The big black pickup truck plunged into the protesters blocking the parking lot and I cringed, viscerally, as though I could feel it myself—this merciless crush of steel against flesh.

I was recovering from a bicycle injury when I watched the event on the news last week, as members of the Never Again movement stood their ground to shut down the Wyatt Detention Facility, in Central Falls, R.I. I had fallen a few days earlier; my face hit the sidewalk. I was far too close to my own trauma not to feel a horrified empathy as I watched the video.

Ever since then I’ve been thinking about the paradoxical courage of nonviolent resistance, nonviolent demand for change and the cessation of “legal” wrongs—from Jim Crow to colonial exploitation to the maintenance of concentration camps (in Germany, in the United States). The core paradox of nonviolent protest against such legally sanctioned immoralities is that, if you block a driveway with your body or simply cross a bridge, you’re depending on the humanity of those you confront, who are armed with the weapons they hold or the vehicles they are driving, to keep them from acting on their anger and harming or killing you.

Is this not the essence of courage? You are bringing nothing but yourself, empowered solely by the force of moral compassion—the way the world should be—to a confrontational demand for change. This doesn’t even compute as rational in a win–lose world. You are not setting your cause for justice and fairness aside as you engage the enemy in an armed shootout, with the plan to implement new social rules after you win. You are creating a new reality as you fight for it. Nonviolent protest is a confrontation between parallel universes: love vs. hate. This is, perhaps, the definition of evolution.

And it doesn’t come without pain.

Thus, on the evening of August 14, some 500 Never Again protesters stood outside the Wyatt Detention Facility, a privately owned prison under contract with ICE, which was holding over 100 immigrant detainees, who were being denied needed medical care and enduring other inhumane conditions. Around 9 pm, there was a shift change at the facility and some of the protesters placed themselves at the entrance to the main parking lot. This was indeed directly confrontational; they wanted to temporarily disrupt prison operations.
A short while later, the employee in the black pickup truck turned into the lot, blaring his horn at the protesters. As they pounded on the hood of his truck he gunned forward into the protesters, two of whom wound up being hospitalised (one man suffering a broken leg and internal bleeding). A short while later, half a dozen officers marched resolutely out of the facility and blasted the crowd with pepper spray, causing three more protesters, including a woman in her 70s, to be hospitalised.

That was it, except for the viral video and the news coverage. Even though the officers and the facility “won,” dispersing the crowd and clearing the parking lot, the driver who impulsively rammed the protesters was placed on administrative leave and shortly thereafter “resigned.”

The Rhode Island American Civil Liberties Union later declared, in a statement, that the facility’s response to the protest was “an attempt to chill the exercise of First Amendment rights by hundreds of peaceful protestors.” It was also “completely unacceptable uses of force.”

Maybe so, but I would add that it is also much, much more than that. The protesters were not standing outside the Wyatt Detention Facility out of some random desire to exercise a First Amendment right, but because of outrage at the facility’s relationship with ICE and the American government’s detention of immigrants. Whether they were acting within a constitutional right or utterly outside of their legal rights was irrelevant. They were claiming, in the moment, the right to interrupt the nation’s establishment of concentration camps and its indefinite detention of primarily Latin American asylum seekers—people fleeing, often with their children, desperate conditions in their native countries, partially caused by US actions over the last six or seven decades.

They were, once again, crossing Edmund Pettus Bridge (the site of the brutal Bloody Sunday beatings of civil rights marchers during the first march for voting rights in the USA - Editor), walking unarmed into a confrontation with a domestic army of club-wielding police. They were walking with Martin Luther King, with Mahatma Gandhi, with Nelson Mandela.

“Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind,” Gandhi said. “It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.”

With these words in mind, I revisit my painful viewing of the pickup truck confrontation at the private prison. For a moment, as I watched the video and felt the pain being inflicted, I imagined Tiananmen Square—government forces breaking up a nonviolent protest with rifles and tanks, killing hundreds or maybe thousands in their determination to maintain dominance.

How is nonviolence more powerful than the weapons of war? It may not appear to be the case in the moment, but in the long run, the weapon-wielders lose. The opposite of nonviolence isn’t violence. The opposite is ignorance.

“As Jews, we’ve been taught to never let anything like the Holocaust happen again. This crisis isn’t happening just at the border. It’s happening in our communities all around the country.” Thus reads a Never Again Is Now recruitment declaration.

“At our protest in August, a guard at the Wyatt drove his truck through a line of peaceful protesters blocking a parking lot. Shortly after, more guards came out and pepper-sprayed the crowd. These tactics were used to scare us away and make us give up, but instead we’re more determined than ever to shut down these systems of state-sanctioned violence. We need anyone and everyone to throw themselves into the gears of the system. We need our politicians to take drastic action to shut down ICE immediately and ensure safety for people fleeing to the United States. Until they do, we’re going to make it impossible for ICE to do business as usual. We refuse to wait and see what happens next.”

I would add: This is participatory evolution.

(Robert C. Koehler, a Chicago reporter and editor for over 30 years, proudly calls himself a peace journalist.)

Articles Put on Janata Blog
Last Week (Oct 27)

1. John Bellamy Foster, “The Crisis of Capital”
2. Bolívar and Zamora Revolutionary Current, “Ecuador is Fighting for All of Latin America”
3. Pankaj Mishra, “Gandhi for the Post-Truth Age”
4. Cecilia Nowell, “‘Green Tide’ Reaches Mexico as Oaxaca Decriminalises Abortion”
5. Jonathan White, “Precarious Work and Contemporary Capitalism”
6. Shilpa Paralkar, “What the ABVP doesn’t want you to read: ‘Maniben alias Bibijaan’”
Mahatma Gandhi’s spectacles are being used as an emblem for Government of India’s sanitation campaign Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA). Even though Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, the ideological parent of ruling Bhartiya Janata Party, abhors Gandhi’s ideology, yet Narendra Modi has decided to use Gandhi as a symbol for his drive for cleanliness. First, he knows that Gandhi is the only truly mass leader that India has produced in recent times who holds national as well as international appeal. Second, he probably does not want people to remember Gandhi for his other ideas like truth, non-violence, Swadeshi or communal harmony because they are antithetical to his and his organisation’s thinking. It would be much convenient for his brand of politics if future generations of Indians were to associate Gandhi only with the sanitation programme and none of his other ideals.

But even as regards sanitation, Modi is making a mockery of Gandhi’s views on this. For Gandhi sanitation was not just picking up a broom and cleaning for a photo opportunity, which is what SBA has been reduced to. When a new person would come to Gandhi’s ashrams with a desire to work with him, the first thing (s)he would be required to do was to clean a toilet. This was Gandhi’s way of testing people’s resolve and commitment to social or public cause. Gandhi closely identified himself with the community of sanitation workers and even said that in his future birth, he would like to be born in that community.

The people who are engaged in cleaning of human excreta are called manual scavengers. This practice is a blot on the name of humanity. According to the Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011, 1,80,657 households earn their livelihood through manual scavenging. However, this number is actually much higher because the government’s definition of manual scavengers doesn’t include sanitation workers cleaning sewer lines, septic tanks or railway tracks. The ‘Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993’ did not see a single case being registered and therefore ‘The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013’ was promulgated twenty years later. But the result is no better.

Under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Gramin, 9.16 crores toilets have been constructed during the last five years which has increased the sanitation coverage from 38.7% to 98% during this period. India’s 601 districts out of 752 and 5,50,151 villages out of 6,40,867 have been declared open defecation free. The above statistics would have created a real problem for us if they were true. Firstly, we would require an equally huge number of manual scavengers to clean the soak pits in which the human excreta gets stored underground when they are filled. Secondly, the soak pit design in areas of the country like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where the water table is very high, especially in rural areas where these toilets have mainly been built, would have posed a threat of contamination of ground water. Both these problems have not emerged on a big scale, indicating either that the toilets have not been constructed on the scale mentioned by the government due to corruption, or that the toilets are not being used because of faulty or incomplete construction.

Not once during the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan do we find a mention of manual scavengers or their problems, all of whom incidentally come from a particular caste called Valmiki in North India, which belongs to the Dalit community. Prime Minister Narendra Modi famously washed the feet of five sanitation workers on 24 February, 2019 during the Ardh Kumbh at Prayagraj as a mark of respect for their contribution to ensuring cleanliness during the month and a half long event. However, the need to undertake this exercise probably arose because there was a protest going on of sanitation workers during the event itself, demanding minimum wages and better working conditions. A well known activist-poet from Allahabad, Anshu Malviya, was arrested on 8 February by the Police Crime Branch and threatened with imposition of National Security Act on him because he was at the forefront of organising the sanitation workers. After a protest by activists and sanitation workers, he was finally released after midnight from a local police station. Sanitation workers were getting Rs 295 per day as daily wages whereas they were demanding Rs 600, in accordance with the monthly minimum wage
of Rs 18,000 being demanded by national level trade unions.

Meanwhile, sanitation workers continue to die while inside sewer lines and septic tanks. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment informed the Lok Sabha in 2017 that 300 deaths by asphyxiation had taken place that year of workers involved in underground cleaning operations. On November 10, 2018, Dinesh Paswan and Vikas Paswan died in an accident inside a sewer line in Chowkaghat locality of Varanasi while Satyendra Paswan suffered a leg fracture. The district administration and the government did not take responsibility and instead the contractor Pankaj Srivastava was made to pay the compensation. The police only filed an accident case at the Chetganj Police Station, and not under the 2013 Act. On June 15, 2019, seven workers died inside a septic tank of a hotel, 30 kms from Vadodara in Gujarat, but again no case was registered under the 2013 Act. Had the cases been registered under ‘The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013’, family members of the deceased or the survivor would have been rehabilitated in an alternative occupation.

The act of Narendra Modi washing the feet of sanitation workers overwhelmed and pushed into the background the basic demands of sanitation workers—a respectable income, safe working conditions, education for their children, health care for their families, an insurance against accidents and solution to health hazards faced by manual scavengers.

Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to machinery. But one machine that he would not have opposed would have been a machine to clean sewer lines and septic tanks, as it would have liberated the manual scavengers from an ignominious plight. It is a shame that we have machines in the modern world which can perform surgery without cutting open the human body, but we don’t have readily available machines to clean the sewers and septic tanks.

(Sandeep Pandey is a social activist.)

The Return of Fascism in Contemporary Capitalism

Samir Amin

It is not by chance that the very title of this contribution links the return of fascism on the political scene with the crisis of contemporary capitalism. Fascism is not synonymous with an authoritarian police regime that rejects the uncertainties of parliamentary electoral democracy. Fascism is a particular political response to the challenges with which the management of capitalist society may be confronted in specific circumstances.

Unity and Diversity of Fascism

Political movements that can rightly be called fascist were in the forefront and exercised power in a number of European countries, particularly during the 1930s up to 1945. These included Italy’s Benito Mussolini, Germany’s Adolf Hitler, Spain’s Francisco Franco, Portugal’s António de Oliveira Salazar, France’s Philippe Pétain, Hungary’s Miklós Horthy, Romania’s Ion Antonescu, and Croatia’s Ante Pavelic. The diversity of societies that were the victims of fascism—both major developed capitalist societies and minor dominated capitalist societies, some connected with a victorious war, others the product of defeat—should prevent us from lumping them all together. Yet, beyond this diversity, all these fascist regimes had two characteristics in common:

(1) In the circumstances, they were all willing to manage the government and society in such a way as not to call the fundamental principles of capitalism into question, specifically private capitalist property, including that of modern monopoly capitalism. That is why I call these different forms of fascism particular ways of managing capitalism and not political forms that challenge the latter’s legitimacy, even if “capitalism” or “plutocracies” were subject to long diatribes in the rhetoric of fascist speeches. It remains the case that the fascist choice is not the only response to the challenges confronting the political management of a capitalist society. It is only in certain conjunctures of violent and deep crisis that the fascist solution appears to be the best one for dominant capital, or sometimes even the only possible one. The analysis must, then, focus on these crises.

(2) The fascist choice for managing a capitalist society in crisis is always based on the categorical rejection of “democracy.” Fascism always replaces the general principles on which the theories and practices of modern democracies are based—recognition of a diversity of opinions,
recourse to electoral procedures to determine a majority, guarantee of the rights of the minority, etc.—with the opposed values of submission to the requirements of collective discipline and the authority of the supreme leader and his main agents. This reversal of values is then always accompanied by a return of backward-looking ideas, which are able to provide an apparent legitimacy to the procedures of submission that are implemented. The proclamation of the supposed necessity of returning to the (“medieval”) past, of submitting to the state religion or to some supposed characteristic of the “race” or the (ethnic) “nation” make up the panoply of ideological discourses deployed by the fascist powers.

The diverse forms of fascism found in modern European history share these two characteristics and fall into one of the following four categories:

(1) The fascism of major “developed” capitalist powers that aspired to become dominant hegemonic powers in the world, or at least in the regional, capitalist system.

Nazism is the model of this type of fascism. Germany became a major industrial power beginning in the 1870s and a competitor of the hegemonic powers of the era (Great Britain and, secondarily, France) and of the country that aspired to become hegemonic (the United States). After the 1918 defeat, it had to deal with the consequences of its failure to achieve its hegemonic aspirations. Hitler clearly formulated his plan: to establish over Europe, including Russia and maybe beyond, the hegemonic domination of “Germany,” i.e., the capitalism of the monopolies that had supported the rise of Nazism.

Japanese fascism belongs to the same category. Since 1895, modern capitalist Japan aspired to impose its domination over all of East Asia. Here the slide was made “softly” from the “imperial” form of managing a rising national capitalism—based on apparently “liberal” institutions (an elected Diet), but in fact completely controlled by the Emperor and the aristocracy transformed by modernisation—to a brutal form, managed directly by the military High Command.

(2) The fascism of second rank capitalist powers.

Italy’s Mussolini (the inventor of fascism, including its name) is the prime example. Mussolinism was the response of the Italian right (the old aristocracy, new bourgeoisie, middle classes) to the crisis of the 1920s and the growing communist threat. But neither Italian capitalism nor its political instrument, Mussolini’s fascism, had the ambition to dominate Europe, let alone the world. Mussolini understood that the stability of his system rested on his alliance—as a subaltern—either with Great Britain (master of the Mediterranean) or Nazi Germany. Hesitation between the two possible alliances continued right up to the eve of the Second World War.

The fascism of Salazar and Franco belong to this same type. They were both dictators installed by the right and the Catholic Church in response to the dangers of republican liberals or socialist republicans. The two were never, for this reason, ostracised for their anti-democratic violence (under the pretext of anti-communism) by the major imperialist powers. Washington rehabilitated them after 1945 (Salazar was a founding member of NATO and Spain consented to U.S. military bases).

(3) The fascism of defeated powers.

These include France’s Vichy government, as well as Belgium’s Léon Degrelle and the “Flemish” pseudo-government supported by the Nazis. In France, the upper class chose “Hitler rather than the Popular Front”. This type of fascism, connected with defeat and submission to “German Europe,” was forced to retreat into the background following the defeat of the Nazis.

(4) Fascism in the dependent societies of Eastern Europe.

We move down several degrees more when we come to examine the capitalist societies of Eastern Europe (Poland, the Baltic states, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece, and western Ukraine during the Polish era). We should here speak of backward and, consequently, dependent capitalism. In the interwar period, the reactionary ruling classes of these countries supported Nazi Germany. It is, nevertheless, necessary to examine on a case-by-case basis their political articulation with Hitler’s project.

In Poland, the old hostility to Russian domination (Tsarist Russia), which became hostility to the communist Soviet Union, encouraged by the popularity of the Catholic Papacy, would normally have made this country into Germany’s vassal, on the Vichy model. But Hitler did not understand it that way: the Poles, like the Russians, Ukrainians, and
Serbs, were people destined for extermination, along with Jews, the Roma, and several others. There was, then, no place for a Polish fascisim allied with Berlin.

Horváth’s Hungary and Antonescu’s Romania were, in contrast, treated as subaltern allies of Nazi Germany. Fascism in these two countries was itself the result of social crises specific to each of them: fear of “communism” after the Béla Kun period in Hungary and the national chauvinist mobilisation against Hungarians and Ruthenians in Romania.

In Yugoslavia, Hitler’s Germany (followed by Mussolini’s Italy) supported an “independent” Croatia, entrusted to the management of the anti-Serb Ustashi with the decisive support of the Catholic Church, while the Serbs were marked for extermination.

The Western Right’s Complaisant View of Past and Present Fascism

The right in European parliaments between the two world wars was always complaisant about fascism and even about the more repugnant Nazism. Churchill himself, regardless of his extreme “Britishness,” never hid his sympathy for Mussolini. US presidents, and the establishment Democratic and Republican parties, only discovered belatedly the danger presented by Hitler’s Germany and, above all, imperial/fascist Japan. With all the cynicism characteristic of the US establishment, Truman openly avowed what others thought quietly: allow the war to wear out its protagonists—Germany, Soviet Russia, and the defeated Europeans—and intervene as late as possible to reap the benefits. That is not at all the expression of a principled anti-fascist position. No hesitation was shown in the rehabilitation of Salazar and Franco in 1945. Furthermore, connivance with European fascism was a constant in the policy of the Catholic Church. It would not strain credibility to describe Pius XII as a collaborator with Mussolini and Hitler.

Hitler’s anti-Semitism itself aroused opprobrium only much later, when it reached the ultimate stage of its murderous insanity. The emphasis on hate for “Judeo-Bolshevism” stirred up by Hitler’s speeches was common to many politicians. It was only after the defeat of Nazism that it was necessary to condemn anti-Semitism in principle. The task was made easier because the self-proclaimed heirs to the title of “victims of the Shoah” had become the Zionists of Israel, allies of Western imperialism against the Palestinians and the Arab people—who, however, had never been involved in the horrors of European anti-Semitism!

Obviously, the collapse of the Nazis and Mussolini’s Italy obliged rightist political forces in Western Europe to distinguish themselves from those who—within their own groups—had been accomplices and allies of fascism. Yet, fascist movements were only forced to retreat into the background and hide behind the scenes, without really disappearing.

In West Germany, in the name of “reconciliation,” the local government and its patrons (the United States, and secondarily Great Britain and France) left in place nearly all those who had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. In France, legal proceedings were initiated against the Resistance for “abusive executions for collaboration” when the Vichystis reappeared on the political scene with Antoine Pinay. In Italy, fascism became silent, but was still present in the ranks of Christian Democracy and the Catholic Church. In Spain, the “reconciliation” compromise imposed in 1980 by the European Community (which later became the European Union) purely and simply prohibited any reminder of Francoist crimes.

The support of the socialist and social-democratic parties of Western and Central Europe for the anti-communist campaigns undertaken by the conservative right shares responsibility for the later return of fascism. These parties of the “moderate” left had, however, been authentically and resolutely anti-fascist. Yet all of that was forgotten. With the conversion of these parties to social liberalism, their unconditional support for European construction and their no less unconditional submission to US hegemony (through NATO, among other means), a reactionary bloc combining the classic right and the social liberals has been consolidated; one that could, if necessary, accommodate the new extreme right.

Subsequently, the rehabilitation of East European fascism was quickly undertaken beginning in 1990. All of the fascist movements of the countries concerned had been faithful allies or collaborators to varying degrees with Hitlerism. With the approaching defeat, a large number of their active leaders had been redeployed to the West and could, consequently, “surrender” to the US armed forces. None of them were returned to Soviet, Yugoslav, or other governments in the new people’s democracies to be tried for
their crimes (in violation of Allied agreements). They all found refuge in the United States and Canada. And they were all pampered by the authorities for their fierce anti-communism!

Undoubtedly, the fascist danger might still appear today to be no threat to the “democratic” order in the United States and Europe west of the old “Curtain.” The collusion between the classic parliamentary right and the social liberals makes it unnecessary for dominant capital to resort to the services of an extreme right that follows in the wake of the historical fascist movements. But then what should we conclude about the electoral successes of the extreme right over the last decade? Europeans are clearly also victims of the spread of generalised monopoly capitalism. We can see why, then, when confronted with collusion between the right and the so-called socialist left, they take refuge in electoral abstention or in voting for the extreme right. The responsibility of the potentially radical left is, in this context, huge: if this left had the audacity to propose real advances beyond current capitalism, it would gain the credibility that it lacks. An audacious radical left is necessary to provide the coherence that the current piecemeal protest movements and defensive struggles still lack. The “movement” could, then, reverse the social balance of power in favor of the working classes and make progressive advances possible. The successes won by the popular movements in South America are proof of that.

One last observation about fascist movements: they seem unable to know when and how to stop making their demands. The cult of the leader and blind obedience, the acritical and supreme valorisation of pseudo-ethnic or pseudo-religious mythological constructions that convey fanaticism, and the recruitment of militias for violent actions make fascism into a force that is difficult to control. Mistakes, even beyond irrational deviations from the viewpoint of the social interests served by the fascists, are inevitable. Hitler was a truly mentally ill person, yet he could force the big capitalists who had put him in power to follow him to the end of his madness and even gained the support of a very large portion of the population. Although that is only an extreme case, and Mussolini, Franco, Salazar, and Pétain were not mentally ill, a large number of their associates and henchmen did not hesitate to perpetrate criminal acts.

Fascism in the Contemporary South

The integration of Latin America into globalised capitalism in the nineteenth century was based on the exploitation of peasants reduced to the status of “peons” and their subjection to the savage practices of large landowners. The system of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico is a good example. The furtherance of this integration in the twentieth century produced the “modernisation of poverty.” The rapid rural exodus, more pronounced and earlier in Latin America than in Asia and Africa, led to new forms of poverty in the contemporary urban favelas, which came to replace older forms of rural poverty. Concurrently, forms of political control of the masses were “modernised” by establishing dictatorships, abolishing electoral democracy, prohibiting parties and trade unions, and conferring on “modern” secret services all rights to arrest and torture through their intelligence techniques. The dictatorships of twentieth-century Latin America served the local reactionary bloc (large landowners, comprador capitalist classes, and sometimes middle classes that benefited from this type of lumpen development), but above all, they served dominant foreign capital, specifically that of the United States, which, for this reason, supported these dictatorships up to their reversal by the recent explosion of popular movements. The power of these movements and the social and democratic advances that they have imposed exclude—at least in the short term—the return of para-fascist dictatorships. But the future is uncertain: the conflict between the movement of the working classes and local and world capitalism has only begun.

Beginning in the 1980s, the lumpen development characteristic of the spread of generalised monopoly capitalism took over from the national populist systems of the Bandung era (1955–1980) in Asia and Africa. This lumpen development also produced forms akin both to the modernisation of poverty and modernisation of repressive violence. We should not lump together the national populist regimes of the Bandung era and those of their successors, which jumped on the bandwagon of globalised neoliberalism, because they were both “non-democratic.” The Bandung regimes, despite their autocratic political practices, benefited from some popular legitimacy both because of their actual achievements, which benefited the majority of workers, and their anti-imperialist positions. The dictatorships that followed
lost this legitimacy as soon as they accepted subjection to the globalised neoliberal model and accompanying lumpen development. Popular and national authority, although not democratic, gave way to police violence as such, in service of the neoliberal, anti-popular, and anti-national project.

The recent popular uprisings, beginning in 2011, have called into question the dictatorships. But the dictatorships have only been called into question. An alternative will only find the means to achieve stability if it succeeds in combining the three objectives around which the revolts have been mobilised: continuation of the democratisation of society and politics, progressive social advances, and the affirmation of national sovereignty.

We are still far from that. That is why there are multiple alternatives possible in the visible short term. Can there be a possible return to the national popular model of the Bandung era, maybe with a hint of democracy? Or a more pronounced crystallisation of a democratic, popular, and national front? Or a plunge into a backward-looking illusion that, in this context, takes on the form of an “Islamisation” of politics and society?

In the conflict over—in much confusion—these three possible responses to the challenge, the Western powers (the United States and its subaltern European allies) have made their choice: they have given preferential support to the Muslim Brotherhood and/or other “Salafist” organisations of political Islam. The reason for that is simple and obvious: these reactionary political forces accept exercising their power within globalised neoliberalism (and thus abandoning any prospect for social justice and national independence). That is the sole objective pursued by the imperialist powers.

Consequently, political Islam’s program belongs to the type of fascism found in dependent societies. In fact, it shares with all forms of fascism two fundamental characteristics: (1) the absence of a challenge to the essential aspects of the capitalist order; and (2) the choice of anti-democratic, police-state forms of political management (such as the prohibition of parties and organisations, and forced Islamisation of morals).

In conclusion, fascism has returned to the West, East, and South; and this return is naturally connected with the spread of the systemic crisis of generalised, financialised, and globalised monopoly capitalism. Actual or even potential recourse to the services of the fascist movement by the dominant centers of this hard-pressed system calls for the greatest vigilance on our part. This crisis is destined to grow worse and, consequently, the threat of resorting to fascist solutions will become a real danger.

Similar developments and choices are found outside of the Arab-Muslim world, such as Hindu India, for example. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which just won the elections in India, is a reactionary Hindu religious party that accepts the inclusion of its government into globalised neoliberalism. It is the guarantor that India, under its government, will retreat from its project to be an emerging power. Describing it as fascist, then, is not really straining credibility too much.

In the Shahjahanabadi old city of Delhi, between the Jama Masjid and the Red Fort, both monuments reminding of the Mughal pristine glory, a green and glossy patch covers an area where once stood the houses of the Muslim nobility. They were leveled after the Indian revolt against the British in 1857.

Near the mosque, and above the level of the crowded new bazaar, a red sandstone wall encloses a garden in which a tomb of simple dignity marks the resting place of the man born in Mecca on November 11, 1888 and who died in New Delhi on February 22, 1958—Mohiuddin Ahmed, better known as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

The location is appropriate, a grave amidst the relics of past history, in a domain wrested by the British from the Mughals, and then freed again at great cost. The other leading figures of the great freedom struggle, Mahatama Gandhi and Pandit Nehru, were cremated not far away, along the banks of the river Jamuna, beyond the battlements of the Red Fort. But Azad, in death as in life, is alone.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is, by any reckoning, a major figure

**Remembering Maulana Azad: A Votary of Hindu–Muslim Unity**

_Firoz Bakht Ahmed_

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[Samir Amin (1931–2018) was an Egyptian–French socialist economist, political scientist and world-systems analyst.]
in twentieth-century Indian history. He was a scholar thoroughly trained in the traditional Islamic sciences, with great intellectual abilities and eloquence of pen and speech. He had, in addition, a remarkable openness to modern western knowledge even as he opposed the western rule over India.

Azad made a lasting contribution to Urdu prose literature with his translation and interpretation of the Qur'an—Tarjuman-ul-Quran. The intellectual history of Islam in India has long been described in terms of two contrasting currents: the one tending towards confrontation, the other towards assimilation, with the Hindu milieu.

This dichotomy is, of course, an oversimplification, for separatist and syncretist represent extreme points on a spectrum of possible intellectual responses by Muslims to the Indian scene.

In his youth, Azad had been totally inexperienced in politics. After entering the freedom struggle, he proved that his religious faith could guide him in the area of general principles, and give him strength for the difficulties he had to face.

Maulana Azad earned a reputation for 'absolute impartiality' and 'unimpeachable integrity' which served him well, particularly in the years after independence.

The major concern of Azad's life was the revival and reform of the Indian Muslims in all spheres of life, and his political hopes for them were within this context. For any such reform, he realised the key position of the ulema and of the traditional educational system which produces them. This was why he pinned his early hopes on the Nadwat ul-Ulema under the leadership of Shibli.

Such was Azad's vision concerning matters internal to the Muslim community.

As far as relations with others were concerned, we have seen that Azad never questioned the fact that being a Muslim in India meant living with non-Muslims in common citizenship. He never contemplated any other political possibility, and when incidents of communal strife in the 1920s threatened Hindu–Muslim unity, and then in the 1930s and 40s the Pakistan movement gathered strength, his spirit rebelled against those trends.

In his presidential address to the Congress in 1923, he said that the ability of Hindus and Muslims “to live together was essential to primary principles of humanity within ourselves.”

Almost twenty years later, when he again addressed Congress from the presidential chair, he repeated this absolutely fundamental premise:

“I am a Muslim and profoundly conscious of the fact that I have inherited Islam's glorious tradition of the last thirteen hundred years.

“I am not prepared to lose even a small part of that legacy. The history and teachings of Islam, its art and letters, its culture and civilisation are part of my wealth and it is my duty to cherish and guard them... But, with all these feelings, I have another equally deep realisation born out of my life's experience, which is strengthened and not hindered by the Islamic spirit.

“I am equally proud of the fact that I am an Indian, an essential part of the indivisible unity of Indian nationhood, a vital factor in its total makeup, without which this noble edifice will remain incomplete. I can never give up this sincere claim...”

(The author is Chancellor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, and a grandnephew of Maulana Azad.)

On October 2, 1947, Why Did Gandhi Say He Was Ashamed That He Was Still Alive?

The plans to officially mark Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary are on course. At the ground level, however, the ugly face of communalism continues to rear its head in one virulent incident after another. It was an issue which agitated Gandhi until his dying breath and, in fact, was uppermost in his mind during his prayer discourse on October 2, 1947, in Delhi, on the day of his 79th birthday, just one-and-a-half months after independence and Partition.

Here is a short excerpt from Gandhi’s prayer discourse of October 2, 1947, from The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume 89, as published online by the Gandhi Heritage Portal.

Today is my birthday... For me today is [a] day of mourning. I am surprised and also ashamed that I am still alive. I am the same person whose word was honoured by... millions [in] the country. But today nobody listens to me. You want only the Hindus to remain in India and say that none else should be left behind. You may kill the Muslims today; but what will you do tomorrow?
At present we have some Muslims in our midst who belong to us. If we are ready to kill them, let me tell you that I am not for it. Ever since I came to India, I have made it my profession to work for communal harmony, and I wish that though our religions are different we may live in amity, like brothers. But today we seem to have become enemies. We assert that there can never be an honest Muslim. A Muslim always remains a worthless fellow.

In such a situation, what place do I have in India and what is the point of my being alive? I have now stopped thinking about living for 125 years. I have stopped thinking in terms of 100 or even 90 years. I am entering my 79th year today; but even that pains me. I would tell those who understand me—and there are quite a few who do understand—that we should give up such bestiality. I am not worried about what the Muslims do in Pakistan. It is not that the Muslims become great by killing the Hindus; they only become brutes. But does it mean that I should also become a beast, a barbarian, insensitive? I would stoutly refuse to do any such thing and I must ask you too not to do so.

If you really want to celebrate my birthday, it is your duty not to let anyone be possessed by madness and if there is any anger in your hearts you must remove it…. If you remember this much, I would consider it a good act on your part. This is all I wish to tell you.

Impoverished Economics? Unpacking the Economics Nobel Prize
Ingrid Harvold Kvangraven

This week it was announced that Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo and Michael Kremer won the Economics Nobel Prize (or more accurately: the ‘Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel’). The trio of economists were awarded the prize for ”their experimental approach to alleviating global poverty”.

On social media and in mainstream newspapers, there was an exceptional level of praise for the laureates, reflecting their existing rockstar status within development economics. The Financial Times even claimed that the Nobel “will help restore [the] profession’s relevance”. However, the widespread calls for celebration need to be considered with a cautionary counterweight.

The experimental approach to poverty alleviation relies on so-called Randomised Control Trials (RCTs). Inspired by studies in medicine, the approach targets specific interventions to a randomly selected group (schools, classes, mothers, etc), and then compares how specific outcomes change in the recipient group versus those who did not receive the treatment. As the groups are assumed to be otherwise similar, the difference in outcomes can be causally attributed to the intervention.

The experimental approach has become enormously influential among governments, international agencies and NGOs. The body of work pioneered by the laureates, or the randomistas as they are sometimes called, is meant to alleviate poverty through simple interventions such as combating teacher absenteeism, through cash transfers, and through stimulating positive thinking among the people living in poverty. Sounds good so far?

While the laureates’ approach to poverty research and policy may seem harmless, if not laudable, there are many reasons for concern. Both heterodox and mainstream economists as well as other social scientists have long provided a thorough critique of the turn towards RCTs in economics, on philosophical, epistemological, political and methodological grounds. The concerns with the approach can be roughly grouped into questions of focus, theory and methodology.

Focus: tackling symptoms and thinking small

The approach that is being promoted is concerned with poverty, not development, and is thus a part of the larger trend in development economics that is moving away from development as structural transformation to development as poverty alleviation. This movement towards “thinking small” is a part of a broader trend, which has squeezed out questions related to global economic institutions, trade,
agricultural, industrial and fiscal policy, and the role of political dynamics, in favour of the best ways to make smaller technical interventions.

The interventions considered by the Nobel laureates tend to be removed from analyses of power and wider social change. In fact, the Nobel committee specifically gave the Nobel to Banerjee, Duflo and Kremer for addressing “smaller, more manageable questions,” rather than big ideas. While such small interventions might generate positive results at the micro-level, they do little to challenge the systems that produce the problems.

For example, rather than challenging the cuts to the school systems that are forced by austerity, the focus of the randomistas directs our attention to absenteeism of teachers and the effects of school meals and the number of teachers in the classroom on learning. Meanwhile, their lack of challenge to the existing economic order is perhaps also precisely one of the limits to media and donor appeal, and ultimately also their success. The lack of engagement with the conditions that create poverty has led many critics to question as to what extent RCTs will actually be able to significantly reduce global poverty.

**Theory: methodological individualism lives on**

In a 2017 speech, Duflo famously likened economists to plumbers. In her view the role of an economist is to solve real world problems in specific situations. This is a dangerous assertion, as it suggests that the “plumbing” the randomistas are doing is purely technical, and not guided by theory or values. However, the randomistas’ approach to economics is neither objective and value-neutral, nor pragmatic, but rather, rooted in a particular theoretical framework and world view—neoclassical microeconomic theory and methodological individualism.

The experiments’ grounding has implications for how experiments are designed and the underlying assumptions about individual and collective behavior that are made. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is that the laureates often argue that specific aspects of poverty can be solved by correcting cognitive biases. Unsurprisingly, there is much overlap between the work of randomistas and the mainstream behavioral economists, including a focus on nudges that may facilitate better choices on the part of people living in poverty.

Another example is Duflo’s analysis of women empowerment. Naila Kabeer argues that it employs an understanding of human behavior “uncritically informed by neoclassical microeconomic theory.” Since all behavior can allegedly be explained as manifestations of individual maximising behavior, alternative explanations are dispensed with. Because of this, Duflo fails to understand a series of other important factors related to women’s empowerment, such as the role of sustained struggle by women’s organisations for rights or the need to address unfair distribution of unpaid work that limits women’s ability to participate in the community.

Note that there is nothing embedded in RCTs that forces randomistas to assume individuals are rational optimising agents. These assumptions come from the economics tradition. This is therefore not a critique of RCTs per se, but of the way RCTs are employed in the laureates’ work and in most of mainstream economics.

**Method: If you didn’t randomise it, is it really knowledge?**

While understanding causal processes is important in development economics, as in other social science disciplines, RCTs do so in a very limited way. The causal model underlying RCTs focuses on causal effects rather than causal mechanisms. Not only do RCTs not tell us exactly what mechanisms are involved when something works, they also do not tell us whether the policy in question can be reliably implemented elsewhere. In order to make such a judgement, a broader assessment of economic and social realities is unavoidable.

Assuming that interventions are valid across geographies and scale suggests that micro results are independent of their macroeconomic environment. However, while “effects” on individuals and households are not separate from the societies in which they exist, randomistas give little acknowledgement to other ways of knowing about the world that might help us better understand individual motivations and socio-economic situations. As it is difficult to achieve truly random sampling in human communities, it is perhaps not surprising that when RCTs are replicated, they may come to substantially different results than the original.

Not only do RCTs rarely have external validity, but the specific circumstances needed to understand the extent to which the experiments may have external validity are usually inadequately reported. This
has led even critics within the mainstream to argue that there are misunderstandings about what RCTs are capable of accomplishing. A deeper epistemological critique involves the problematic underlying assumption that there is one specific true impact that can be uncovered through experiments.

Recent research has found that alternative attempts to assess the success of programs transferring assets to women in extreme poverty in West Bengal and Sindh have been far superior to RCTs, which provide very limited explanations for the patterns of outcomes observed. The research concludes that it is unlikely that RCTs will be able to acknowledge the central role of human agency in project success if they confine themselves to quantitative methods alone.

There are also serious ethical problems at stake. Among these are issues such as lying, instrumentalising people, the role of consent, accountability and foreign intervention, in addition to the choice of who gets treatment. While ethical concerns regarding potential harm to groups is discussed extensively in the medical literature, it receives less attention in economics, despite the many ethically dubious experimental studies (e.g. allowing bribes for people to get their drivers’ licences in India or incentivising Hong Kong university students into participation in an anti-authoritarian protest). Finally, the colonial dimensions of US-based researchers intervening to estimate what is best for people in the Global South cannot be ignored.

Why it matters: limits to knowledge and policy-making

There will always be research that is more or less relevant for development, so why does it matter what the randomistas do? Well, as the Nobel Committee stated, their “experimental research methods now entirely dominate development economics”. A serious epistemological problem arises when the definition of what rigour and evidence means gets narrowed down to one single approach that has so many limitations. This shift has taken place over the past couple of decades in development economics, and is now strengthened by the 2019 Nobel Prize. As both Banerjee and Duflo acknowledged in interviews after the prize was announced, this is not just a prize for them, but a prize for the entire movement.

The discipline has not always been this way. The history of thought on development economics is rich with debates about how capital accumulation differs across space, the role of institutions in shaping behavior and economic development, the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, unequal exchange, the global governance of technology, the role of fiscal policy, and the relationship between agriculture and industry. The larger questions have since been pushed out of the discipline, in favour of debates about smaller interventions.

The rise of the randomistas also matters because the randomistas are committed to provoke results, not just provide an understanding of the situations in which people living in poverty find themselves. In fact, it is one of their stated goals to produce a “better integration between theory and empirical practice”. A key argument by the randomistas is that “all too often development policy is based on fads, and randomised evaluations could allow it to be based on evidence”.

However, the narrowness of the randomised trials is impractical for most forms of policies. While RCTs tend to test at most a couple of variations of a policy, in the real world of development, interventions are overlapping and synergistic. This reality recently led 15 leading economists to call to “evaluate whole public policies” rather than assess “short-term impacts of micro-projects,” given that what is needed is systems-level thinking to tackle the scale of overlapping crises. Furthermore, the value of experimentation in policy-making, rather than promoting pre-prescribed policies, should not be neglected.

The concept of “evidence-based policy” associated with the randomistas needs some unpacking. It is important to note that policies are informed by reflections on values and objectives, which economists are not necessarily well-suited to intervene in. Of course, evidence should be a part of a policy-making process, but the pursuit of ineffective policies is often driven by political priorities rather than lack of evidence.

While randomistas might respond to this by arguing that their trials are precisely meant to depoliticise public policy, this is not necessarily a desirable step. Policy decisions are political in nature, and shielding these value judgements from public scrutiny and debate does little to strengthen democratic decision making. Suggesting that policy-making can be depoliticised is dangerous and it belittles the agency and participation of people in policy-making. After all, why should a policy that has been proven effective through an RCT carry more weight than, for example, policies driven by people’s demands and political and social mobilisation?
While the Nobel Prize does leave those of us concerned with broader political economy challenges in the world anxious, not everything is doom and gloom. Firstly, the Nobel directs attention to the persistence of poverty in the world and the need to do something about it. What we as critical development economists now need to do is to challenge the fact that the Prize also legitimises a prescriptive view of how to find solutions to global problems.

Secondly, the fact that a woman and a person of colour were awarded a prize that is usually reserved for white men is a step forward for a more open and inclusive field. Duflo herself recognises that the gender imbalance among Nobel Prize winners reflects a "structural" problem in the economics profession and that her profession lacks ethnic diversity.

However, it is obvious that to challenge racism, sexism and Eurocentrism in economics, it is not enough to simply be more inclusive of women and people of colour among those who are firmly placed at the top of the narrow, Eurocentric mainstream. To truly achieve a more open and democratic science it is necessary to push for a field that is welcoming of a plurality of viewpoints, methodologies, theoretical frameworks, forms of knowledge and perspectives.

This is a massive challenge, but the systemic, global crises we face require broad, interdisciplinary engagement in debates about possible solutions.

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exorbitant pricing because of its monopoly position; so, what does increasing “competitiveness” mean?

A third argument linked to this is that it would bring about greater “efficiency”. No index of “efficiency”, in terms, for instance, of any physical indicators such as inputs per unit of coal output, is provided on the basis of which this claim can be judged. Only some vague reference is made to the cost of production per unit of coal; but a lower cost of production per unit of coal is not indicative of greater efficiency. In fact, in the coal sector, where wage costs are a major part of the total unit cost, any observed lower cost in private production is on account of two main factors: lower wages, sometimes estimated to be as low as a third of the wages paid by CIL for similar work, and less concern for miners’ safety.

In fact, CIL has a safety record, which no doubt can and must be improved, but which is far better than what one observes in other countries which have gone into private coal mining, including even China. In fact, the average fatality rate per million tonnes of coal production is much lower in India than in China and Indonesia, two other large producers which allow private mining. Achieving “cost reduction” at the expense of human lives is hardly something we should be aiming at.

This basically brings us to the two most cited arguments. One is that FDI will bring in better technology into India’s coal mining sector. Even if this argument is accepted, we have to ask why technological upgradation of coal production by CIL itself cannot be effected by simply acquiring better technology, and why it becomes necessary to actually open up the sector to 100% FDI. In fact, there is no evidence of the government ever having made serious efforts to acquire technology through other means than by opening up to 100% FDI.

The second oft-repeated argument is that India has been importing coal of late, with the magnitude of imports going up over time because domestic production is insufficient to meet the domestic consumption requirements. Domestic production, therefore, has to be augmented rapidly, for which we need to involve private players, including foreign ones. The problem with this argument is that it never explains why CIL should not be able to increase production to the extent required. CIL, it is recognised, performed very well in 2018–19 by adding 40 million tonnes of incremental output. Why it should not be asked to keep doing so in the next few years so that imports could be eliminated altogether, is never explained.

The suggestion is often made that CIL is “over-stretched”. What exactly this means is again not clear. It is a characteristic feature of large companies that they have the wherewithal to grow even larger whenever there is sufficient demand for their output; why this should not be the case for CIL, defies reason. And if perchance there is some constraint on CIL’s growth, then the government could easily set up another public sector company to increase the country’s coal producing capacity, instead of inviting foreign multinationals into our coal sector.

Much is made in this context of the fact that “precious foreign exchange” will be saved if we augment domestic production by inviting foreign multinationals. But there is never any recognition of the fact that such invitation will also lead to a substantial outgo of “precious foreign exchange” on account of profit repatriation by these multinationals.

Ironically, the same sources that argue that foreign multinationals should be invited because CIL is “over-stretched”, immediately add that foreign multinationals will not come, given the difficulties that currently exist on land acquisition, on the pricing of coal and on having to bid for coal blocks. The suggestion, therefore, is that all these restrictions must go in order to facilitate the entry of foreign multinationals. In other words, not only must foreign multinationals be allowed into coal production but they must be provided with a red carpet and the country’s entire policy regime must be made subservient to their demands; and all because of some unspecified “over-stretching” on the part of CIL.

The conclusion is inescapable: that there is no pressing objective reason for this policy of opening up the coal sector to foreign multinationals; this policy is not dictated by any necessity but entirely because having foreign capital per se is considered desirable, even if in the process the price of coal goes up, and even if rampant primitive accumulation of capital at the expense of the tribal population of the country is carried out (which after all is the meaning of “easing” land acquisition).

It is ironical that a government which proclaims its “nationalism” so vociferously, and which locks up people for being “anti-national” at the slightest excuse, is so keen to hand over control over the nation’s resources to foreign multinationals by reversing all previous policy.

Courtesy: News Click
Grassroots Communication Fights Back! A Conversation with Jessica Pernia

Cira Pascual Marquina

Tatuy TV was born twelve years ago, at the height of the community television movement and in a context where Chavez was assuming the role of society’s great communicator and pedagogue. Since then, that remarkably democratic movement of community media has disappeared. Instead, we have an institutionalised media that is useful in the anti-imperialist struggle but has big limitations when it comes to telling the story of popular struggles. Can we talk about this process, beginning with the fascinating early wave of popular communication and going up to the present?

Indeed, there was a boom in community media beginning around 2003 that was encouraged in part by a legal framework that promoted popular communication. Those laws, together with public financing mechanisms, generated an exponential growth of media and fostered new efforts in popular communication. However, it must be acknowledged that this boom did not bring about progress in a qualitative sense. That is to say, many community media outlets were created, and they had access to resources, but their impact on popular subjectivity and social organisation left much to be desired.

Comandante Chavez was very discerning with regard to this issue, and he tried to promote a revolutionary communication system, but it didn’t take off.

At the risk of being too hard on ourselves, I would say that the present situation constitutes incontrovertible proof that the rentier mentality also penetrated the spheres of popular communication. On the one hand, many of the community media projects became dependent on institutional leadership and financing. On the other hand, the rentier attitude expressed itself in the perverse practice of consuming more resources than those produced. This happened with community media, where a community radio station might end up broadcasting another radio station all day, without producing its own content, and without accompanying processes of popular organisation (meanwhile receiving funds, which sometimes ended up in the pockets of the person in charge of the station.)

I don’t think that institutional financing is bad in itself, but if it ends up sterilising popular processes then it should be criticised. After all, the disappearance of a good part of the community media is unfortunately due to their no longer being able to capture income. We still have a lot to do!

There was a lot of money, and a great deal of equipment was distributed. There were also some important advances in developing legislation [for community media], and especially a lot of enthusiasm. But more was needed. It’s difficult to admit, but we have to face it.

After twelve years—and I’m going to be self-critical—Tatuy TV has its share of responsibility in the waning of the community television movement, and the movement of popular and alternative media in general. However, we shouldn’t forget the responsibility, too, of the many institutions, directing boards and coordinating bodies that Chavez created in the government, as well as that of the political parties, the [Great] Patriotic Pole, and the untold number of other mechanisms of integration, attention, and organisation of the revolution’s communicational project.

That a revolutionary process would [now] devote such a marginal, even minuscule role to popular media and such a trivial role to public media—while permitting private channels to be so aggressive—speaks for itself.

The Bolivarian revolution once had a sweeping grassroots communication movement, but today Tatuy TV is the only community television station that is still standing. Tatuy TV produces an impressive series of shorts called Chavez, the Radical, and it also works to give voice the struggles of the popular movement and people involved in the communes. Can you tell us about how Tatuy TV conceives of its role in communication?

I am not totally sure that we are the only television station standing or what it means to remain standing in the middle of this crisis. A case in point is that for more than four years we have been out of the radioelectric spectrum, off the air. It could be that other community TVs are still transmitting. What has disappeared, without a doubt, is the organisation around community media and their contribution to the battle of ideas.

The truth is that as far as Tatuy is concerned, we have tried to survive without losing sight of the

Jessica Pernia is a founding member of Tatuy TV, a community television station in the Venezuelan city of Merida. The Tatuy TV team, which is committed to defending Chavez’s communal project, produces a variety of audiovisual and written reports on the struggles of working-class Venezuelans. In this interview Pernia, also a journalism professor at the Bolivarian University, takes a critical look at the history of alternative communication in the Bolivarian Process and reflects on Tatuy’s efforts to address Venezuela’s current multi-crisis.
horizon. Since we can’t transmit on the radioelectric spectrum—because we don’t have the equipment—we migrated to the electronic format, to social networks. Since there is no funding available to support our initiatives, then we look for donations, we take on odd jobs, we organise ourselves so that there is no lack of food for all of us… and when there is no electricity, then we engage in conversation and debate, we sing, we play sports, we practice photography… and yes, people are leaving the country, that is true, but we are staying put here!

We have debated a great deal about what to do in the midst of the economic, social, and political crisis that we are facing, and we have reached the conclusion that our worst enemy is neither the crisis itself, nor the opposition, nor the government—even though they all have their share of responsibility. Our worst enemy is depoliticisation.

Dammit! When a revolutionary organisation perceives that there is no interest in education, debate, political organisation, that is really scary!

What comes after the loss of faith? Fascism! For that reason, we have to throw ourselves into the project of re-politicisation, and that means recovering the spaces of struggle and organisation that we abandoned. That’s what we’ve collectively decided! Let’s go back in time! What’s the problem? If it is necessary to make cinema forums, then we will do them. If it’s time to do poetry festivals, then it will be festivals. And yes, of course, we will organise workshops and more workshops.

However, the most important thing is to never abandon the people who are themselves struggling. That should never happen. It would be unforgivable. It is now the time to be there first, on the spot even before the protagonists arrive, so that we can turn on the videocamera (lights, camera, action!). Representing reality with a view to transforming it—that’s our mantra and our praxis.

For us, it’s important to be in the trenches as a people, to accompany the class’ struggles, to show the sacrifices that are being made, to raise morale during combat… and that must always be done by pointing to the strategic horizon: the project that Chavez developed.

For us, it’s vital to turn Tatuy into a communication tool in the service of socialism and the communal state. We put our all into accompanying campesino, working-class, communal, feminist, and student struggles, and to making their voices heard in the ideological battle that is being waged.

Chavez, the Radical is extremely important in this battle because it allows us to put emphasis on the strategic horizon while reflecting on tactics. It also helps us to point out deviations in the revolutionary process. Chavez, for his part, was radically clear.

In any revolutionary process, there is an internal class struggle. In the Bolivarian Revolution, this struggle was particularly intense in the early years, but in recent times it has erupted again. Today the main struggle is between a strong sector within the government that is pushing for a neoliberal capitalist restoration while the people are in constant resistance against imperialist aggressions and the liberalisation of the economy. How do you, as communicators, address these kinds of struggles?

Look, we know that Chavismo is not uniform. There are forces in conflict within it, and we understand that reformism has made headway and assumed leadership positions that are putting at risk not only the socialist project, but also the very existence of the people who are having to pay, as always, for the consequences of the crisis.

We are thus struggling on two fronts. First, there is a battle against reformism, which is pushing us into the neoliberal abyss, sacrificing the people while doing lip service to Chavista discourse. Then, and simultaneously, there is a battle against the bourgeoisie and imperialism, which have both screwed us up over the course of history.

A little while ago, together with Venezuelanalysis, we made an audiovisual investigation into the imperial aggressions we are suffering: more than 150 unilateral sanctions against our nation! This is no game, and we demand that they end, but one thing cannot serve as a ploy to [distract us from] the other, so we have to fight on both flanks.

Tatuy is not only a media project committed to popular power, but it is also a political organisation. Can you say something about how a communication project like Tatuy ends up becoming a unit of political organisation?

The channel was just an excuse for organisation and political work! In the beginning, when Tatuy was a traveling cinema club, our slogan was: agitate, inform, organise! We always considered Tatuy TV, the television station, as what it is: un medio [Spanish word meaning both communication medium and means]. We never considered it an end in itself. Maybe that was also what helped us to adapt quickly to the new circumstances.

The goal is socialism. Everything else—including the collective discovery of reality, the new forms of solidarity that are emerging, the grasping of new ideas and the multiplication of that knowledge, and the making of knowledge into a tool for social organisation—all that is the mission that, in terms of socialist communication, a collective like us must carry out. It’s the pedagogical project of revolutionaries. That’s all. (Cira Pascual Marquina is Political Science Professor at the Universidad de Bolivariana de Venezuela in Caracas and is staff writer for Venezuelanalysis.com.)
Recalling the Million+ Victims of America’s Endless ‘War on Terror’

Dave Lindorff

September 17, 2019: Now that the flags are back, waving from the tops of flagpoles across the country, and the maudlin paens to the close to 3,000 lives lost in the airplane attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, it’s time we gave a thought to the dead who were ignored.

According to very conservative estimates, as reported by the “Costs of War” project of Brown University’s Watson Institute on International and Public Affairs, nearly 250,000 civilians have been killed during the 18 years since September 2001 in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan in wars or attacks that were instigated by the United States.

Those are very conservative figures carefully compiled by organizations like Iraq Body Count and the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies. These numbers are of people known to have died in the violence of war, mostly as so-called “collateral damage,” but often deliberately, as when the US bombs a hospital, a wedding or a private housing compound in order to kill some targeted individual considered an “enemy combatant,” unconcerned about the others in the area, often women and children, who are almost certain to die or suffer serious injury as the result of the strike.

The numbers do not include the other deaths that also stem from America’s post 9-11 wars—from things like starvation, deaths from lack of medical care, and especially deaths from diseases like typhus or dysentery caused by lack of access to clean water or adequate sanitation facilities.

It is scandalous that the US government does not publish accurate information about the mayhem and slaughter that its wars have caused, especially because it is precisely because of the US extensive use of airpower, including remotely piloted drones as a means of keeping politically dangerous US military casualties in the so-called “War on Terror” at a minimum, that produce so many civilian casualties.

Reporters who want to learn about civilian casualties from these US wars must either take the dangerous step of going to the battle zones without US official backing (what is called embedding with American forces—a set-up that keeps the military in control of access and message), or rely on reports from NGOs that monitor such things.

According to some accounts, civilian deaths caused by America’s permanent war in the Middle East since 2001 could exceed one million. And remember, none of those deaths, occurring in places ruled by dictators, authoritarian governments or armed groups in the case of Pakistan’s border region with Afghanistan, had any involvement in attacks on the US. Their deaths, whether caused directly or indirectly by the US military, can in no way be construed as “retribution” for the attacks of 9-11.

Add to that the other uncomfortable reality that many of the combatant deaths caused by US forces in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, border areas of Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and Syria are of fighters who are not terrorists at all, but rather, like the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces as well as the Pathet Lao in Laos, who fought and ultimately defeated US forces in the decade-long Indochina War of the ‘60 and ‘70s, are actually “freedom fighters” who have been defending their countries from a US invasion and occupation.

Of course, if we were to acknowledge that the “War on Terror” launched by the Bush/Cheney administration against Afghanistan and later Iraq—two countries none of whose people had anything to do with the 9-11 attacks—had resulted in so many murdered civilians, it would not just tarnish the reputation of our country, but also those “heroes” in uniform who followed orders and did all the slaughtering.

Folks in Iraq Veterans Against the war and Veterans for Peace will readily explain that the high rates of traumatic stress suffered by returning US veterans of these undeclared and clearly illegal invasions and occupations by the US, like those among returning Vietnam War vets of a prior generation of US war, and the current high rate of suicide among veterans has much to do with the mission, which many troops admit has nothing to do with “defending America” or “defending freedom,” and everything to do with projecting power and with seeking US global dominance in a world where the US is increasingly being challenged as the “sole power” envisioned by George H.W. Bush’s “New World Order” in the wake of the 1991 US-launched Gulf War against Iraq.

It’s time we as a nation gave some thought to and did some penance for all those civilian deaths and combatant deaths as we remember 9-11.

We might also bow our heads in mourning for the freedoms that we have surrendered to the national security state since that terrible day.

(Dave Lindorff is an Investigative journalist and the founding editor of the news collective ThisCantBeHappening.net.)
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