a structural crisis, and in due course cease to exist." The modus operandi of an historical system features "trends," which "move the system too near its asymptotes," rendering it unable to continue its "normal, regular, slow upward push." He believed the ensuing wild and repeated fluctuations bring us "to a bifurcation—that is, to a chaotic situation in which a stable equilibrium cannot be maintained," engendering "two quite divergent possibilities of recreating order out of chaos, or a new stable system," determined by "a system-wide battle–for historical social systems, a political battle," and one that will produce a global social order not yet known. For Wallerstein, the struggle over systemic transformation takes place under conditions of "chaos," which he took to be a key characteristic of our "structural crisis." "Chaos is not a situation of totally random happenings," Wallerstein wrote; rather, it foretells "rapid and constant fluctuations in all the parameters of the historical system," including "not only the world-economy, the interstate system, and cultural-ideological currents, but also the availability of life resources, climatic conditions, and pandemics." Writing presciently almost a decade before COVID-19 claimed the lives of several million people

worldwide, Wallerstein understood the speed at which quotidian life could be turned upside down, for better and for worse.

Within the current crisis, Wallerstein suggested "the only certainty is that the existing system—the capitalist world-economy—cannot survive." That does not mean the predatory institutions and consequences of the system must cease to plague populations. Accelerated trends toward silencing and erasing subaltern concerns and carceral obstruction of exilic counterpublics could continue apace, compelling acquiescence to relations of capital so long as some semblance of the world-economy remains intact. Uncontested, resurgent techniques of social control could likewise help preserve a stratified barbarism, to borrow [Rosa Luxemburg's dystopian vision of future society bereft of socialism](#), and could assimilate it into a successor system far worse for far greater numbers of people than the crisis-riddled one we've got. Yet, if Wallerstein was also correct in [forecasting a future system](#) as the "result of an infinity of nano-actions by an infinity of nano-actors at an infinity of nano-moments," meaning what every person "does at each moment about each immediate issue matters," then we might chart that contrary path after all.

Coordinating counterpublics in solidarity with one another beyond borders could serve as a precondition for transcending nation-state hegemony in the process of displacing the limited possibilities for participatory globalization previously imposed. As opposed to "counter-hegemonic" struggle over the reigns of a given state, a popular shift to transnationalizing theoretical frameworks and exilic movements, over the course of succeeding decades – perhaps in the years until 2050, per Wallerstein's prognostication regarding when a new system would solidify – could weaken the coercive and censorious components of state organization. Refusing to tolerate far-right attacks on political dissent online, where the world's communication now commonly takes place, is part of an intercommunal self-defense strategy to undermine the otherwise brutal attempts to contain social-political movement. Protecting the virtual commons can be tantamount to reinforcing spaces of exile where communities in movement might create conditions in which our physical and digital lives are no longer governed by the possessive and dispossessive impulses nurtured by widespread exploited, alienated labor and ecologically destructive externalities hitherto required and reproduced by capital and its incessant agglomeration. In his work referenced immediately above, Wallerstein likened what's possible during these tumultuous times to the "butterfly effect," so named because of a phenomenon whereby a butterfly fluttering its wings can affect the climate across the globe. If indeed, "we are all little butterflies today," per his analogy, our method of anti-systemic interrelating in the present could, if we play our cards correctly, contribute to an expedited "withering away" of not just the state with all its machineries of control, to turn the theory put forward Marx's partner in anti-capitalist thought, Friedrich Engels, somewhat on its head. We can also participate, however each of us deems desirable, in the displacement of both the dog-eat-dog interstate order and the extant system as such, toward an interconnected world struggling to be born.

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