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Editorial Note

This is the second regular issue of *IAPSS Politikon* for 2019. As promised in the first one, we are pleased to report the results of the evaluation process for the first *Best Article Award*, comprising the four issues published in 2018. Congratulations to our authors (both from Volume 39 of the journal) Paola Imperatore (University of Pisa) and Adil Nussipov (Central European University) who share this year’s award. We also express our sincere gratitude to all members of our evaluation committee, namely Chair and honouree of this year’s award Professor İlter Turan (Istanbul Bilgi University, IPSA Past President), senior members Professor Yuko Kasuya (Keio University, IPSA EC member and Publications Subcommittee Chair), Professor Petri Koikkalainen (University of Lapland, ECPR EC member and Training Subcommittee Chair), and junior member Rafael Plancarte-Escobar (Autonomous University of Querétaro, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *IAPSS Politikon*).

The Award Committee concluded that both articles stood out equally for the innovative questions they raised as well as the methodological and theoretical coherence they displayed and decided that the Award be divided between the two authors. The Award Committee also noted that, though employing different modes of analysis, both articles stood out for the sophisticated operationalization of variables and use of data followed by penetrating analysis. The articles represent notable contributions to their respective subfields of Social Movements and International Organizations. While Imperatore’s article contributes to understanding the frames and discursive strategies present in the protest campaigns against infrastructure projects in the case of Italy, Nussipov’s paper, employing a quantitative model, helps us understand why International Organizations allow or deny access to Transnational Actors in their policymaking process.

In the past months, the efforts to further improve the performance and outreach of *IAPSS Politikon* led to the preparation of an annual report, covering the period from June 2018 to May 2019. One of the findings of this report is that the journal received\(^1\) 90 submissions, with a desk-rejection rate of 63 percent and a rejection rate (including desk-rejections) of 71 percent. The acceptance rate (excluding articles withdrawn by authors at some stage of the review process) equals 19 percent. These basic statistics match the journal’s ambition to meet high standards of academic quality (hence the relatively low acceptance rate). At the same time, the higher desk-rejection rate mostly due to submissions not meeting the formal requirements and the authors not rectifying them as requested, but relatively low rate of rejections in the main review process indicate inclusivity of authors from

\(^1\) Depending on the counting of the exact submission dates and other methodological details.
disadvantaged (educational, language, financial) backgrounds. In other words, authors who place considerable efforts into improving their manuscripts normally have a good chance of getting them accepted to the journal.

Last but not least, to the issue itself. In this one, all the publishing formats currently in place are represented (but we are working on extending these also based on the feedback and types of submissions received). There are three research papers. The issue begins with the contribution belonging to Political Theory by David Guignion, which critically assesses some of the central theses of the well-known contemporary thinker Jordan Peterson. Departing from the context of a particular piece of Canadian legislation, Guignion uses a number of primary writings and speeches of Jordan Peterson and juxtaposes them with the political thought of the philosophers Jean Baudrillard, Hannah Arendt, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The findings are an ambitious ‘counter-critique’ to Peterson’s critique of the notion of science in contemporary society. Next, AJ Golio’s article combines theory and empirics by identifying the ‘human costs’ that accompany the “fortress design” preservation policy of national parks which carries severe restrictions on land use including by local rural communities. While this model of conservation originates from the US, the author scrutinizes the case of South Africa which has implemented it as well. The South African case, with its regime transition, enriches the understanding of how opening up this policy area to more public participation, in particular through electoral accountability, may help reduce its negative side effects on the communities that existentially depend on the land. The last research article shifts the balance back to a theoretical study revolving around the notions of rationality and rationalisation in Critical Terrorism studies. Bernardino Leon-Reyes gains inspiration from the Weberian conceptualization of rationality in studying how a critical take on terrorism seems to have missed the centrality of (a certain type of) rationality in the conduct of terrorist actions. Breaking down this ‘objectified rationality’ into different subtypes creates room for empirical analyses of processes of rationalization of terrorist conduct as well as of the responses to it which may undermine the foundations of democratic regimes.

The last part of the issue is devoted to a research note by Maxim Chupilkin who advocates a more intense focus on inequality in political economy. He argues for a bi-directional study of social mobility, looking at both those who achieved a better economic position than their predecessors and those whose position worsened (including individuals from wealthy family backgrounds who do not end up with as high earnings as expected). Lastly, Marzio Di Feo reviews the popular book by Yuval Harari Homo Deus, praising it for its holistic and interdisciplinary approach but also raising a note of caution in relation to the generally optimistic outlook of the author on the civilizational transition towards ‘an age of algorithms’.
We invite you to engage with the papers from the present issue and look forward to presenting more original scholarship from junior researchers in the coming months.

On behalf of the Editorial Board

Max Steuer
Editor-in-Chief

References


Jordan Peterson and the (F)law of ‘Scientific Inquiry’: A Critical Evaluation of Peterson’s Use of Science and Philosophy in His Conquest Against Social Justice

David Guignion

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Abstract

This article explores Jordan Peterson’s political project in response to Canada’s legislation of Bill C-16, a bill seeking to add gender expression to the list of grounds for discrimination under the criminal code. Peterson opposes Bill C-16 because it presents, for him, an ideological mode of speech and thought regulation. For Peterson, this bill is the result of the decline of scientific validity and the rise of a postmodernism motivated by the desire to undermine Western civilization. Therefore, this article argues that Peterson’s challenge to postmodern thought as an anti-scientific doctrine is perplexing given the general lack of consensus between his views and those of the greater scientific community. The article presents different theoretical frameworks attesting to the reality of gender non-conforming identities as well as to the consequences of denying these identities, and argues that rather than challenging oppressive systems of governance, Peterson’s project actually mirrors them.

Keywords

Friedrich Nietzsche; Gender; Hannah Arendt; Jean Baudrillard; Jordan Peterson; Judith Butler; Totalitarianism; Trans-identities
Introduction

If all enigmas are resolved, the stars go out. If everything secret is returned to the visible […] , if all illusion is returned to transparence then heaven become indifferent to the earth.

—Jean Baudrillard (2008a: 79)

What is the purpose, and, worse still, what is the origin of all science? What? Is scientific method perhaps no more than fear of and flight from pessimism? A subtle defence against truth? Or, to put it in moral terms, is it something like cowardice and insincerity? To put it immorally, is it a form of cunning? O, Socrates, Socrates, was that perhaps your secret? O, mysterious ironist, was this perhaps your irony?

—Friedrich Nietzsche (2007: 4)

On September 27th 2016, Jordan Peterson, a psychology professor at the University of Toronto, released a YouTube video of himself speaking out against Bill C-16, a law proposed by the Canadian government that would add “gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act and [to] the list of characteristics of identifiable groups protected from hate propaganda in the Criminal Code” (Parliament of Canada, 2016). For Peterson, and many of his right-wing followers, Bill C-16 represents a shift towards an impending totalitarian regime that seeks to restrict freedom of speech and deny scientific reason. As he stated in an address to a group of students at the University of Toronto, “I have studied totalitarianism for four decades and I know how it starts” (Peterson, 2016a). According to Peterson, anyone that agrees with and promotes Bill C-16 must necessarily oppose “logic,” “dialogue,” and “Western civilization” (Peterson, 2017a). Peterson’s video, along with his vocal refusal to adopt gender-neutral pronouns, marked the beginning of Peterson’s rise to fame.

This article discusses Jordan Peterson’s crusade against Bill C-16 in order to challenge his utilization of scientific discourse to promote his ideological position on contemporary social issues. His arguments can be difficult to follow as they are riddled with aporias and contradictions that make a coherent analysis nearly impossible. For example, he has been vocal about his fear of a looming totalitarian regime while simultaneously calling for the complete abolishment of the Ontario Human Rights Commission that serves to “promote and enforce human rights, to engage in relationships that embody the principles of dignity and respect, and to create a culture of human rights compliance and accountability” (Ontario Human Rights Commission). Despite this, this article categorizes his overall project into three broad conceptual domains: his arguments about postmodernism, his “scientific” discourse, and gender identity. The article traverses each of these domains sequentially, giving credence to his arguments by constructing them in a coherent manner to allow for a steady theoretical terrain from which to mount this polemic. This strategy is employed to give a face to an
otherwise faceless argument and to make this dialogue possible. In relation to these three domains, this article presents counter-arguments and evidence that destabilize the facile deployment of a scientific rationality by Peterson and his allies and therefore calls into question many of his central claims.

This paper moves through each of these domains methodically, beginning with his juxtaposition of postmodernism with neo-Marxism, all the while claiming to be a faithful reader to Friedrich Nietzsche. This section demonstrates not only that postmodernism and neo-Marxism are two incommensurable terms, but that Nietzsche’s work has heavily influenced what Peterson labels postmodernism. Moreover, this section attempts to destabilize his problematic association of postmodern philosophy with totalitarianism. To do this, this paper invokes Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1994), a seminal text on the rise of totalitarianism in the 20th century. This use of Arendt’s theorization of the rise of totalitarianism in the 20th century serves as a plea for Peterson and his followers to recognize the parallels between those movements in the 20th century and much of the rhetoric that dominates our social Zeitgeist today. Moving from this domain, the second section presents divergent scientific data that attests to the reality of trans* identities. This section presents a number of scientific studies on the increasing risk experienced by trans* people today and the measures that should be taken to alleviate these risks. This section will serve the purpose of demonstrating the fragility of so-called scientific rationality and will call into question his axiomatic faith in science as universal and ahistorical. The third and final section presents the voices of those marginalized by Peterson and his allies in an effort to highlight the present efforts by marginalized folks to resist the erasure committed by Peterson. This section places these marginalized voices, and their theoretical approaches alongside the work of Jean Baudrillard and his consideration of simulation and singularity.

**The Incommensurability of Marxism and Postmodernism**

Peterson predicates a great deal of his political work on the flawed assumption that postmodernism is a threatening political doctrine that derives from Marxism. He often characterizes social activism as being propagated by “bloody neo-Marxists” who wish to promote postmodernism, a “pernicious and philosophically primitive and nihilistic doctrine” (Peterson, 2016c). Peterson argues that the rise of postmodernism constitutes the first step in replacing basic scientific tenets with “radical social constructionism” (Peterson, 2016c), a theoretical framework that would, according to him, allow the Left to replace a so-called objective Truth rooted in biology and genetics with a socially constructed human identity. He adds, in one of his many public lectures, that postmodernism is a “well developed and pervasive, pernicious, nihilistic, intellectually attractive doctrine” that now “dominates the humanities and…social sciences” (Peterson, 2017a).
Furthermore, Peterson suggests that European Marxist thought, defined by Richard D. Wolff and Stephen Cullenberg as a theory that distinguishes “the production and distribution of surplus labor from...matters of property and power” (Wolff and Cullenberg, 1986: 128), has been re-appropriated by contemporary postmodernists who have transposed the hegemonic Marxist relationship of “poor against rich” onto the broader postmodernist domain of the “oppressed against the oppressor” (Peterson, 2017a). With this argument, he therefore suggests that postmodernism is merely a clever Marxist “sleight of hand” (Peterson, 2017a) seeking, like its Marxist predecessor, to undermine the West.

Clare Hemmings problematizes this approach to postmodernism and Marxism by emphasizing some of the most significant differences between the two theoretical frameworks. She writes that postmodernism’s “attention to complexity of meaning and interpretation distracted us from [the] more substantive concerns with inequality, experience, political economy, and justice” (Hemmings, 2011: 97) that Marxism attends to. Hemmings extends this analysis by suggesting that, without a Marxist—or other tangible approach to critical theory—“we remain powerless to alter the pernicious power relations our poststructuralist tactics can cleverly identify but spectacularly fail to transform” (Hemmings, 2011: 97-8). Hemmings’s point stresses the lack of consistency between Marxist and poststructuralist theories, demonstrating their fundamental incongruency in the domain of political action, with the former emphasizing a radical transformation of capitalism into a socialist system, and the latter belonging to the domain of theory interested in the immaterial conditions of signification.

Jean Baudrillard, referred to by some as the “high priest of postmodernism” (1993a, 21), is one such figure that greatly disturbs Peterson’s conflation of Marxist and postmodern theories. In *The Mirror of Production*, Baudrillard vehemently challenges Marxism, asking: “are we, quite simply, within a mode of production at all, and have we ever been in one?” (Baudrillard, 1973: 124). Baudrillard extends this question by turning his critical gaze back on Marxism, suggesting that Marxism is predicated on the fundamentally Eurocentric tenets of “productivism, scientism, and historicism” (Baudrillard, 1973: 73), and that it homogenizes earlier societies under the “light of the present structure of the capitalist economy” therefore silencing specific sociohistorical contexts, projecting onto them “the spectral light of political economy” (Baudrillard, 1973: 66). This book marked a fundamental turning point in Baudrillard’s work as he grew wary of the possibility that Marxism could actually provide the blueprints for an effective mode of societal change. Postmodernism, as demonstrated with Baudrillard’s work, does not share an indubitable affinity with Marxism, but actually condemns it.
Baudrillard is not the only thinker indicative of postmodernism to be critical of Marxism however. Michel Foucault, who Peterson argues attempted to “resurrect Marxism” (Peterson, 2017b), is another such figure of the so-called postmodern tradition that has been highly critical of Marxism. In *The Order of Things*, he systematically avoids discussing Marxism in terms of economic theory in favour many other liberal approaches to economics indicative of the work of Adam Smith and François Quesnay. Foucault does this because, as he makes abundantly clear, he believes that “Marxism exists in nineteenth century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breathe anywhere else” (Foucault, 2005: 285). This sentiment resonates in harmony with the overarching themes of his work because he refuses to acknowledge that societal ills, or power, can be reduced to a single structural locus. Thus, Foucault is highly sceptical of the possibility of a meaningful societal revolution because, without a comprehensive evaluation of the plethora of institutions that govern our daily lives, we risk perpetuating the same oppressive schema.

Peterson’s definition of postmodernism, however, seems to exclude this type of postmodernist critique of Marxism. For him, the contemporary postmodern movement is simply a “new skin that the old Marxism now inhabits” made up of nihilistic yet dominating “neo-Marxists” guided by a desire to dismantle the “structure of Western civilization” (2017d). Although Peterson’s fears of nihilism, or the disavowal of moral or ethical principles, may appear sound, his contradictory position on postmodernism as both fundamentally nihilistic and actively dominating delegitimate one of his central concerns. Additionally, the thinkers that Peterson cites as representatives of the postmodern movement—Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida—were greatly indebted to the Western philosophical and literary canons with some commentators even labeling them “Neo-Kantians” (Meštrović, 2013: 154). Peterson’s reduction of these thinkers to philosophical aberrations, detached from Western Civilization, illuminates his own obliviousness to said canon.

**Peterson, Arendt, and Totalitarianism**

In Peterson’s *Maps of Meaning* he tries to grapple with and understand the historical instantiations of state mandated fascist and totalitarianism in the 20th century. One of the central questions he asks is, “How was it possible for people to act the way the Nazis had during World War II?” (Peterson, 1999: xii). What is particularly striking is that Peterson makes no significant use of Hannah Arendt, the thinker of fascism and totalitarianism par excellence. He does mention her briefly however, suggesting that her seminal text, *The Banality of Evil* would have been more appropriately titled “The Evil of Banality” (Peterson, 1999: 369). The absence of Arendt’s work in Peterson’s exploration of these themes is suspicious, and signals that his understanding of totalitarianism is missing integral philosophical insight. This is particularly true of the lineage he traces between nihilism and the development of totalitarianism.
Even if we were to overlook the contradictory nature of Peterson’s position on nihilism and political praxis, and were to engage with his scientific terms immanently, his linking of nihilism with totalitarianism remains problematic. As Hannah Arendt argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “indifference to public affairs [and] neutrality on political issues, are in themselves no sufficient cause for the rise of totalitarian movements” (Arendt, 1994: 313). According to Arendt, it is the “strong man” rather than the indifferent public that has historically lead to the rise of totalitarian regimes. As she explains, competitive and hostile “attitudes are very useful for those forms of dictatorship in which a ‘strong man’ takes upon himself the troublesome responsibility for the conduct of public affairs” (Arendt, 1994: 313) and hardly conform to traditional or typical definitions of nihilism.

Though Arendt’s observations regarding the “strong man” and totalitarianism more broadly are based on her experiences during the Jewish Holocaust, many of her theories seem to run parallel to Peterson’s claims regarding scientific rationality and human nature. This is not to say that Peterson directly emulates the fascist movements of the 20th century, as that comparison would be erroneous and misguided. Rather, Arendt’s description of the “strong man” as founded upon “the belief in a kind of human ‘nature’ which would be subject to the same laws of growth as that of the individual” (Arendt, 1994: 298) shares a strong affinity with Peterson’s persistent reliance on essentialist positions, as illustrated in statements about “essential female [and] masculine patholog[ies]” (Peterson, 2017e). Arendt elaborates on these “essentialist beliefs” as irrelevant since “Western philosophy and religion” has been defining and redefining it “for more than three thousand years” (Arendt, 1994: 298). Furthermore, such assumptions do very little to protect the rights of those who we consider human but still deprive of “expression within and acting upon a common world” (Arendt, 1994: 302). These sorts of oppressive mechanisms through which human nature is established and used to justify the removal of legal and/or political rights were used quite successfully by the Nazi regime during the Second World War. As Arendt explains, “the Nazis started their extermination of Jews by first depriving them of all legal status” (Arendt, 1994: 296) and then depriving them of their homes (Arendt, 1994: 293), therefore leaving them without “territory and (...) government of their own” (Arendt, 1994: 19). By expelling the Jewish people from any “community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever,” the Nazis were therefore able to expel them from humanity itself (Arendt, 1994: 297).

The oppressive mechanisms adopted by the Nazis are not only observable in the context of the Second World War, however, and can in fact be observed today. As Mary Ellen Donnan reveals in *The Shattered Mosaic: How Canadian Social Structures Cause Homelessness* (2016), “the national data indicates that although only about 10% of the general youth population identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, or two-spirited, people who identify in those ways make up 25
to 40% of the youth homeless population” (Donnan, 2016: 60). Interestingly, such statistics are ignored by Peterson, who prefers instead to claim that Bill C-16 only poses a threat to freedom of speech. This attitude is exemplified in an address given at the University of Toronto in which Peterson stated, in response to a trans* person’s concerns: “I don’t believe that using your pronouns will do you any good in the long run” (Peterson, 2016b). Peterson’s silence on issues of poverty and homelessness in the trans* community in Canada, combined with his aggressive stance against laws that seek to recognize trans* people and protect them from discrimination, mirror the tactics used by totalitarian regimes (such as the Nazi regime) to oppress marginalized communities.

**Nietzsche and Postmodernism**

As previously discussed, Peterson’s construction of contemporary social activism as a nihilistic and dangerous threat to Western values and scientific discourse born out of the postmodern movement is dependent on the axiom that the “fundamental assumptions of Western civilization are valid” (Peterson, 2017c). Though Peterson centers most of his core arguments around this “fundamental assumption,” his appreciation for Friedrich Nietzsche, a theorist described by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as a “precursor for postmodernism in his genealogical analyses of fundamental concepts, especially what he takes to be the core concept of Western metaphysics” (Alesworth, 2015), remains unshaken.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argues that the notions of “Truth” that run through the course of history are founded, not on their objectivity, but in their continual self-proclamation of objectivity. For Nietzsche, the shift from language to science placed the scientific method at the forefront of Western civilization, making everything quantifiable under the scientific gaze. As he explains, “it is *language* which works on building the edifice of concepts; later it is *science*” (Nietzsche, 2007: 150). Nietzsche expands on this idea, writing: “what I understand by the spirit of science is the belief, which first came to light in the person of Socrates, that the depths of nature can be fathomed and that knowledge can heal all ills” (Nietzsche, 2007: 82). According to Nietzsche, this belief in the ultimate infallibility of science, or “Socrates' tendency to murder art” (Nietzsche, 2007: 82), is destructive, especially when left unacknowledged. To Nietzsche, science is “truly capable of confining the individual within the smallest circle of solvable tasks” (Nietzsche, 2007: 85). As he explains, “science, spurred on by its powerful delusion, is hurrying unstoppably to its limits, where the optimism hidden in the essence of logic will founder and break up” (Nietzsche, 2007: 75).

There is no thinker that would stand as opposed to Peterson as Nietzsche, whom Peterson repeatedly cites and applauds in his *12 Rules for Life. An Antidote to Chaos*. Peterson has remarked of Nietzsche that he is as an “absolute intellectual *tour de force* of staggering magnitude” (Peterson, 2017f) and that he has influenced “every philosopher of the modern age [in] one way or another” (Peterson,
2017g). *12 Rules for Life*, proclaiming the necessity for people (young men) to adopt an ascetic lifestyle in the form of a mutated Christian conservatism, stands diametrically opposed to Nietzsche’s central claim in *The Genealogy of Morality* that the ascetic ideal is not something to strive for, but is rather the consequence of a life attempting to inject artificial meaning into its veins in a poor attempt at inoculation from degeneration (Nietzsche, 2017: 89). In this capacity, Peterson resembles the “ascetic priest” that Nietzsche castigates (Nietzsche, 2017: 89). The task of intellectuals should not be to inject arbitrary rules and regulations into people, but rather to foster “perspectival seeing” that welcomes “more eyes, various eyes we are able to use” to sketch a more complete understanding of our “objectivity” (Nietzsche, 2017: 89).

According to Peterson, the Western scientific discourse he holds so dear is not merely threatened by a general postmodern movement made up of nameless “neo-Marxist” social justice warriors, but rather, may be seen in specific actions taken by the members of this movement. These specific threats are especially apparent in relation to challenges made to the male/female binary. As Peterson explains, legislation (such as the proposed Bill C-16) that seeks to expand gender categories is “patently absurd” (Peterson, 2016c) and undeniably driven by “ideologues” that want to push “made up words” (Peterson, 2017h). Peterson is not so much concerned with the so-called ‘absurdity’ of these challenges as he is with the threat they pose to his belief system. For Peterson, “rational discourse,” “objectivity” and “scientific inquiry” (Peterson, 2017i) must necessarily be silenced for non-binary gender identities to exist and, because these concepts are paramount to Eurocentrism and the “success” of the West, Peterson dismisses any questions about their validity as intrinsically unfounded. With this dismissal, Peterson therefore eliminates the potential for any meaningful dialogue that may not align itself with his fixed opinions.

Peterson’s project is an attempt then to move away from the Nietzschean notion of “perspectival seeing” toward the domains of ahistorical, and acontextual seeing. This narrowing of possibility operates to maintain the authority of those who choose what is considered worth seeing, and through what means, pushing society toward the sovereign and dictatorial rule.

The ‘Science’ vs. Peterson

Though Peterson’s line of argumentation seems to suggest a science/postmodernism opposition, a considerable number of scientific journals have published articles addressing the growing stigmatization and discrimination trans and genderqueer people experience regularly. Such articles, though they conform to the same scientific rationale utilized by Peterson, shed light on the great deal of contradictions, oppositions and divergent beliefs in this supposedly “objective” field of study. These studies correspond to the domain of research that aligns with the Aristotelian maxim of *phronesis*, which may be understood as fostering “practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying
the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 4). This approach, although still immersed in the scientific tradition, stands opposed to the other domain of Aristotelian reason of *episteme* that proclaims the *a priori* nature of “scientific knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 2). This brand of research, while disavowed by Peterson, presents a foray into the lives and experiences of marginalized groups that would otherwise be silenced.

In their article, “Transgender Population Size in the United States: A Meta-Regression of Population-Based Probability Samples” for example, Esther L. Meerwijk and Jay M. Sevelius demonstrate just how restrictive and inefficient the gender binary can be for so many people in the U.S. In their study, Meerwijk and Sevelius report that approximately 1.2 million people do not identify with their “sex assigned at birth” (Meerwijk and Sevelius, 2017: 1), adding that this estimate would rise by “1.5 times” if it were to also include other forms of gender nonconformity (Meerwijk and Sevelius, 2017: 1).

Divan et al. confirm this position, arguing in their study that the “recognition as human beings” of trans* and genderqueer folk requires “a guarantee of (...) core rights that recognize [the] legal personhood” of these individuals (Divan et al., 2016: 81). Still, to Divan et al., the acknowledgement of someone’s gender identity is just the first step. As they explain, “preventing human rights violations and social exclusion is key to [a] sustainable and equitable development” (Divan et al., 2016, 82) that can only be established with “systemic strategies to reduce the violence against trans people” occurring, necessarily, “at multiple levels” (Divan et al., 2016: 81).

The harmful consequences of the stigmatization faced by trans* people are further discussed in a study published in the *Archives of Neuropsychiatry* of Istanbul in March of 2017. This study, which included 99 transmen and 42 transwomen participants, reported that the “overall incidence of at least one suicide attempt among participants was 29.8%” and that of those that did attempt to commit suicide, 76.7% were under the age of 21 (Şahika Yüksel, et al., 2017: 29). Furthermore, its authors suggest that as youth begin to familiarize themselves with their own identity, “heterosexist false information, which normalizes binary gender” can lead to the “internalization of transphobia, self-blame, shame, and problems that can continue into adult life” (Şahika Yüksel, et al., 2017: 30). Still, suicide is just one possible mode of harm that trans* people may regularly experience. This disavowal of gender identities and sexualities, and the continual denial of adequate health care, social care, and housing diminish any opportunity to generate a more accepting and open environment free of stigmatization and discrimination. The standardization of a limited gender binary that recognizes only two, stable gender categories based on physical sex at birth combined with the persistent refusal to acknowledge identities that defy this system seems, therefore, to cause much greater harm than do the so-called “neo-Marxists” Peterson is so deeply concerned about.
Despite the growing body of scientific literature that supports and recognizes more fluid definitions of sex and gender while acknowledging the harmful effects of the oppression faced by trans* and genderqueer individuals, Jordan Peterson continues to argue that attempts made to redefine and recognize a wider range of gender expressions and identities is a simple “construction of people who have a political ideology” (Peterson, 2016d). For Peterson then, there is simply no way to make sense of trans* and/or genderqueer individuals within the realm of Western scientific discourse and, therefore, any gender identity that does not conform to his “objective” and “scientific” definition of gender as fixed binary system related to biological sex must be invalid and therefore repudiated. Peterson’s erasure through disavowal of trans* peoples’ chosen preferred pronouns consequently locates cisgender identities within the realm of ‘reality,’ and any other non-normative gender identities within the realm of artificiality.

Baudrillard, Reality, and Truth

Peterson’s categorization of people based on their connection to a “real” biological imperative or ideologically motivated political strategy implies that there is an essential reality pertaining to gender identity that exists across cultural epistemes and historical epochs. Though Peterson suggests that there is a fundamental “Truth” pertaining to identity, and that this “Truth” can be rigorously supported with the use of scientific methods, his claims do not account for the possibility that the gender binary is itself an ideologically motivated tool, and that there may in fact be no ultimate “Truth” pertaining to gender identity. Jean Baudrillard has vigorously challenged the position held by scholars such as Peterson on objectivity and “Truth,” suggesting instead that “science, like any discourse, is organized on the basis of a conventional logic” adding that it “explains things which have been defined and formulated in advance and which subsequently conform to these explanations” (Baudrillard, 1993b: 61). The studies presented above, remaining faithful to the Aristotelian notion of phronesis, resonate in concert with Baudrillard’s theorization of science because they do not refuse that science is valid and results may be concluded from them, but that these conclusions should not be transposed onto any societal or cultural context. Therefore, despite the many attempts to dissuade a Baudrillardian praxis for scientific conduct, these studies speak to the late Baudrillard’s conception of singularity which holds that “every detail of the world is perfect if it is not referred to some larger set” (Baudrillard, 2005: 140). This turn to Baudrillard then may appear ironic given the implicit rejection of postmodernism by Peterson and many other members of the

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2 Of course, not all trans* people locate themselves outside of the gender binary. Those people reserve every right to identify how they choose, even if it subscribes the dominant notion of the gender binary. The goal of this argument is not to condemn, in any way, trans* people who fit within the gender binary, but to suggest that the gender binary is but one of a plethora of ways to look at gender identity and expression.
scientific community. However, this paper sketches a version of Baudrillardian theory that speaks to the Aristotelian notion of \textit{phronesis} to broaden the conceptual and physical possibility of scientific research. Prior to exploring Baudrillard, it is important to consider the way that contemporary psychological research has become attuned to the nature of simulation in understanding humans and their relationships to the world.

Lisa Feldman Barrett, professor of psychology at Northeastern University, has greatly challenged what she calls the “classical view of emotion” that maintains there to be universal attributes to human emotion and interaction. In her \textit{How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain}, she disturbs this classical view by suggesting that the world is understood by humans through “simulations,” which dictates what we “see, hear, touch, taste and smell” (Barrett, 2017: 27). Moreover, these simulations can “cause tangible changes in your body” (Barrett, 2017: 28). While Barrett does not draw a direct parallel between her own work and that of Baudrillard, there are many parallels between their conceptions of simulation. This is because, like Baudrillard, Barrett is trying to wrest the broader scientific community from the clutches of transcendental, universalistic assumptions regarding emotion and the human body. Barrett proposes that we become attuned to our relationship to simulation opposed to these transcendent principles because “people spend at least half their waking hours simulating rather than paying attention to the world around them, and this pure simulation strongly drives their feelings” (Barrett, 2017: 71).

Reality, for Baudrillard, is always caught in a play of signification, and suggestions of a “naturality” made by the authoritative scientific community mistake the only true nature of the world as a world of appearances in which there may not be “anything but a discourse of the real and the rational” (Baudrillard, 2008b: 14). According to Baudrillard then, notions of an objective “Truth” are fundamentally flawed and any attempt to occupy an objective field of study is bound to fail and merely become “signs: signifiers of a ‘real’ signified” (Baudrillard, 1973: 48). The fundamental impossibility of performing “objective” studies and/or of revealing fundamental truths is understood by Baudrillard and his theory of simulation. For Baudrillard, simulation occurs when “the world has become real beyond our wildest expectations” (Baudrillard, 2008b: 65) and can be described as the outcome of a calculated move to put the “illusion of the world to death” (Baudrillard, 2008b: 17). Scientific discourses that rely on notions of objectivity and “Truth” therefore dissolve “into the imaginary of the sign, or the sphere of truth” (Baudrillard, 2008b: 17) and leave us with reality (and therefore simulation) in all its glory. The ‘real’ then, is “merely a particular case of that simulation” (2008b: 17) that Baudrillard argues “allows our society to think itself and live itself as superior to all others” (Baudrillard, 1973: 113). Jordan Peterson’s
understanding of the world as fixed, stable, and decipherable through the use of science therefore operates to uphold and reinforce the realm of oppressive simulation.

For Baudrillard, the only adequate way to challenge Peterson’s oppressive rhetoric within this realm of simulation is to engage with “seduction,” a concept he defines as the “symbolic mastery of forms” (Baudrillard, 2003: 24). Rather than attempt to understand the world as existing outside of appearances, representation, or ideology, seduction diverts things from “their identity, their reality, to destine them for the play of appearances, for their symbolic exchange” (Baudrillard, 2003: 21). Baudrillard’s “seduction” opposes Peterson’s scientific discourse precisely because seduction is able to engage with the world at the level of appearances. This approach remains faithful to his concept of singularity as it takes cultural formations, in the demonstration of rites and rituals, as immanent in any culturally faithful analysis in the form of science or otherwise. This line of argumentation may be observed in Baudrillard’s earlier work when he argues that “only a critique of the political economy of the sign can analyze how the present mode of domination is able to regain, integrate and simultaneously take advantage of […] all previous,’ archaic’ modes of production and exchange, infra- or trans- economic (Baudrillard, 1981: 120). Baudrillard’s work can then be read as not necessarily opposing the domain of scientific inquiry, but accounting for the degree to which any scientific inquiry should be attuned to the cultural and significator conditions of the object of study.

This critique of the political economy of the sign functions to simultaneously address the nature of signification, while simultaneously challenging the historical and cultural instantiations that have culminated in its potentially oppressive existence. Without this sort of criticism, we run the risk of perpetuating the notion of a “real” method or approach to criticism that mobilizes the discursive and scientific tools of Eurocentric enlightenment thinking that has been so categorically responsible for much of the hegemonic oppression that we find ourselves associated with today. It is in this capacity that Baudrillard is particularly effective at putting forth a methodological imperative for the realization of the Aristotelian notion of phronesis because he refuses to suggest that there is a single way to conduct research, but that research and science may adapt to accommodate the given societal or cultural moment.

Baudrillard, Butler, and those Voices of the Marginalized

The trans* community is one example of a community that challenges the greater system at hand through a radical re-evaluation of the hyper-normalized position of cisgender people. Riley J. Dennis, a trans* contributor to the internet site Everyday Feminism, disturbs the strict relationship between gender and sex when she argues that “sex is not a biological fact because it is determined by things that are largely changeable” (Dennis, 2017). Still, this is not to say that trans*identity is inherently opposed to any biological ‘fact.’ As Riki Lane explains, if we simply dismiss ““biologism,”
we forget that there really is biology that we have to theorize through investigating what is natural, biological, social, and cultural and how these categories develop and condition one another in discourse” (Lane, 2009: 138). Rather, biology should be subjected to the same discursive challenge as is mobilized against the dichotomization of gender.

This radical challenge to the scientific validity of the dichotomization of biological sex presents a Baudrillardian “reversal.” This reversal occurs when biological sex is inverted to mirror the highly unsteady terrain of gender identity. No longer is gender something that is predicated on the objective finality of ‘sex,’ but it is ‘sex’ that is reversed to be predicated on the fundamental uncertainty of gender identity. In this instance, sex is seduced away from the objective finality of its biological imperative, toward the “form which tends always to unsettle someone in their identity and the meaning they can have for themselves” (Baudrillard, 2003: 22).

Judith Butler adds to this theory, arguing that gender “ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 2002: 179). By challenging Peterson’s understanding of the male/female binary as inextricably linked to a transcendental natural apparatus, Butler confirms Baudrillard’s theory of simulation, outlining the play of appearances and signification emblematic of simulation and of gender. As she explains, the “replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (Butler, 2002: 41).

As both Baudrillard and Butler demonstrate, to acknowledge the fluidity, diversity, and multiplicity of gender as a social construct allows us to move closer to the reality of the world, not further away from it. Assumptions about gender as belonging to fixed binary system, however, illustrate our denial of the world as illusion and, therefore, further remove us from our world. Perhaps Baudrillard says it best when he writes that

at all events, illusion is indestructible. The world as it is—which is not at all the ‘real’ world —perpetually eludes the investigation of meaning, thus causing the present catastrophe of the apparatus of production of the ‘real’ world, so true is it that illusion cannot be combatted with truth—that is merely to redouble the illusion—but only be a higher illusion (Baudrillard, 2008b: 19).

Jordan Peterson is characteristically emblematic of a drive to purge the world of all illusion. His reliance on scientific rationale, and a very specific scientific rationale at that, attaches meaning to a world that is first and foremost unnatural. For Peterson, there is a “Truth” beneath the illusion. With enough science, reason and rationality, this “Truth” may be attained from under the heavy
weight of illusion that clouds our judgment and intellect. Peterson’s failure to ask if the only truth of the world is that beneath the bedrock of illusion there is only a greater illusion feeds the progression of Western archaeological excavation into illusion and drives this machine of modernity deeper into the bedrock of illusion than ever before. What will remain then, once the final illusion has been purged?

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to present many of the philosophical and psychological shortcomings of Jordan Peterson’s work. By drawing upon a plethora of sources from academic circles indicative of the “hard” and “soft” sciences to the philosophical tradition of the humanities to voices of those marginalized outside of academia, this paper has demonstrated the range of perspectives that oppose and resist many of the facile claims put forth by Peterson. Beyond locating the various contradictions and fallacious remarks Peterson makes, this paper has also argued that Peterson’s assault against Bill C-16 risks mirroring the same systemic instantiations of totalitarianism that he claims to know so much about. To re-iterate, this is not to suggest that he represents these movements directly, but that there are many affinities between these oppressive ideological systems and Peterson’s faith in a universal conception of truth. This paper serves the purpose of mounting a philosophically analytic rebuttal to Peterson’s central claims by performing an immanent critique, pointing to the many shortcomings of his speculations, and locating epistemic fallacies that may be observed in his ideas. This is a necessary form of critique because, unlike the Hegelian mode of oppositional politics that poses a critique from an antithetical and exterior positionality, this form identifies the core of the theoretical inadequacy of Peterson’s project from the inside.

References


People or Preservation? How Electoral Accountability Reduces Human Cost in South Africa’s National Parks

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Abstract

Natural protected areas (NPAs) are commonly used to preserve environmental biodiversity. Such policies, however, often harm rural communities. This article argues that the human cost of NPAs is often because of a lack of formal electoral accountability that links national governments to these communities. Through the case of 1994 democratic elections in South Africa that signified the end of the apartheid, I show that an increase in electoral accountability can be associated with a decrease in the human cost of NPAs. Using scholarly observations and histories on NPAs in South Africa, and primary documents from governmental agencies, I examine the post-apartheid change in three areas pertinent to human cost: Law and Intention, Communication and Community Involvement, and Land Restitution. In doing so, I demonstrate that the enfranchisement of black South Africans, who overwhelmingly populate the rural communities that are harmed by NPAs, has led to a shift in human cost.

Keywords

Biodiversity; Electoral Accountability; National Parks; Preservation; Human Cost; South Africa
Introduction

Land preservation has become an increasingly important international issue, as world leaders turn their attention toward the state of the environment. In this setting, natural protected areas (NPAs) like parks and preserves play an imperative role in protecting biodiversity, as well as easing the effects of desertification, sensitivity to drought (Stringer et al., 2009), and rapid urban expansion (Huang et al., 2018). However, the literature on NPAs is critical of how these parks also create substantial human cost in the developing world, and especially in Africa (Neumann, 1998), where many people rely on subsistence land use (Brechin et al., 1991; Chatty and Colchester, 2002). This conflict between the use of NPAs in Africa for positive environmental outcomes, and the harm they tend to inflict on local communities, suggests that further research is needed to find equilibrium between the two.

In this article, I look at the human cost of NPAs in depth and argue that a previously absent, yet crucial, component of the issue is electoral accountability. Existing research, while hinting at this relationship, has yet to explicitly connect accountability to the human cost of NPAs. Specifically, I will demonstrate that the substantial harm the land preservation policies in Africa exert upon rural communities is often due to the failures of formal electoral systems in holding governments accountable to these communities. I hypothesize that stronger electoral ties between governments and rural communities are associated with lower human cost NPAs. To substantiate this claim, the following pages will present a case study of South Africa, where an increase in electoral accountability was observed during the 1994 elections, the first in which black South Africans could fully participate. I identify three primary areas of concern for human cost—Law and Intention, Communication and Community Involvement, and Land Restitution—and compare the conditions in each of these areas in both pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. To do so, I mostly use secondary accounts and histories, supplemented by analyses of primary documents from the South African National Assembly and the government agency on South African National Parks. Overall, through this case study, I document the decline in the human cost of the nation’s National Parks system post-1994 and provide evidence for the claim that an increase in political accountability is associated with a decrease in human cost.

The Human Cost of Protected Areas: A Literature Review

Before delivering a history of national parks in Africa and their human cost, some key terms must be clarified. Firstly, I borrow the definition of a “protected area” from Brechin et al. (1991: 7), who understand it as “any finite area of land or water that comes under a systematic managerial regime.” A natural protected area (NPA), then, has the explicit objective of land management for
environmental and biodiversity protection. Research confirms that land preservation in NPAs is an essential part of maintaining the ecosystems, wildlife, and natural habitats threatened by climate change and human impact (Stringer et al., 2009; Huang et al., 2018). For instance, evidence shows that NPAs are effective in meeting global biodiversity targets (Chape et al., 2005), and there is a decline in the loss of natural land-cover at protected sites in Africa (Beresford et al., 2013). As such, NPAs are an integral and indispensable part of environmental protection. As a salient issue across the world, including in Africa (Lubbe, 2017), NPAs exist in some form in nearly every country (Brechin et al., 1991).

Governments play a key role in land preservation and the management of NPAs. In most countries, NPAs are designated and maintained by the central government, exemplified by National Parks (Chatty and Colchester, 2002; Brechin et al., 1991). The tendency toward governmental management becomes clear when viewed through the lens of space. The designation of an NPA necessitates a portion of land, and states, by definition, represent some kind of institutionalized authority and control over this land (North, 1981; Tilly, 1985). In a system of state-controlled preservation, NPAs are a result of intentional domestic policy choices that are shaped by competing interests (Duffy, 2000).

Most policy on NPAs and land preservation across the world follows the example of the United States. The U.S. introduced the world’s first National Park in 1872, Yellowstone, based on the assumption that conservation of land requires extreme restriction of human use of that land (Chatty and Colchester, 2002). This “fortress design” style quickly became the prominent preservation practice across the world (Thondhlana and Cundill, 2017), so much so that “the ideas that people should not live in protected areas or consume their resources are virtually synonymous with the national park ideal” (Brechin et al., 1991: 10). NPAs, then, can be understood as excluding human use entirely (Brechin et al., 1991; Chatty and Colchester, 2002). The “fortress design” and the policies required for such a mandate are, however, not always well suited for other countries, as in the United States relatively few people rely on subsistence land use (Brechin et al., 1991). Across sub-Saharan Africa, many individuals live in rural communities that require the use of local natural resources for survival (Anthony, 2007). Therefore, the implementation of “fortress design” NPAs can lead to significant human cost.

As a second key term, I use “human cost” to denote the negative impacts on a community, that interfere with its societal and economic development. The relationship between NPA policies in Africa and the human cost for those who live in and around them is the primary concern of this article. Historically, this relationship has been a sour one, to put it lightly. NPAs often run in tandem with the forced removal of communities that live in or use the designated area. This practice, while
seemingly extreme, has been quite common across sub-Saharan Africa (Anthony, 2007). In Tanzania, a country that boasts the largest protected land area in Africa, over half of the preservation endeavors involved evictions (Brockington, Sachedina, and Scholfield, 2008: 567). An estimated 1,200 persons were displaced from the country’s well-known Serengeti National Park alone (Neumann, 1998). Furthermore, in Uganda, in 1983, the creation of Lake Mburo National Park involved the displacement of an estimated 4,500 families (Pearson and Muchunguzi, 2011: 126). The inability to cultivate the land for subsistence or the use of natural resources, one of the core tenants of “fortress design”, leaves many communities economically deprived. In Tanzania, the Maasai that live within the confines of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area are worse off than similar Maasai groups who do not (Galvin et al., 2002). The exclusion of local communities applies not only to economics, but also the policy-making processes that form NPAs, as “[t]he exclusion of local people as knowledgeable active participants in management” (Goldman, 2001: 65) is widespread.1

Accounts of human cost suggest that balancing the environmental and social outcomes is essential to the goals of preservation, as hostility resulting from local resentment of NPAs presents a significant detriment to the proper maintenance of ecosystems (Fabricius and de Wet, 2002; Brockington, Sachedina, and Scholfield, 2008). It is therefore imperative to bridge the gap between these natural and social concerns. Here, my article contributes to the conversation by bringing electoral accountability into the picture.

**Preservation and Electoral Accountability: A Theoretical Framework**

While mechanisms of formal accountability among governments and those they govern is a dense and complex topic, its basic logic can be explained through the self-interested politician. In a competitive election, where this policy-maker faces a punishment of being voted out of the office or a reward of being voted in, she must advocate for the desires of her constituents in order to gain power (Ashworth, 2012). Thus, the representative remains accountable to protect the interests of the represented. Without free and fair elections, this system of formal accountability either does not exist, or is dysfunctional to some degree, and politicians may have little incentive to address the problems of the underprivileged. The staggering human cost of land preservation across Africa suggests a breakdown of this political accountability mechanism.

However, matters of environmental concern, like biodiversity protection and land preservation, can lead to cases where an incumbent is incentivized to act against the voters’ short-

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1 For those that live adjacent to NPAs, complaints about the negative impacts of the wildlife itself are numerous. In fact, encounters with wildlife are the primary source of dissatisfaction, according to local-level public opinion data (Anthony, 2007; Pearson and Muchunguzi, 2011). Wild animals, which often call the parks home, destroy crops in the surrounding communities, graze on pasture intended for livestock, and carry diseases (Pearson and Muchunguzi, 2011).
term interests for the sake of their long-term interests (Bueno de Mesquita, 2007; Daley and Snowberg, 2011). Therefore, a decision in favor of a policy that will fight climate change, a long-term interest, at the expense of short-term economic growth is possible despite a potential short-term electoral punishment (Ashworth, 2012: 184). For example, disaster preparedness spending, a policy that is not likely to have short-term electoral reward, is nonetheless a sensible policy as it has potential life-saving benefits in the long run (Healy and Malhotra, 2009).

It is possible to relate such cases to NPAs and human cost. Accountability mechanisms could be functional in a sense that African politicians do represent the interests of their constituents, but they incur short-term human cost, to trade off in favour of the long-term benefits of biodiversity conservation. Yet, this outcome is unlikely because as existing research shows, high human cost and the resulting poverty, marginalization, and hostility subverts conservation goals (Fabricius and de Wet, 2002; Brockington, Sachedina, and Scholfield, 2008). Therefore, the trade-off here would result in neither short-term social benefit nor long-term environmental protection.

Instead, historical land preservation policy can be better explained through a common dynamic wherein systems of governmental accountability tend to respond to economic elites, not the laypeople that typically make up the rural and subsistence communities that are negatively affected by NPAs (Gilens, 2012; Diop, 2012; Mizuno, 2016). This issue becomes apparent by examining public opinion toward preservation, such as Infield’s (1988) study, in which positive attitudes toward NPAs increase in correlation with an increase in affluence and education levels. This is likely because most of the benefits of NPAs are disproportionately received by urban areas and economic elites. For instance, historically, parks in Africa tended to be only accessible to high-ranking chiefs or colonial figures, and excluded laypeople and most indigenous Africans (Brechin et al., 1991). While NPAs have recently become nominally more accessible for all, their economic benefits are still far out of the reach of rural communities. Profits from park tourism in Kenya tend to be centralized in urban centers like Nairobi, instead of going to local businesses (Brechin et al., 1991). Urban companies gain large revenues from preservation and eco-tourism, but incur little, if any, of the cost that comes with them (Obunde, 2005; Pearson and Muchunguzi, 2011).

In an era of heightened global environmental and biodiversity concerns, as reflected in the signing of the Paris Climate Accord and dire reports from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Davenport 2015; Davenport 2018), countries that take action toward biodiversity conservation can receive rewards in the form of improved international relations (Duffy, 2000). As Duffy (2000) points out, African wildlife holds a prominent position in the Western imagination, and African biodiversity protection is a highly salient issue among the Western public. In the United Kingdom, for example, Prince Harry holds a secondary role as the President of the
conservation NGO African Parks Network (Mfula 2018). With African biodiversity holding such a prominent position among the Western populace, national governments in Africa could pursue NPAs to please these groups, obtain their tourism dollars, and secure a diplomatic victory, unconcerned with the human cost laid on rural constituents.

Lastly, legacies of human cost could be explained by the fact that countries in Africa have historically not been very democratic. Most African nations spent much of the twentieth century as colonies of European powers, and upon independence, fell into various authoritarian and one-party regimes. In 2017, the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index rated twenty-four countries in sub-Saharan Africa as authoritarian regimes. The Freedom in the World report for the year 2018 notes little progress in democratization across sub-Saharan Africa, with only 11% of people living in countries that are considered “free”. Without strong democratic elections, there is little reason to think that formal accountability between governments and people can exist at all. In this scenario, human cost is of little consequence simply because the victims have no means of electoral punishment.

In this section I presented three explanations of accountability failure which prompt governments across sub-Saharan Africa to pursue high-human cost NPAs. (1) They could be accountable to rural communities by responding to long-term environmental interests at the expense of their short-term social concerns, but this is not likely. (2) They could choose to be accountable only to economic elites instead of the rural communities, relying instead on patronage networks to get elected (van de Walle 2003; Corstange 2016). (3) They could simply not be held accountable at all, in the case of non-democratic regimes. All of these possibilities suggest that there is a high risk of human cost, incurred by those living in areas of at-risk biodiversity, or simply rural places that make attractive locations for potential NPAs. I hypothesize that this risk can be reduced through an improvement in electoral accountability, especially in rural communities.

A Case Study of South Africa

In order to test my hypothesis, I now turn to a case study. South Africa is ideal for examining how NPA systems change over time, and how responsive they are to these institutional changes, given its extensive history with NPAs. In 1898, the establishment of the Sabie Game Reserve in the Transvaal Republic marked the second of such preservation efforts in the world, after the establishment of Yellowstone in the United States over one decade earlier (Cock and Fig, 2002). This effort shows that early twentieth-century South Africa championed the United States’ “fortress design” application of NPAs (Carruthers, 2008; Dlamini, 2012). The Sabie Game Reserve later survived the unification and independence experiences and was renamed as Kruger National Park, which to this day remains South Africa’s largest park and the nation’s flagship preservation effort.
Since the original National Parks Act of 1926, management of all the National Parks in South Africa, which today number twenty, has been institutionalised under the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, and the governmental organization South African National Parks (SANParks) (SANParks, n.d.a, SANParks, n.d.b). In this sense, NPA management in South Africa as an institutionalised and legislated governmental endeavour is subject to frameworks of formal electoral accountability.

This robust history of NPAs in South Africa also includes accounts of violence and disregard toward rural communities, which indicates that pre-1994 South Africa represents high human cost occurrences. In writing about SANParks, Moore and van Damme (2002: 64) are blunt, stating, “Biodiversity preservation was the exclusive concern of conservationists in [SANParks], whilst human and social issues were mostly ignored.” Household interview data from a rural community in Natal, South Africa, reveals markedly negative opinion toward the local NPA, despite positivity toward the concept of environmental conservation generally (Infield 1988). It also appears that perceptions of NPAs in South Africa varied significantly among certain groups. As mentioned earlier, a positive opinion was correlated with affluence and education level (Infield, 1988). A study of South African reserves also reveals that those affiliated with SANParks, like reserve managers, perceive little conflict with local communities, where the communities themselves hold grievances over restricted access and lack of benefits (Thondhlana and Cundill, 2017). It is not difficult to imagine South Africa’s history of forced removals from NPAs and other negatively impactful land preservation practices to be linked to un-democratic tendencies. Rural peoples typically lack the ability to hold South African politicians accountable for human cost issues, as confirmed by the authors here:

People [who were] forcibly relocated to make way for conservation in South Africa shared a number of characteristics… They lived in underdeveloped parts of the country with weak formal infrastructure. These small communities therefore lacked political leverage (Fabricius and de Wet, 2002: 143).

Several scholars categorize the practices of SANParks firmly into the racially divided apartheid regime that ruled South Africa under the National Party from 1948-1994, because by and large, the forcibly removed rural communities were mostly composed of black South Africans (Cock and Fig, 2002; Carruthers, 2008; Dikeni, 2016).

A shift in conservation philosophy toward a more militant “management by intervention” (Carruthers, 2008: 203) style in post-World War II South Africa, coincided with the 1948 ascendance of the National Party, and the beginning of the apartheid. This is not necessarily surprising, given the lack of representation of black South Africans pre-1994, when they were excluded from, among other sectors of government, serving on the board of SANParks (Cock and Fig, 2002). But the rural
communities that faced the human cost of preservation were largely made up of black South Africans, and therefore, an increase in electoral accountability towards black South Africans would yield an opportunity to push for accountability to these communities. In 1994, the National Party’s control of the South African government was challenged when black citizens became enfranchised, marking what many consider the first fully democratic elections in the country (Carruthers, 2008; Ross, 2008; Thompson, 2014). The 1994 election signalled a sweeping shift in electoral accountability in favour of black South Africans, and therefore, for rural communities and the victims of past SANParks policy. As historical accounts confirm, despite some imperfections, the election was overall representative of these communities (Ross, 2008; Thompson, 2014), with an estimated 90% voter turnout in April 1994 (Beinart, 2001: 291). Therefore, this case study includes an increase in electoral accountability at a particular point in time (the 1994 elections) that makes during-apartheid and post-apartheid comparison possible.

There is some debate, however, over how “accountable” South Africa’s government became after these elections. The African National Congress (ANC), which became the ruling party, has controlled the national government ever since (Thompson, 2014). Thus, there is concern over electoral accountability under the dominant party rule, and despite the practice of largely free and fair elections with multiple parties, scholars express scepticism over responsiveness to voters within ANC supremacy (Graham, 2014). Others find, however, that at the local level ANC politicians are largely responsive to voter opinion, and re-nomination is closely correlated with local government performance (Wegner, 2018). Another debate concerns the system of proportional representation adopted by South Africa, and whether politicians in states that utilize proportional representation face any incentive to respond to their constituents in rural and agrarian areas instead of national party platforms (Barkan, 1995). Other scholars assert that such proportional representation is best for highly fractionalized democracies, and note the amendments of the South African government to combat parliament’s detachment from voters (Reynolds, 1995). South Africa also ranks consistently high on international measures of democratization (Freedom House, 2018; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018), suggesting that concerns over governmental legitimacy in South Africa are largely unfounded.

Therefore, South Africa as a case study adequately mimics the hypothesis of human cost and accountability established earlier, which suggests that a decrease in human cost, especially when it comes to SANParks practices, should be observed after the 1994 shift toward electoral accountability for black and rural citizens. The following section provides an analysis of the evidence of this decrease in human cost. These results are divided into three main areas of South African NPA policy and practice that impacts on human cost. Each of these is examined in both during- and post-
apartheid periods, for that the differences can also be attributed to the increase in electoral accountability.

Firstly, in the *Law and Intention* section, I analyse and compare primary documents from SANParks and laws from the South African National Assembly pertinent to land preservation. This constitutes a study of formal governmental change. Secondly, as important as changes within policy, are changes within practice. Works on NPAs’ human cost note high instances of local communities being left out of the decision-making process and economic development (Goldman, 2001; Galvin et al., 2002). There is evidence in existing literature to determine that communication with populations affected by NPAs leads to desirable social outcomes (Bidol and Crowfoot, 1991), most expressively the general public approval of NPAs, as occurred in South Africa’s neighbouring Swaziland (Ntshalintshali and McGurk, 1991). Therefore, evidence of an increase in *Communication and Community Involvement* would indicate fewer human cost outcomes. I document this change through secondary accounts and histories, as well as data on SANParks employment. Finally, *Land Restitution* consists of policies that involve returning land to its original inhabitants of previously displaced communities. The literature on NPAs stress forced removals as a primary grievance of local communities (Neumann, 1998; Pearson and Muchunguzi, 2011), and although a history as traumatic as this one may not ever be fully rectified, several authors point to these policies as one significant and necessary area of redress (Cock and Fig, 2002; Moore and van Damme, 2002). Any change in human cost should include a change on this front, as I demonstrate, again, via analysis of secondary documents in the following section.

**Results**

*Law and Intention*

A post-1994 decrease in the human cost of NPAs in South Africa can be observed, first through laws and policies that governed the NPAs. “A new beginning was to be made in SANParks, which would see the introduction of a more inclusive form of conservation aligned with South Africa’s new democracy,” (Moore and van Damme, 2002: 66). This new beginning is evident, first, in the new philosophies that governed SANParks. For instance, in 1995, the organization introduced its Social Ecology program (Moore and van Damme, 2002), with the explicit purpose to build more positive relationships with communities living in the vicinity of National Parks, according to the SANParks website as of January 28, 2019.

An investigation of other primary documents from SANParks reveals similar people-oriented intentions. In 2012, for example, the organization released a report on recent social investment programs, titled, “From Fortress Conservation to People and Conservation” (Magome and Daphne, 2012). In it, SANParks CEO Dr. David Mabunda acknowledges a “painful
conservation past where public institutions were used to implement a well-crafted system of alienating certain spheres of society,” while advocating an imperative to “re-orient protected areas” toward the inclusion of social considerations as well as conservation goals (Magome and Daphne, 2012: iii). Even SANParks publications that are not specifically dedicated to the topic of human cost extoll a similar attitude. The organization’s publicly available 2018 Annual Report states,

> Historically, the national parks excluded the majority of South Africa’s people (...) To ensure an inclusive national parks system, SANParks formulated a comprehensive Socio-Economic Development strategy to assist with the development of communities neighbouring the parks (South Africa National Parks 2018, 8).

These statements present a stark contrast to the pre-1994 tendency, outlined above, wherein the human cost of preservation was summarily ignored, if not outright exacerbated.

Brief analyses of the laws that give SANParks its mandate also reveal the shift toward a more community-centred organisation. In 2003, the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act effectively replaced the 1976 National Parks Act, through the efforts of the South African legislature. Both laws provided the legal groundwork for the establishment of natural protected areas for the purpose of ecology and biodiversity protection. The 1976 law, however, makes zero mention of community development, participation, local or social needs, or even simply “humans” or “people” (1976). These omissions fit the, previously outlined, “fortress design” preservation mentality. The 2003 replacement, on the other hand, directs as one of its objectives: “To promote participation of local communities in the management of protected areas” (page 12). It makes explicit mention of social and economic development (on pages 20, 32, 34), and provides entire sections on park co-management (page 34) and public participation (page 26). The disparity between these two legislative acts and the emphasis each places on human cost indicates a sweeping change in preservation policy, and the two laws passed on either side of the 1994 election.

**Communication and Community Involvement**

Given how imperative the systems of communication and community involvement are to implementing NPAs in a socially responsible way, the SANParks shift that occurred after the widening of electoral accountability in 1994 should include noticeable effects on the practice of intentional inclusion of people living in the vicinity of National Parks. Indeed, there is evidence of such an increase in several scholarly accounts. For instance, a process of, “formalization of interactions between [National Parks] and neighboring communities” (Cock and Fig, 2002: 142-143) that involved public consultations and forums with conservation bodies on social issues such as water access, wildlife impact, and economic opportunities is observed. The presence of community and neighbour advisory structures on the planning and management of parks have become
commonplace (Moore and van Damme, 2002). Overall, interactions between representatives of SANParks and members of neighbouring communities are much more prevalent after the election of 1994.

The literature on NPA management also stresses practices like the Social Impact Assessment as vital for the inclusion of local communities in the political processes. This allows for social concerns to be integrated into park planning and policy, through several tools of predicting potential adverse effects (Hough, 1991). These tools, virtually non-existent in South Africa pre-1994, have been used by SANParks since the end of apartheid rule (Moore and van Damme, 2002). Similarly, schemes of tourism revenue sharing with local communities have been observed (Moore and van Damme, 2002; Cock and Fig, 2002). Revenue sharing programs tend to improve local public opinion and attitudes toward NPAs (Groom and Harris, 2008). Significant steps toward community revenue sharing programs came in 1997 and 1998, when the SANParks Board “instituted organizational restructuring” (Cock and Fig, 2002: 145), and targeted local economic opportunity as a strategic concern. The formalization of these practices is exemplified in endeavors like the Kruger Social Ecology Unit and the Skukuza Alliance, both of which provide “business opportunities for local artists and traders” (Moore and van Damme, 2002: 68).

Finally, there is evidence that SANParks became more inclusive, not just at the community relations level, but also within the organization itself. Table 1 below shows the proportion of individuals of different races employed by SANParks in 1999 and 2018. The raw numbers for employment in 1999, shown in the table, were reported by Cock and Fig (2002: 141) and by the SANParks Annual Report (2018: 167-168) for the more recent figures. In both cases, the figures were meant to demonstrate gender equity in SANParks employment, so they were categorised by gender as well as by race and skill level. For this article, both genders have been combined and the raw numbers have been put in proportions of each employment skill level.
Table 1: SANParks Employment Proportions by Race and Skill Level, 1999 vs. 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>1999</th>
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<th>1999</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.753</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>.405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.676</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Skilled</td>
<td>.666</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.768</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Cock and Fig 2002: 141; SANParks Annual Report 2018: 167-168
* Includes racial categories “Coloured” and “Asian” from Cock and Fig (2002); “Coloured” and “Indian” from SANParks (2018).

As can be observed, the proportion of Africans employed at the highest skill levels of SANParks, including many of the top management positions, rose significantly from 1999 to 2018. This change further indicates the inclusion of black South Africans in land preservation efforts post-1994. Though this shift in employment was not immediate, there is reason to think the effect of the 1994 election would be slow to progress on this front: South Africa’s democratic transition was a negotiation that left many bureaucrats in place for several years, including in SANParks (Cock and Fig, 2002: 134). Therefore, the employment composition changes observed after 1999 can still be attributed to practices adopted after the 1994 election, despite delays in the actual makeup of the workforce. Overall, increased interaction between SANParks and local communities, as well as the prevalence of formal practices like the Social Impact Assessment, revenue sharing schemes, and the observable increase in the employment of black South Africans in leadership positions, contribute to the narrative of a post-1994 decrease in human cost.

Land Restitution

As mentioned, displacement due to land preservation policy was common in South Africa before the 1994 election, and represented one of the most harmful human costs of SANParks practice. Secondary sources observe the regular practice of evictions and forceful removals of black and indigenous South Africans from land designated as an NPA (Cock and Fig, 2002; Moore and van Damme, 2002). For example, in his fieldwork notes from the year 1994, Dikeni (2016: 26) quotes from a conversation with a resident of the village of Cork, next to the Kruger National Park, in which she recalls the policy that pushed her out of the NPA: “We were controlled like animals and placed on land that we cannot use. Our families were often separated without their will.” The flagship
Kruger National Park was notable among instances of relocation (Dlamini, 2012), with an estimated removal of over 3,000 people by the South African government in the name of biodiversity conservation (Dikeni, 2016: 22). The Makuleke community, for example, was forcibly evicted from their territory in 1969 to make way for a new section of Kruger and placed on land much less suited for farming and grazing (Fabricius and de Wet, 2002).

Land restitution was observed as a new standard practice after 1994, with several prominent claims successfully resolved through SANParks and the South African Ministry of Land Affairs. The Makuleke, for instance, were allowed ownership of their land again in 1998 (Cock and Fig, 2002; Moore and van Damme, 2002). The process was not severely limited, either. Fabricius and de Wet (2002: 143) note examples of land claims in eleven different NPAs across nearly every province of South Africa, from Blyde Canyon in Mpumalanga Province to Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in Northern Cape Province, just in the eight years between 1994 and 2002. Consequently, the prevalence of land restitution in NPAs across South Africa is directly linked to the first fully democratic elections, because it was only under the provisions of the new Constitution that these claims could be legally recognized (Moore and van Damme, 2002).

The social benefits of land restitution policies are numerous, providing communities like the Makuleke and Khonani San in southern Kalahari with not only commercial and residential rights, but also aspects of cultural identity tied to the land that had been taken (Cock and Fig, 2002). It is also notable, however, that this decrease in human cost does not have to come with negative conservation impacts like biodiversity loss, as suggested by the original philosophy of “fortress design” preservation. On the contrary, the conservation benefits seem to be numerous; from a decrease in poaching attributable to improved community relations, to the development of new institutions and conservation models like the SANParks/community joint management structures that are now prevalent in South African NPAs (Fabricius and de Wet, 2002). Thus, the evidence of human cost change from the listed three areas had observable substantive impacts. For instance, local public opinion on Kruger National Park has improved over time (Anthony 2007). In fact, Anthony’s (2007: 240) Table 1, based on a survey of community respondents in 2004, indicates that large majorities replied affirmatively to “liking” Kruger, and responded that they are “satisfied” that their village is located near the Park. These statistics present a vastly different picture of positive public opinion than the history of National Parks in South Africa before the 1994 election.

**Alternative Explanations**

Two alternative explanations could be used to explain the decrease in human cost of South Africa’s NPAs around 1994, but neither holds up against existing evidence and reasoning. It could be argued that this decrease is due to either (1) changing international norms of socially responsible
preservation, or (2) the influence of NGOs. The government under National Party rule, however, was notoriously stubborn in its resistance to international norms and behavioural demands, so it is difficult to imagine that these alone would have altered the scenario in South Africa. For instance, starting in 1977 with the United Nations embargo on arms sales to South Africa, the apartheid government faced intense international scrutiny to end its racially discriminatory practices, but did not relent for many years (Thompson 2014, 222). Further, it was only after the ANC came to power, claims Dikeni (2016: 31), that the environmental NGOs were invited to work with SANParks and other conservation agencies. Finally, if low-human cost preservation is influenced primarily by these factors, then similar changes should also be observed in other sub-Saharan African nations, even without a change in accountability. Yet, there is little backing for such shift elsewhere, given that recently published literature sheds light on ongoing human rights abuses in NPAs in many other countries (Brockington, Sachedina, and Scholfield, 2008; Goldman, 2011; Pearson and Muchunguzi, 2011). For example, neighbouring Botswana, which shares the bi-national “transfrontier” Gemsbok National Park with South Africa, has had a regime of one-party rule since its independence, and therefore no electoral accountability shift. There, forced removals and “continued disrespect” of local San communities continued long after South Africa ended the practices (Cock and Fig, 2002, 139). There is little evidence to back these alternative explanations, and therefore, the electoral accountability-based arguments I advance in this article offer a more satisfactory answer.

Conclusion

Land preservation policies must strike a delicate balance between important biodiversity conservation goals and the needs of the rural communities living on and/or around these lands, which are often subsistent and lacking political leverage. Building on histories of human cost and theories of electoral accountability, I contend that an increase in electoral accountability leads to a decrease in human cost. The case study of South Africa has confirmed this thesis, with the democratic election of 1994 proving to be a pivotal turning point for both electoral accountability, and National Park policy and procedure when it comes to Law and Intention, Communication and Community Involvement, and Land Restitution. Surely, there is still room for improvement on both fronts in modern South Africa, but steps forward have been taken in tandem.

The findings of this article touch upon the political science literature on conservation policy and electoral accountability, suggesting that fair elections, meaningful participation in park management, and access to information on NPAs, should lead to more socially responsible practices and therefore better conservation outcomes. However, further research on this topic is needed. The use of natural experiments and the ability to survey human cost and public opinion on NPAs in a local community both before and after an accountability shift should present convincing evidence.
For instance, in South Africa, NPA opinion data from before 1994, as represented in Infield (1988), can be replicated.

In terms of policy, governments that wish to provide solutions to both environmental and human rights issues may take steps toward greater enfranchisement and local participation in NPA procedure. In this article I have shed some light on the relationship between conservation outcomes, social responsibility, and electoral accountability, and suggested that the strength of each is dependent on the others. Preservation of biodiversity resources is a goal that the world must achieve, and it must be accomplished with the humanity of every individual in mind.

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Rescuing Rationality from the Rationalists: For a Neo-Weberian Understanding of Rationality in Critical Terrorism Studies

Bernardino Leon-Reyes

Abstract

A decade after its emergence, Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) has remained unable to engage with one of the most prominent discourses that, on the one hand, justifies the dehumanisation of those accused of terrorism and, on the other, disciplines critical scholarship: the presentation of the terrorist as an irrational subject. Recognising the tensions that emerge from CTS’s critical understanding of “the world” and its simultaneous aim of making knowledge claims, this paper draws on the work of Max Weber in order to create a reflexive methodology able to analyse the rationality of terrorism. After showing the incompatibility between recent understandings of rationality in ‘mainstream’ terrorism studies with CTS, and the limits of ‘postmodern’ stances, this article proposes a neo-Weberian ‘via media’ capable of offering an analysis of the rationalities of terrorism, while remaining sensitive to the limitations of social theory.

Keywords

Critical Terrorism Studies; Ideal-type; International Relations Theory; International Sociology; ISIS; Max Weber; Methodology; Rationality; Social Action

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Introduction

Why is it relevant for Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) to elucidate whether terrorism is rational or not? After all, CTS was articulated as a “critique of the existing field” (Jackson et al., 2009: 216-7) in an effort “to highlight a number of potentially serious problems” that have characterised the conduct of inquiry in orthodox terrorism studies (Jarvis, 2016: 61). CTS scholars have been, consequently, more interested in exposing dubious epistemological, ontological and normative assumptions present in orthodox terrorism studies, rather than in engaging with definitional debates such as what rationality is. In this paper, nonetheless, I will suggest that determining whether terrorism is rational has both important theoretical and practical implications that, indeed, CTS should take into account.

This paper will argue that CTS should adopt a Weberian ideal-typical approach to rationality. Section one will present why CTS should adopt the methodological tool of the ideal-type. I will start by showing why the question of rationality is relevant for CTS, followed by the shortcomings and epistemological incompatibilities of the dominant understandings of rationality in terrorism studies. I will commence this section arguing how an ideal-type of rationality offers a potential solution, as a “via media” between “rationalist” and “particularist” approaches. Furthermore, in section two, I will argue why Max Weber’s typification of rationality represents a useful point of departure to conceptualise this ideal-type, explaining his model of rationalities, and sketching some of the ways in which it could be applied to the study of terrorism. Rather than a case study, this paper is a proposal for this specific approach, and an invitation for further research.

The Case for an Ideal-Typical Approach to Rationality in CTS

The Relevance of the Question of Rationality

The notion that terrorism is irrational has not only precluded a rigorous study of terrorism; it has also led to the “villainisation and demonisation of researchers as ‘sympathisers’ and ‘defenders’ of terrorists” (Stampnitzky in Tellidis, 2016: 627) when scholars have tried to study the motivations behind the actions of militants. This is what Lisa Stampnitzky (2013: 189) refers to as the politics of “anti-knowledge” present in the discipline; “as terrorism is understood to be irrational, the very possibility of understanding it can be called into question.”. Challenging the assumption of irrationality can, as well, be part of “overcoming the Orientalist” bias present in the discipline (Gunning, 2009: 172) and the gendered representations of terrorists as irrational (see Gentry and Sjoberg, 2016), because it would attempt to understand the orientation of actors situating them in their particular within socio-political contexts (Tellidis and Toros, 2015: 3), such as one of poverty or oppression. In short, determining that terrorism is rational is important in theoretical terms insofar
as it bestows terrorism the status of being an intelligible phenomenon, something that can be studied and understood.

Moreover, since the commitments of CTS are both analytical and normative (Jackson et al. 2009), there are a set of practical reasons that justify a defence of the engagement with rationality. When terrorism is posited as an irrational phenomenon, and terrorists as irrational subjects, then it is pointless to attempt to change the contexts that conditioned how they “came to be”, as they would not have followed a rational course of action. For instance, voices that call for the ending of American Imperialism in the Middle East as a way to address the “roots” of terrorism can be decried as foolish, inasmuch as terrorism is posed as a product of an irrational hatred towards the West, Modernity, or Christianity—“our way of life”. This allows relocating the origin of the terrorist’s grudge from a contingent US foreign policy to a less flexible American culture. It follows that, since the US “cannot” give up on their culture, democracy, or wealth, all that is left is to repress and kill these terrorists (Mann, 2005: 162). However, the consequences of portraying “terrorists as irrational fanatics” (Wolfendale, 2016: 258) are not only related to the legitimisation of targeted killings, or even interventions, on the basis of counterterrorism; this portrayal has also transformed “economic, political, and social structures” (Wolfendale, 2016: 258), operating as a justification for situations of exception beyond the law (see, e.g., Agamben, 2005). In light of the practices enabled by the discourses of/on irrationality, part of the project of CTS should, therefore, be to advance the idea that terrorists are rational actors. Hence, the question becomes how.

Rationality in Terrorism Studies

Notwithstanding the dominance of everyday discourses that paint the terrorist as an irrational and pathological individual, a considerable body of literature on rationality has been published in “orthodox” terrorism studies. Robert Pape (2003: 355) has argued, in relation to the case of the Israeli occupation, that despite the high cost for the individual, suicide terrorism cannot be considered irrational, as it is an “effective” means for the advancement of political goals. In this vein, Rational Choice Theory (RCT) has also been applied to terrorism to explain, for instance, the presence of suicide terrorism as the consequence of individual choices driven by “future self-gratifying benefits” (Perry and Hasisi, 2015: 72), or the absence of suicide terrorism by the dearth of these rational motivations (see, e.g., Kalyvas and Sánchez-Cuenca, 2005). In other words, for this body of thought, rationality has to do exclusively with the means chosen and not with preferences (Gambetta, 2005: ix). Orthodox scholarship has been predominantly positivist, directed to formulate causal empirical generalisations built on “falsifiable hypotheses on the basis of more general theories, and collecting the evidence needed to evaluate those hypotheses” (King et al., 1994: 37) (for an early
critique exploring the notion of the ideal-type as a reconciliation between objectivism and subjectivism, see Timothy McKeown’s [1999] excellent review of King et al).

For instance, when Bryan Caplan (2006: 99) explains that terrorists “estimate the costs and benefits of irrationality without bias” and that, in equilibrium, “the choice to be irrational reflects a rational estimate of the price”, a certain mind-world dualism underlines his research, as the researcher can know the world as it is. Or, in terrorism studies, the terrorist as (s)he is. The key problem with this approach is that because it holds terrorism as an “objectively knowable” phenomenon, it is incompatible with the reflexive standpoint that constitutes CTS (Fitzgerald, 2016: 115-129).

Furthermore, orthodox scholarship has inquired how rationality can help policy makers predict certain actions to eradicate terrorism, following a “prioritisation of policy-relevant knowledge as the basis of legitimate academic output on terrorism.” (Fitzgerald, 2016: 121). Pape, for instance, raises a question in Dying to Win (2006) that illustrates this point: “can we find a lasting solution to suicide terrorism that does not compromise our core interest in maintaining access to one of the world’s key oil-producing regions?” Following Robert Cox’s (1981) distinction, orthodox terrorism studies are “problem-solving” theories that lack critical distance from governments (Fitzgerald, 2016: 121) working as patches to hegemonic relations of power. In contrast, CTS are critical because they call into question the origins and transformations of these social and power relations (Cox, 1981: 129). Therefore, the above-mentioned positivist epistemology, and this problem-solving use of RCT are at best scarcely compatible with the methodology of CTS—if not the very assumptions against which CTS emerged. Thus, if Hayward Allker (1990) called for rescuing reason from rationalists (understanding by rationalists positivists; what Robert Keohane [1988] labelled as such), in this paper I will attempt to rescue rationality from “rationalists”.

However, what do we find on the other “extreme”? At the very heart of CTS, we find the post-structuralist approach to questions such as “what is rationality?”. In an analogous fashion to the cartesian hyperbolic doubt—yet without the horizon of the determination of truth—post-structuralist authors leave aside the question of what rationality is, delving instead into the ways in which rationality is deployed in dominant discourses. For instance, Judith Butler considers rationality unstable, unfixed, and performative; in other words, everyday discourses creates and legitimates what rationality is. She analyses how the Western civilisational discourse sets Islamic beliefs and practices as “tokens of mental illness”, in opposition to hegemonic norms of “Western rationality” (Butler, 2006: 72). Furthermore, others have focused on rationality as a teleological discourse of modernity grounded on a “forced and contingent” separation between nature/animal and human, in which essentially, they are dependent on each other. In both cases, nevertheless, a political investigation underwrites; namely how reason can legitimise the “rationalisation” of others, which in turn enables
“going against their inner beings”. Hence, in post-structuralism’s ontology, there is no rationality outside discourse (cf. Dillet, 2017). In stark contrast with positivism, where a law-like “egoistic” rationalism is assumed to exist as an explanatory model for behaviour, the post-structuralist research programme is concerned with unveiling particular rationalities. In the words of Michel Foucault (1983: 210), “what we have to do is analyze specific rationalities rather than always invoke the progress of rationalization in general”. This approach represents the danger that Richard Jackson et al., pioneers of CTS, warned against: “that critical scholarship, with its understandable concern for interrogating the discursive foundations upon which the study of terrorism is founded […]”, disengages from the empirical study of political violence and its foundations in the ‘real’ world” (Jackson et al., 2009: 233).

CTS scholars have further options beyond the orthodox RCT rationality and the post-structuralist deconstruction of the concept. However, albeit “methodological and disciplinary pluralism” was characteristic of CTS (Jackson et al., 2009: 225-6), it has been the adherence to “post-positivist and non-international relations based methods and approaches” and the commitment to understanding (beyond “linear notions of cause and effect”), that has framed CTS’s research agenda as sui generis (Jackson et al., 2009). Indeed, most CTS scholars have been committed either to a certain “analyticism” (following post-structuralism and historical sociology, ethnography, inter alia) or to “reflexivism” (following Critical Theory, feminism, and postcolonial scholarship) since the conditio sine qua non in CTS (cf. Stump, 2016: 218) has been scepticism over the ontological difference between “knowledge” and “world” (Jackson, 2010: 116). There is, therefore, a monist epistemology that underpins CTS. This epistemology is expressed in the maxim “terrorism does not exist outside of the definitions and practices that seek to enclose it” that cannot be “adequately defined due to its unstable ontological status” (Jackson, 2008: 28-9). This might uncover a tension in CTS: on the one hand, it holds that categories in/of the social world—be it terrorism or rationality—are ontologically unstable; yet, on the other hand, it attempts to demonstrate that, for instance, state terrorism is terrorism; namely to make “truth” claims.

Sociology, just as post-structuralism, feminism, Critical Theory, or post-colonial theory provides a reflexive approach (Smith, 2002: 227), which has yet to be fully explored in CTS. Besides “counter[ing] the ahistoricity and lack of context that terrorism research has often been accused of” (Gunning, 2009: 172), I suggest that sociology offers the resource of the ideal-type as a “via media” between the objectivist law-like claims of positivism and the particularist approach of many critical theories, including but not limited to the concept of rationality. The ideal-type itself was conceptualised by the sociologist Max Weber as a via media to the methodological debate (Methodenstreit) between the nomothetic Austrian School and idiographic German “Historicists” (Gerhardt, 1994: 78; Lebow, 2017: 43). Weber followed Simmel in the division between law-like
sciences (Gesetzswissenschaften) and what he called the cultural sciences (Kulturwissenschaften), where such regularities were impossible to find (Lebow, 2017: 51-53). However, he did seek a method to overcome the particularist intuitionism characteristic of historians “in an attempt to explain individual social phenomena as an outcome of historical process and also as a manifestation of wider institutional structural patterns” (Gerhardt, 1994: 78).

Hence, a possible route to overcome the above-mentioned impasse—without claiming to be the sole, nor the best one—is adopting an ideal-typical approach to the question of rationality. Similarly to what Jackson proposed in regard to the definitional deadlock (namely to “retain the term [of terrorism] as a focus for research […] according to a set of identifiable and unique characteristics” in spite of its instability (Jackson, 2008: 29-31), an ideal-type is a mental construct that exaggerates certain aspects of a social phenomenon for analytical and pragmatic reasons. It is, at the same time, a simplification and a misrepresentation of reality that allows us to understand an object or a process (Jackson, 2010: 143). The ideal-type is an idealisation not in a normative way, but insofar it does not exist in the real world; it abstracts, combines, and exaggerates elements that are present in real phenomenon (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 20). The ideal-type provides “a schematic representation” of a social phenomenon that works as an “analytical grip” (Swedberg and Agevall, 2016: 156) to make knowledge claims without engaging in objectivism (Lebow, 2017: 70-71). An ideal-type is “used” (see Swedberg, 2018; Gerhardt, 1994) by confronting it to the individual empirical cases and observing the correspondence or contrasts in it, analogous to the outline advanced by Bates et al. (2000) in their Analytical Narrative Project. In other words, the divergence from the ideal-type to the individual case is the “payoff” (Swedberg, 2018: 8-9): where the researcher can then hypothesise how and why it diverged from the ideal-type. Therefore, viewing rationality in ideal-typical terms “prevent[s] logically general abstractions from being mistaken for either reliable predictions or transcendental certainties” (Jackson, 2017: 80) such as the way it is frequently understood in orthodox terrorism studies, while it overcomes a particularist approach.

I have, so far, argued that (a) proving that terrorism is rational is relevant to CTS; that (b) the ways in which rationality has been conceptualised in terrorism studies are not fertile enough for CTS to do so; and that (c) an ideal-typical approach can resolve the tension between adopting a reflexivist stance and making knowledge claims on rationality. Of course, this claim per se does not ineluctably lead to the conclusion that among all possible ideal-types of rationality, CTS should incorporate the Weberian one. In the coming section, I aim to explain why.

The Case for a neo-Weberian Approach

If there is a “division of labour” through which some authors concentrate on creating ideal-types and others attempt to confront them with particular cases (as Jackson [2010: 152] has argued),
then CTS should adopt Weber’s typification of rationality since few social theorists have attained the level of sophistication that he accomplished in his categorisation of rationality (see, e.g., Levine, 1981: 10). As I will explain in the coming paragraphs, Weber conceptualised rationality both as a driver of action and as a process. In addition, Jackson et al. (2009: 234) have pointed out when they framed the “new research agenda” for CTS that a key challenge was “the risk of bifurcating the broader terrorism studies field into critical and orthodox intellectual ghettos [that] would likely result in a level of intellectual and political irrelevance.” If we were to follow Jackson in advocating in favour of an inter-paradigmatic dialogue, then, I suggest, it is essential to share part of our canon. Weber’s work on rationality set an idea of rationalisation that fostered part of the work of the Frankfurt School, but also the foundations of RCT. I suggest that, beyond this sophistication, a pragmatic reason to invoke Weber is to use his ideas as a lingua franca between competing approaches to terrorism studies.

However, it is important to highlight the fact that Weber used the concept of rationality in several ways throughout his oeuvre. Similar to what, for instance, Załęski (2010) did by reconstructing and completing Weber’s ideal-types for the study of religion, drawing on the work of Kalberg (1980) and Levine (1981), I will attempt to clarify Weber’s understanding of rationality. It is essential to bear in mind that the purpose of an ideal-type is to be useful (Jackson, 2010: 135); therefore, we can, and indeed must, rectify them by making them more systematic, if this adaptation us to use these ideal-types in a more insightful way. Before I proceed with this re-ideal-typification, I must highlight that the debate on what Weber means by rationality is still an ongoing one, and the purpose of this paper is in no way to provide a final solution to it. Instead, it will attempt to sketch which kind of insights this ideal-typification of rationality could bring to the discipline. Before continuing, as a preliminary note, let us keep in mind that Weber conceptualised the manifestation of rationality in two varieties: subjective, as a driver of social action, and objective (or, better said, objectified), which corresponds with institutionalised processes of rationalisation (Levine, 1981: 10). This considered, let us turn to these categories.

In Economy and Society (1978 [1922]: 4), Weber described Sociology as the “science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences.” This stemmed from his Verstehen, the idea that sociologists must grasp the meaning of social action from the social actor’s perspective, for what the sociologist, therefore, had to empathise to understand what motivated a determined social action. Its scope is different from the one of psychology, as it is interested in the motivation of social relationships of action (Weber, 1981 [1913]: 152), intentionally directed towards social “others”. Thus, Weber proposed a classification of social action in relation to four orientations: instrumental rationality, value
rationality, affect, and tradition (Table 1). Following Kant’s dichotomy between means and ends (Swedberg and Agevall, 2016: 166), Weber argued that an action is instrumentally rational (Zweckrational) when it aims towards the realisation of a determined end (Zweck) through a “conscious and calculated use of certain means” (Swedberg and Agevall, 2016: 166). By the same token, an action is value-rational (Wertrational) when the social actor “feels forced or compelled to act in this manner, [...] regardless of [...] the cost to the actor” (Swedberg and Agevall, 2016: 166) and “independently of its prospects of success” (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 25). In contrast, non-rational social action is driven either by interiorised habits (traditional) or by the actor’s emotions (affective) (this interest, should be noted, would roughly correspond to the research of sociologist Jon Elster who, drawing on Weber, has suggested that motivations go beyond pure unbounded selfish calculations [see, e.g., Elster, 2009]). It is important to highlight that ideal-types do not exist in the real world, yet they are valuable in virtue of their results—they provide us with interesting insights by contrasting them with empirics (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 26).

Table 1. Orientations of social action (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 4)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rational orientation</th>
<th>Non-rational orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value Rational</td>
<td>Affective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentally rational</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

The above-mentioned typology (see Table 1) is similar to the one that Tosini (2009; 2010) suggested to utilise in order to understand suicide terrorism. Analysing interviews and biographical information of suicide terrorists, he follows Weber’s typology of social action, arguing that suicide terrorism can be rational in both senses (as instrumental and value-oriented), and non-rational in the instances where it is caused by “outrage and humiliation” (Tosini, 2010: 412). Therefore, terrorists can be value rational in that they are motivated by political and religious “interiorised […] moral criteria that command certain actions regardless of their consequences” (Tosini, 2010: 408) as well as instrumentally rational since it provides “prestige […] to his name and his family” (Ricolfi, 2006: 113). This typification of rationalities is not a description of the world; rather, it more of an analytical tool that CTS may apply to see contrasts or similarities, and then tell a useful story as Tosini does.

In contrast, objectified rationality corresponds to processes of “rationalizations […] in all areas of culture” (Weber, 2013 [1905]: xxxix) that are transformed towards an “ultimate points of view” (Levine, 1981: 12). Terrorism could, therefore, be considered a “rationalising” force insofar
as it attempts to put in place a determined point of view (religious in the case of Islamic terrorism, nationalistic in the case of secessionism, etc.) in different spheres of life such as economic organisation, political order, military structures, legal systems, education and certainly, religion, *inter alia*.

Levine (1981: 11-15) has argued that these processes of objectified institutional rationalisations can be ideal-typified in four primary forms: (1) *instrumental* (practical in Kalberg, 1980), (2) *substantive*, (3) *formal*, and (4) *conceptual* (theoretical in Kalberg, 1980). Instrumental objectified rationality occurs when spheres of life become “increasingly more precise in calculating the methodical attainment of given practical ends” (Weber, 1946 [1922]: 293), while substantive rationality, “accords predominance to ethical imperatives […] or political maxims” (Levine, 1981: 13). Scilicet, they represent the institutionalisation of the instrumental and value-oriented subjective rationalities (respectively). Further, formal rationality manifests an “inexorable” process of bureaucratisation (Weisz, 2014: 693-4), in which rules and routines (*Planmässigkeit*) are set to limit the effects of social relations in favour of efficiency and predictability (Levine, 1981: 13) while, lastly, conceptual rationality relates to the constitution of a worldview and the establishment of a canon (Levine, 1981: 12) composed of “symbolic meanings” (Kalberg, 1980: 1152).

There are numerous cases in which terrorism has crystallised in the form of institutions, for instance, the case of the LTTE in Sri Lanka, or ISIS in Syria and Iraq. It can be argued that these terrorist groups engage in *processes of rationalisation* that transform the social world of their societies. In the case of the latter, the establishment of a certain worldview (see Juergensmeyer, 2018), the systematic use of their propaganda and housing programmes (Gerges, 2017: 178) or the recently revealed bureaucratic structure (see Callimachi, 2018) can all be understood as part of a rationalising process in which terrorism attempts to control all spheres of life, subjugating them under “ultimate points of view” (see Table 2). Further research in the form of rigorous case studies could confront these ideal-types with the evidence, potentially leading to interesting insights on how terrorist organisations engage in processes of *modern* rationalisation.
**Table 2: Levine’s typology of Weberian objectified rationalities (Levine’s, 1981: 13), applied to ISIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of objectified rationality</th>
<th>Institutional Spheres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>Establishment of a worldview in al Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s theology (Juergensmeyer, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Use of prayers (Levine, 1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive</td>
<td>Jihad as the greatest deed in islam (Roy, 2017: 13) as a doctrine for salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allocation of resources according to a standard of fairness (Levine, 1981); e.g. housing programmes for homeless ISIS fighters (Gerges, 2017: 178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Sharia Law; Establishment of praying routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bureaucratisation and tax accounting (Callimachi, 2018)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

It should be noted that this framework does not, and indeed should not, be applied exclusively to the study of “terrorists” groups in CTS. Applying these ideal-types to hegemonic worldviews such as the “War on Terror”, in order to construct insightful narratives, can potentially show the ways in which this phenomenon is *conceptually rationalised* through a determined scholarship (i.e. problem-solving orthodox scholarship); *instrumentally rationalised* through the construction of a “useful enemy” (Keen, 2014: 171) which, in turn, legitimises a governmental logic (Aradau and Van Munster, 2007) or a dominant class project (Boukalas, 2015). Further, we could argue that the War on Terror is *substantively rationalised* in a language of “good versus evil” (see Richards, 2017), and
formally rationalised through the bureaucratisation of violence expressed in “efficient” targeted killings (see Adams and Barrie, 2013).

Conclusion

The question of rationality has been largely disregarded in CTS. This paper has argued why rationality should be at the heart of CTS, and how a Weberian ideal-typical approach offers a “via media” between positivist and particularist research programmes. The major limitation of this piece is the fact that these ideal-types must be applied in rigorous case studies in order to obtain interesting findings. Therefore, to this end, further work needs to be undertaken to apply and refine these typifications. These limitations notwithstanding, this paper has contributed to the ways in which one can understand rationality in CTS, insofar as it offers a way forward to make knowledge claims while recognising the “ontological instability” of the object studied. This is an approach that assists CTS overcome the politics of “anti-knowledge”, creating new possibilities for analytical narratives on the ways in which terrorists are rational, and in the ways whereby terrorism is rationalised in formal (e.g. state terrorism) and informal institutions.

Contra the “sciences” of his time, Weber rejected the notion that “rationality derived from the Enlightenment” (Kalberg, 1980: 1160), as well as its supposed singularity as a “uniquely Western phenomenon.” (Levine, 1981: 9). Perhaps his ideas can illuminate contemporary debates in International Relations and Security Studies, helping us challenge contemporary assumptions by understanding the ways in which terrorism is rationally motivated—regardless of how morally reprehensible these actions might be.

References


Downward Mobility: When Social Lifts Change Direction

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Abstract

In this research note, a new direction in the study of inequality is being advocated. The current research in the field of social mobility is extensively focused on upward mobility and pays no attention to downward mobility. With the help of intergenerational wealth data, this contribution demonstrates the unexplained questions of downward mobility, shows the importance of studying children from both poor and privileged backgrounds and outlines possible research directions in the field. This research note is a call for action for scholars of inequality.

Keywords

Capital Accumulation; Income; Inequality; Intergenerational Inequality; Social Mobility; Wealth
Introduction

Inequality is one of the most discussed problems in the field of social sciences. Inequality of income and inequality of wealth, inequality and democracy (Bartels, 2008), intergenerational inequality (Corak, 2013) — the problem of inequality encompasses many broad topics and is perhaps one of the most multi-disciplinary problems in the scholarly world. The study of inequality originally reserved for the universities and think-tanks is now influencing public opinion and policy making.

The impact of the discussion around inequality on the state of affairs in the real world makes it even more urgent to find drawbacks and blind spots in the existing debates. One of the biases in the study of inequality is that the current literature is extensively focused on the upward mobility and constraints for the economic performance of the low-income youth — the main example would be the discussion started by the work of the economist Thomas Piketty (Piketty and Goldhammer, 2014). The field has omitted the fact that mobility is usually a two-way process: if somebody goes up, someone else has to go down. The typical question asked by the research is “how can we explain why a child born in the lowest quintile of the income distribution has a low probability of getting into the highest quintile?” This research note also makes a case for studying why and how youth from the privileged families move down the social and economic ladder. Firstly, the problem in statistics of intergenerational wealth and income inequality is identified. In the further sections, implications of the concept are developed and ideas for future research are made.

This research note pursues two contributions to Political Science. Firstly, it broadens the optics used to study inequality and mentions consequential policy-making implications. Secondly, it raises the question about the impact of institutions — if the access to the best schooling, healthcare and infrastructure guarantees success on the income ladder with almost the same efficiency as the flip of a coin, what is the real role of institutions in the financial success of the individual?

Note on existing research

The problem of inequality is intrinsic to the neoliberal economic system which is the dominant approach of today’s policy-makers (Alfredo et al., 2005). What is more important for this study — specifically downward mobility is one of the philosophical foundations on which neoliberalism is built. Contemporary economics appraise the approach of Schumpeterian creative destruction — big companies are forced to step down by disruptive startups (Schumpeter, 1942). This can be broadened to the whole economic structure of the society — the old and inefficient should be brought down by the young and dynamic. This is downward mobility in its essence — industrial magnates were replaced by the Silicon Valley, middle class factory workers by programmers and designers, cinemas by Netflix.
The problem of downward mobility is neglected. Major scholars of inequality focus on how wealthy groups create political and economic systems that protect the rich while excluding the poor (Stiglitz 2015, Bartels 2008). This study shows that downward mobility exists and should be studied. Despite making rules work in their favor rich families still face high risks of moving down the wealth ladder.

There are several studies of the downward mobility which show that, firstly, privileged classes do tend to lose status and power and, secondly, that after the loss prestige is not easily gained back. This is present in different countries and economic systems — American middle-class (Newman, 1999), kids of the Maoist middle class in the changing China (Davis, 1992), refugees and migrants (Gans, 2009), previously non-poor families in rural Uganda (Bird and Shinyekwa, 2005). These findings show that downward mobility is a problem as well and can have a significant economic and emotional cost. This research note advocates that downward mobility can be shown on the cross-generational income and wealth data in the US. The significant probability of the downward mobility and the associated costs make it even more urgent to broaden the research of inequality to explain why the downward mobility occurs.

The unexplained statistics

Sixteen years ago, Charles and Hurst (2003) computed the correlation of wealth across generations. They did so in the research on the US households, having taken the date from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the survey of the socio-economic status since 1968. The sample used by the authors includes all the families in which in 1999 a child had at least one core sample parent known to be alive and both parents and children have positive wealth in the years measured. This results in 1491 parent-child pairs observed. Charles and Hurst calculate a regression of the log of children’s wealth on the log of parents’ wealth. This study is already not up to date; however, it suits well to illustrate the blind spot in the study of inequality. Charles and Hurst show that a child born in the first (lowest) quintile of wealth distribution as an adult has a 65% chance to be in the first or second quintiles and 19% chance to end up in the 4th and 5th quintiles of the wealth distribution. They also show that the child born in the fifth quantile of wealth distribution has a 60% chance to be in the fifth or fourth quintile of the distribution.

Most of the research on inequality is focused on explaining the first observation: schools which are reproducing the intergenerational poverty (Corcoran, 1995), inefficient parenting (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994) and lower cognitive skills (Doren and Grodsky, 2016). At the same time, there is no research that explains why children born in the wealthiest families (fifth quintile) have a 40% chance to end up in the third quintile or lower. Their chances of getting to the lowest quintile of wealth distribution are 11 % (Charles and Hurst, 2003).
Similar statistics can be observed in the income distribution. In a recent significant study of income inequality and race conducted jointly by Stanford, Harvard, and U.S. Census Bureau scholars, the authors performed the analysis of the longitudinal U.S. Census Bureau data on the whole American population from 1989 to 2015 focusing on income dynamics across generations. Information on income, race and other factors was obtained from American Community Surveys 2005-2015. The primary analysis sample of the authors includes 20 million children. The research shows that White children born in the fifth quintile have a 41.1% chance to stay there, Black — 18%, Asian — 48.9%, Hispanic — 30.6%, American Indian — 23% (Chetty et al., 2018). These numbers highlight not only the racial disparities but also the unexplained mechanism of the downward social lifts. Why do kids even from the most privileged groups have less than 50% chance to stay in the privileged state?

This problem can be summed up as that of the mechanism of downward social mobility. The contemporary scholarship of inequality has a gap in understanding which factors influence the movement of the person down the income and wealth ladder. This blind spot can cause bias in both scholarship and policy making. The studies used as examples focus on the United States; however, as the point of this research note is to show the limitations of contemporary scholarship of inequality rather than to make empirical conclusions about the problem, the US data serves as a good example. The next part of this research note explores, firstly, what are the implications of the downward social mobility and, secondly, what research can be conducted in this field.

Implications of the downward mobility

Downward social mobility calls into question the philosophical foundations of our society. In both academy and policy-making there is an assumption that children from wealthy families have a guarantee of success in the future. In the review of the debates on wealth inequality Killewald, Pfeffer and Schachner (2017) write:

Parental wealth is associated with greater offspring educational and cognitive achievement (Conley 1999, 2001a; Doren & Grodsky 2016; Friedline et al. 2015; Jez 2014; Orr 2003; Pfeffer 2011; Yeung & Conley 2008) and labor market outcomes, such as occupational attainment and work hours (Conley 1999, Pfeffer 2011).

The same logic is present in the OECD Centre for Opportunity and Equality (2017) reports which can serve as a proxy of what ideas are guiding the policy-making in the countries:

Children from more affluent families tend to develop better skills in reading and problem solving, are less likely to drop out of school without a diploma, and are more likely to complete tertiary education.
Though being so privileged, these kids still have less than 50% chance of replicating the financial success of their parents — this is a paradox. Kids of the parents from the highest quintile of the wealth or income distribution have access to the best institutions of our society: best education at all levels, best healthcare, best methods of parenting, best housing, best infrastructure broadly. Research even shows the developed advantage in cognitive skills. Nevertheless, after getting all the best of the best institutions, they have a less than 50% chance to have income as high as their parents.

Both academic literature and policy recommendations show that in the debate about inequality the goal of social mobility is always to give the kids from poorer background opportunities similar to the affluent children. In this logic, there is an implicit statement that the goods that the kids from rich families were lucky to get from birth secured for them high levels of success in the future life. Data shows that this assumption is not as solid as it is often supposed to be.

Our society is based on the belief in the power of human-designed institutions to influence the outcomes. Otherwise, it would be pointless to debate the merits of any political order, educational system or healthcare policy. The goal of the institutions is to tackle nature by nurture. This is important for the aspect of justice. Any theory of justice is arguing for the independent criterion — be it the highest utility for all (Bentham, 1781), equality of basic liberties (Rawls, 1985) or equality of basic capabilities (Sen, 1980) — on which the institutions should be created. In any discussion about justice there is an implicit assumption that the better the institution the higher the opportunity to have a prosperous life. If being treated by the best institutions in all aspects of life from the early childhood still leave a 50% probability of not being in the top 20% of financially successful citizens — the role of the institutions is somewhat exaggerated.

Research on these questions may have wide policy implications. Currently, the anti-inequality policy is focused on providing better access to institutions such as healthcare or education. For example, OECD policy recommendations are interventions in the field of education, labor market, urban planning, healthcare and parenting (Social Mobility and Equal Opportunities, 2017). But if the best institutions do not guarantee the place in the highest-earners, the policy which tackles inequality and promotes mobility should be aimed at something different.

Studying downward social lifts may offer valuable insights into the problem of inequality itself. In order to understand mobility, the best strategy is to understand both directions, while the current research is noticeably biased towards understanding upward mobility. Such research can uncover new factors which influence both upward and downward mobility — social network, consumption behavior, status. Upward and downward inequality are happening simultaneously. The research into only one of two types of lifts may create biases while studying both directions helps avoid at least some of them.
The proposed research can be useful for better understanding the dilemma of social mobility. Social mobility is by its nature a zero-sum game. Everyone can’t be in the top 20% of the income distribution and 20% of the population have to be in the poorest 20%. When more comparatively poor children become comparatively rich adults, the more comparatively rich children become comparatively poor adults. In any case, the children from the privileged background should not be punished for the opportunities they had in the childhood. The goal of tackling inequality is to make access for resources provided by merit or other just criterion and not by privileging or denying the privilege to any background: rich or poor. The lack of study of the children from the rich background excludes them from the discussion about inequality and therefore can lead to policy bias as well.

Avenues for further research

There are several research directions in the study of downward social mobility. Some of these are outlined as examples.

The interesting fact about children from the very rich background is that their problems may be mirrored problems of kids from the very poor background. Corcoran and Goertz showed that schools reinforce the problem of poverty among children (1995). The perverse effect of schooling may also be visible in the privileged kids. Children of rich parents often study in closed communities and have almost no contact with people from other circles. As a result, they study in the closed system which reinforces all the problems of the social group “rich kids”. There is no contact with the outside world which could have had eradicated the inefficient norms. In the study of the childhood poverty Lichter (1997) writes:

A growing policy concern is whether the increasing geographic concentration of poverty in low-income urban neighborhoods or rural areas promotes maladaptive behavioral or cultural adjustments—juvenile delinquency, school dropout, and nonmarital childbearing.

The same promotion of harmful practices may be happening in the closed rich communities. In both schooling and segregated neighborhoods very poor and very rich differ significantly from the middle class.

The second direction of study can be investment and consumption behavior. Charles and Hurst (2003) stress the important fact that children tend to have the same investment behavior as their parents. Children of rich parents may hold riskier assets, not because of the risk tolerance but by replicating the behavior of successful parents. These practices may have bad consequences — risky investment strategy, though efficient for the wealthy person, may be too risky for the young adult even from a privileged family.

Extrapolating the investment behavior on consumption, rich kids may continue the patterns of consumption adopted in childhood throughout the whole adult life. This can be a strong hit to
the wallet in the time of being a young adult and can decrease savings and therefore make the individual more vulnerable for the financial stress.

The research on investment and consumption patterns is connected to the broad question of status. Affluent families transmit to the offspring the feeling of “high status” which can impact many decisions in the later life. Status can have an effect on consumption, job choice, family decisions. The privileged background may reinforce the behavior “beyond the means” for the child who is not supported by the family any longer but has not managed to accumulate her own wealth yet.

Conclusion

All in all, downward social mobility is significantly understudied in comparison with upward mobility. This gap is present in institutional analysis as well as the study of upward social lifts. Important insights about the structure of inequality and policy-making can emerge as a result of the proposed research program. The current situation can result in a bias in the scholarly discussion and policy-making. In order to tackle the problem of inequality, all its aspects deserve equal attention.

References


Book review


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Keywords

Human Enhancement; Politics of AI; Post-humanism

Homo Deus addresses the pathway to a superhuman transition through human enhancement, where narratives of religion, war, equality, and freedom are coupled with the concrete implications of new godlike technologies such as artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. Composed by three parts, the book starts from an analytical approach to the Anthropocene era (Part I: Homo Sapiens Conquers the World), over the turning point of modernity (Part II: Homo Sapiens Gives Meaning to the World), until the next stage of evolution (Part III: Homo Sapiens Loses Control).

The opportunity to change history begins with preemptive conditions about the coming end of the historical course of Homo Sapiens due to the attempt to merge humanity with new technologies. The unique ability of humans to assert dominion over all other animals belonged to a very sophisticated cooperation on an imagined order, beyond objective and subjective realities or myths about war, gods, corporations, and politics. Modernity was the promise of unprecedented power within a complete renunciation to all these beliefs. The antidote to this meaningless view has been provided by humanism: a quasi-perfect potion composed by a large variety of intellectual, emotional, and physical experiences. Humanism enabled us to answer all ethical questions, even if the sanctification of life, emotions and desires undermines its very foundations by unleashing new post-humanist technologies. Organisms are algorithms, so replicating life and reality does not seem Sisyphean. While the usefulness of humans as unique individuals faces emergent upgraded superhumans, liberal assumptions are thwarted by three principles of life sciences: (1) humans are “dividuals” composed of many different and networked algorithms; (2) the algorithms constituting
a human are not free; (3) it follows that algorithms are always right because they know humans much more than humans can ever know themselves. Consequently, “beauty will be in the calculation of the algorithm” (328-29).

The success of liberalism consisted in ascribing value to individuals in the spheres of politics, economy and war, but financial flows and trade are managed by computer programs, in warfare soldiers are being replaced by autonomous robots, and democratic elections face algorithmic predictions about opinions and desires, undermining free will with a barrage of computational propaganda. The post-liberal world consists of worshiping data flow as a value for understanding any phenomenon through its contribution to data processing. Taking place in science labs, the new religion of *Dataism* finds the parameters to guarantee eternal life and happiness, i.e. chemical and electric stimuli to the point of continuous orgasm. As a consequence, death is a technical problem, and it is no longer possible for any actor to physically win a war. Whoever controls the data process, a new social contract will be signed; in order to gain immortality, humanity loses its free will by abandoning the human-centric world view in favor of a data-centric one, destroying basic foundations of liberal democracy: “What’s the use of having democratic elections when the algorithms know how each person is going to vote?” (392).

Although dystopian claims about technology are becoming popular to a large audience and the book is written in an engaging style, Harari seems to primarily target academics and experts who are shaping the tech-driven world, in order to define a new human agenda. An innovative point concerns the method of investigation of the author, who as a historian envisions the future not based on the lessons of history but on a predictive discourse about concrete developments of new technologies and life sciences, emphasizing the idealistic perspective of the human-centric premise. The analytical exploration across disciplinary boundaries focuses on the possibilities of future scenarios, and relies on a wide range of empirical examples from art to observation of political phenomena and processes through technological advancements. A basic critique might point out two fundamental questions. Firstly, the undue faith in progress is not likely to improve the form of government. On the contrary, it produces hegemonic control by states or even by high-tech corporations. Secondly, the disregard for the factors affecting power and, in turn, for the correlation between power and the post-human destiny does not take into account the idealized harmony of individual interests with the interests of humanity. Although Harari describes the future as the capacity to balance technological capabilities and visionary suggestions, the rise of the new species, a form of cyborg-elite, *hominis dei*, will provide deeper cleavages. If war is of a dialectic nature between opposing wills escalating to the extreme, the struggle for the beautiful creation of *Homo Deus* would exacerbate the algorithmic race, giving rise to new forms of war, from hybrid wars to cyberwar. In
this view, conflicts are all but obsolete and technology is the most useful instrument for strengthening divisions. Humans use it merely to satisfy their endless animus dominandi.
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