

# ONWARD BARBARIANS

At the beginning of May 2020, hunger riots erupted in Santiago, Chile. Lockdowns had deprived men and women of their incomes to the point of near starvation. A large movement of self-organized community kitchens soon spread across the country. Later in the month, riots spread through Mexico in response to the police murder of Giovanni López — a construction worker who had been arrested for not wearing a mask — while thousands of despairing migrant workers broke the curfew in India. Some Amazon warehouse workers in the US and Germany had begun to strike in protest at poor COVID-19 safety protocols.<sup>1</sup> Yet these stirrings of workers' struggle in the world's largest retailer were quickly drowned out, at the end of May, by a mass movement of unprecedented size that swept across the US in revulsion at the live-streamed police murder of George Floyd. Largely initiated by black residents of Minneapolis, the uprising was quickly joined by Americans from every place, race and class. In the first riots and demos one could even spot a few supportive militiamen in a *Querfront* worthy of the age of QAnon.<sup>2</sup>

The arrival of COVID-19 had initially seemed to imply a break in the class struggle, or at least to provide the repressive apparatus with additional resources. Such, at least, was the prognosis of three ageing Italian dissidents who circulated scandalous texts in the first weeks of the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> And indeed it may be true that the lockdowns represent, as Julien Coupat has recently argued, “a new mode of governing, and producing, a

*certain type of man*".<sup>4</sup> The massive mobilizations that had shaken Chile since October 2019 were disbanded by the lockdown, together with a generalized fear of the new plague in a country where health is an expensive commodity. France's long general strike against pension reforms ended abruptly when the reforms were passed by the same set of decrees that announced the first emergency coronavirus measures, bypassing parliament. For a while, protesters in Baghdad, Beirut and Hong Kong were forced from the streets, and the Italian dissidents seemed to be proven right. Yet it didn't take long for masses all over the world to disobey the curfews and lockdowns that had put half of humanity in confinement and thrown the world economy into an enormous slump.

Around the same time as the mass demonstrations against Floyd's murder sprang forth in the US, thousands of people marched from Sao Paulo's favelas to the state governor's palace demanding economic support, while masses in Colombia and El Salvador took to the streets banging on pots to protest worsening living standards and demanding an end to the lockdowns. In July, hundreds stormed the Serbian parliament in response to the new government's reinstatement of curfews, while the killing of the popular singer Haacaaluu Hundeessaa in Ethiopia sparked violent demonstrations in which more than 150 were killed. The following month saw similar protests in neighboring Kenya, as the slums of Nairobi rose up against a police force that had killed more than 20 people in the process of enforcing the curfew, while Belarus trembled with demonstrations, riots, and strikes after the rigged elections which, as always, handed power to Alexander Lukashenko. In September, Colombia saw a wave of riots, following the murder by police of the lawyer Javier Ordóñez, and working-class neighbourhoods of Madrid and Naples rose up

against the police and the lockdowns. At the time of writing Nigeria just experienced a massive wave of protest against a murderous and corrupt police force, and India is currently in the midst of the largest general strike in its history.

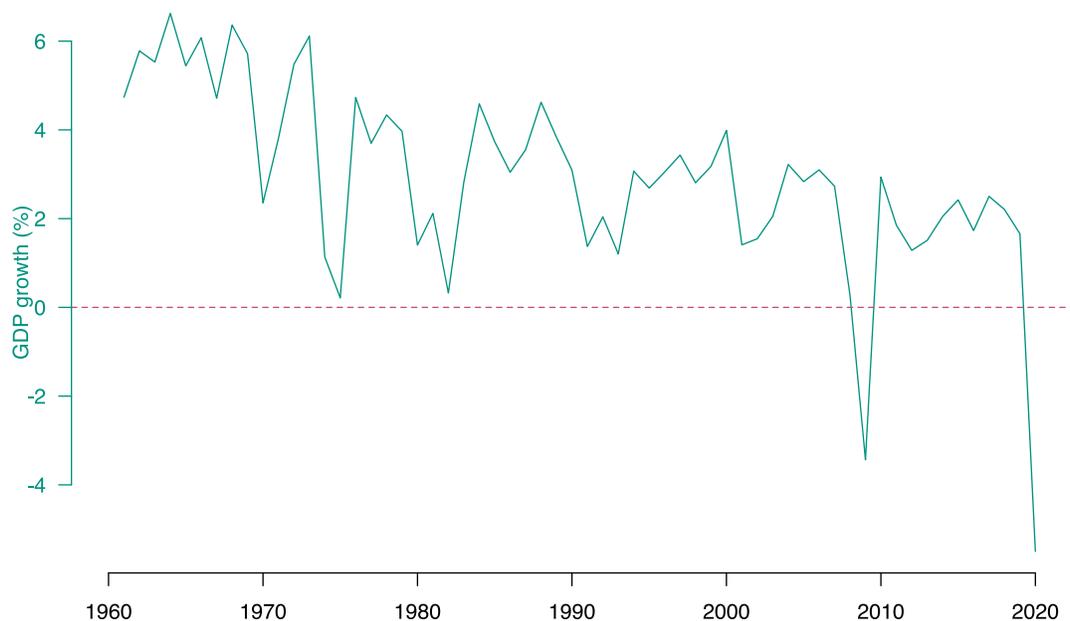


Figure 1: Economic growth rates, OECD countries, 1960-2020

Our present period may represent a kind of *metanoia* (a conversion or turn) of the populations against the whole array of apparatuses and mores that can no longer successfully mould our species into an animal with no other habitat than wage labour and capital. On the heels of decades of declining growth rates and increasingly jobless recoveries we are now in the midst of the worst global recession since the 1930s (see figure 1). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics has announced “the worst monthly unemployment figures in the 72 years for which the agency has data on record” while the Bank of England has warned that “the United Kingdom will face its steepest decline in output since 1706.”<sup>5</sup> Comrades in Faridabad, India have recently argued that “capital is in haphazard retreat. Capital is

extremely weak. It is tottering.”<sup>6</sup> This might seem over-optimistic, but it is now clear that the “type of man” that such an economy produces is not a socially distanced and self-policing isolate, but a disgruntled mass of men and women ready to revolt. They have descended to the streets at an unprecedented scale and a planetary scope, a *confusion* of disparate identities brought together by rage at deteriorating living conditions, alienation, and the police.

## **1. A GLOBAL ACCUMULATION OF NON-MOVEMENTS**

It is still too early to predict the consequences of the pandemic, but what is without doubt is that the era of protests that began with the economic crash in 2008 has not ended. Most of the uprisings that later gave life to that year’s dreams of hope and change, to use the words of Barack Obama, have either been crushed by state repression, turned to civil war, or fossilized into political parties seeking to administer the stagnating economies of our world. Yet, if the hope for change was naive, it was only because the true changes revealed themselves in more nightmarish colors with the rise of ISIS, the coup of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and the proliferation of a new populism that has catapulted to power figures like Donald Trump, Victor Orban and Jair Bolsonaro, but also Emmanuel Macron and Boris Johnson.

Some have tried to understand this development from Occupy to Trump through the classical dialectic of revolution and counter-revolution.<sup>7</sup> However, it is by no means clear that we are witnessing a “counter-revolution”, for the Trumps of this world can only escalate conflicts and deepen schisms, to the point that the party of order reveals itself to be the party of an-

archy.<sup>8</sup> These neo-populists cannot produce any real hegemony, but only split populations.<sup>9</sup> Joe Biden's victory shows that the fear of fascism was overwrought. But the Bidens of the planet can only further the schisms that delegitimize the democratic process. If there is an illiberal development it is rather bound to the state's increasing draconic measures against the protests movements that we are seeing all over the world, who demand sovereignty over their lives and a peace, order, and security that no Trumps, Bidens or even Sanders can give them.<sup>10</sup> The right axis of Figure 2 (in green) shows that between 2008 and 2019, there was an increase of anti-government struggles across the world of around 11 percent per year. The left axis (in red) displays the steady decline in political legitimacy from 2008, as measured by the share of people expressing satisfaction with democracy.<sup>11</sup> Further figures scattered throughout this article display the same statistics broken down by region. Clearly visible in this figure, the new surge of uprisings that have emerged since May 2020 indicate that we are heading towards an even more disruptive decade. The insurrection is not coming, it has already arrived, unfolding on a planetary level with greater and greater intensity every year.<sup>12</sup>

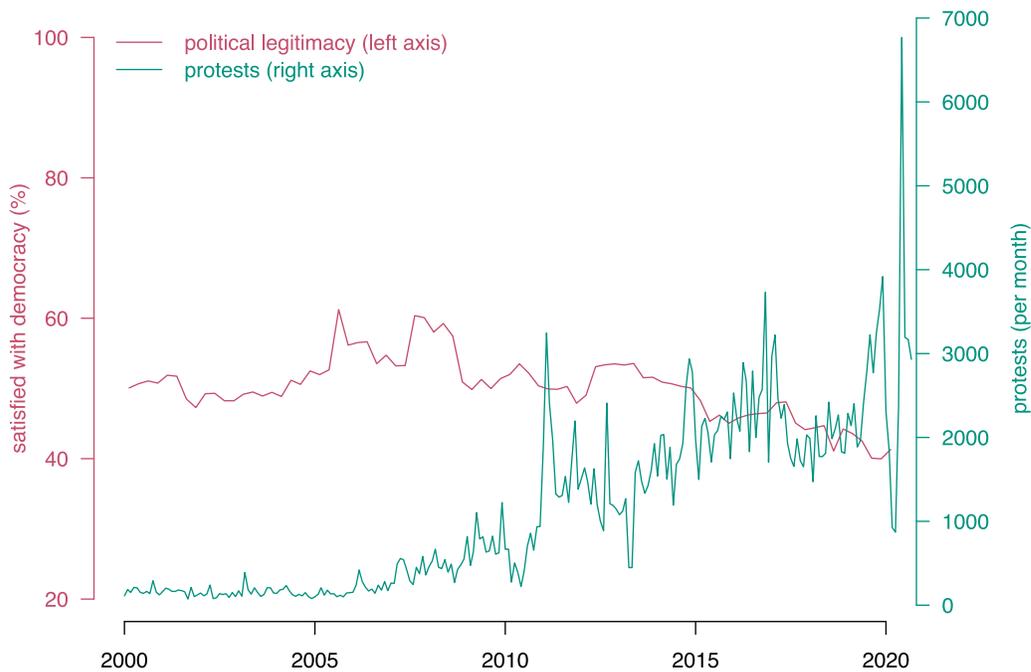


Figure 2: Protests and political legitimacy, all countries 2000-2020

This does not imply that we are steadily moving towards an omega point where revolution becomes inevitable. These movements may simply indicate our entrance into an ungovernable world. But we can today repeat the words of Jacques Camatte from 1972 and insist that “[s]ince May, there has been the movement of the production of revolutionaries”.<sup>13</sup> All over the world men and women are, if not abandoning the world of capital, at least expressing real dissent with the status quo. Implied in the accumulation of protests since 2008 is a growth in the number of people with experiences of mass mobilization and practical dissent who can potentially begin “to understand the existing needs for revolution”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, even if our period is not revolutionary in the short term, it is fundamentally disruptive and produces the potential for a break with the capitalist mode of production. The accumulation of struggles, and thus of men and women who have experienced for themselves the need for revolt and perhaps revolution, is a prerequisite for any

serious discussion of overcoming capitalism.

It is true that revolution is not a school, and we cannot trust collective memory any more than our individual (mis-)rememberings. But the accumulation of social dissent over the past decade seems likely to continue and, increasingly, to shape the terrain over which the struggles are fought. This is not merely because anti-governmental struggles have already restructured the political landscape, as in the cases of parties such as the Five Star Movement in Italy or Emmanuel Macron's *En Marche*, which organized assemblies and copied the 2011-rhetoric of being neither left nor right. Nor is it simply because square movements, youth riots, and similar struggles laid the basis for Syriza and Podemos and inflated the dreams of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders (paralleled by the growth of the nationalist right that seems to be the truth of the populist turn). No, we insist that the accumulation of social dissent since 2008 signals a continued intensification of class conflicts simply because the often brutal failures, or for that matter feeble victories, of the movements since 2011 have not exorcized the spectre of change.<sup>15</sup>

On the contrary, the anarchy of our period implies that enormous demonstrations, massive riots, and (we need to emphasise) waves of strikes,<sup>16</sup> have become the new normal. In Chile one can, for instance, identify a red thread going from *la revolución pingüina* in 2006, when hundreds of thousands of high school kids brought the school system to a halt, demanding free travel passes and education reform, to the more violent and general uprisings around 2011. And then again, with even more intensity, we saw a new leap in 2019 when masses poured into the streets, outraged by president Sebastián Piñera's declaration of war on the population, which led to

overhaul of the constitution.<sup>17</sup> Similar trajectories can be identified in many countries, such as in the United States, where Occupy Wall Street was followed by Black Lives Matter, which in turn paved the way, this year, for the largest social movement in that country's history.<sup>18</sup> Enormous uprisings and intense social conflicts are becoming such a normal facet of our period that even the radical left dismisses them as failing to meet their high standards: they are too liberal, too violent, too passive, too informal, too nationalist, too much part of the status quo, or too invested in identity politics.

In this article we argue that what we have in fact witnessed since 2008 is a continuous increase of what the Iranian-American sociologist Asef Bayat has described as “non-movements”, namely, “the collective action of dispersed and unorganized actors”.<sup>19</sup> These non-movements are not in any sense revolutionary in themselves. They are closer to what Camatte has recently called “passive revolts”: subjective expressions of the objective disorder of our times.<sup>20</sup> They reflect above all the growing delegitimization of politics in a context of ongoing stagnation and austerity. It is the combination of steadily rising non-movements involving unprecedented numbers of people, with a decline in democratic legitimacy, that allows us to describe the trend of our era as the production of revolutionaries without a revolution.

As examples of “non-movements” Bayat points to the struggles of the unorganised poor in Egypt; the fight of youth in Turkey to reclaim and realize their desired lifestyles; as well as womens' struggle for gender equality both in the domestic and public spheres in Chile, India and the United States. In these struggles “claim-making practices” make themselves felt “through direct actions, rather than through exerting pressure on author-

ities to concede — something that the conventionally-organized social movements (like labour or environment movements) usually do.”<sup>21</sup>

Such practices often dress themselves in the garments of identity. Just as the workers movements belonged to an emergent capitalist world order organized by a polarization of the political field along class lines, so today class fragmentation has shaped the horizon of the non-movements. In an age of debt, where large parts of the population have no or even negative reserves, the decomposition of class undoes the basis not only for a workers’ movement, but for democratic representation itself. Thus today it is rational for proletarians, and increasingly also for members of the middle classes, to turn to other categories in order to define one’s place in a tottering world order. Class remains the primary source of our separations — old fashioned Marxist sociology is still in many ways valid — but class belonging is today calibrated by a multitude of variables such as age, gender, geography, race, or religion that act as channels, as well as real limits, for social struggles, and make identity politics a real expression of class struggle.<sup>22</sup>

As we make clear below, we do not wish to dismiss, denounce or, for that matter, exalt identity politics, nor to conflate it with liberalism or reformism.<sup>23</sup> However, it must be recognized that there is something quite liberal about the non-movements, in that they are compelled to confront the illiberal tendencies of our era. For example, French protesters are currently fighting against new draconian controls on free speech and the freedom of the press, including a law that bans photographing police.<sup>24</sup> One could say that the non-movements have their basis in “the tribe of moles” that Sergio Bologna depicted in his analysis of the *autonomia* of Italy’s 70’s, but their form can also

suggest the subculturalisation and infantilization of society that critics such as Christopher Lasch and Jean Baudrillard once bemoaned.<sup>25</sup> At the same time the confusion of identities weaken theories governed by, for instance, “intersectional” perspectives that view class as one identity among others, for it is the ramifying class structure itself that has made identity into the central political category of a stagnating capitalism.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, external criticism of identity politics is beside the point, for the non-movements themselves present an immanent critique of its limits in their daily practice. They reveal how men and women are starting to conceive reality in categories beyond the imperatives of the economy, at the same time as they are clashing against the consequences of what often is called neoliberalism. Identity politics is, for us, the necessary mode of politicization of a neoliberal subject for whom the predicates of identity seem to be simultaneously essential and inessential, empowering and enfeebling. Such politics cannot be easily mapped onto a strategic division between “real” and “social”, “working class” and “middle class”, “revolutionary” and “reformist”, because their operationalization in struggle leads to a *confusion* of identities, including the ones thrown up by the struggle itself.

The uprisings after the murder of George Floyd, and the shift in racial attitudes in the United States that has been aptly called the “great awakening” is an expression of this pattern, and reveals the *anthropological* nature of the non-movements.<sup>27</sup> What we are witnessing is, to a large extent, a questioning of mores, representations and modes of reproduction that no longer fit a deindustrialized proletariat. Yet even those who have grasped the distinctiveness of the non-movements have generally failed to recognize this shift. For Bayat, the non-

movements imply “a revolution without revolutionaries”, in so far as they give rise to explosive uprisings that are not “anchored on strategic visions or concrete programs”.<sup>28</sup> For critics of identity politics, such as Michael Lind, the non-movements express a deepening of capitalism rather than its domestication or overcoming.<sup>29</sup> Yet both misunderstand the inner dynamic of the non-movements. On the one hand we have argued, against Bayat, that we are witnessing the production of *revolutionaries without revolution*, as millions descend onto the streets and are transformed by their collective outpouring of rage and disgust, but without (yet) any coherent notion of transcending capitalism. On the other hand, against Lind, we insist that the non-movements point to the disruptive kernel of our era, the fact that capitalist stagnation implies a crisis for political representation as such, and thus the end of political movements in the classical sense.

The classical social movement, as defined by Carl Schmitt, is the mediation between the unorganised people and the state.<sup>30</sup> Such a movement seeks to organize or mobilize “the people” as an administrative and political category, one that must overcome the identities that differentiate a given nation, often by violently repressing the interests or even existence of specific groups. In contrast, the non-movements express the antagonistic dimension of identity politics in the sense that they cannot constitute a people, and seldom even articulate clear political or positive demands. Or else they produce an endless stream of partial and sometimes contradictory demands — thereby resembling a hydra whose many calls are almost impossible to fulfill, yet whose lifespan can be short and violent.

Of course within the many non-movements that we are seeing

all over the world, which incorporate large swaths of the by proletariat as well as downwardly mobile elements of the middle class, many do hope to constitute themselves as a new subject. Sometimes they link up with parties, unions and other organisations that once belonged to the world of movements and ideologies but that nowadays mostly act as a strange set of subcultures. Nationalism and populism are certainly back. But, as Gilles Dauvé has noted, apropos of the Gilets Jaunes, the non-movements tend to only be able to mobilize as a *rabble*, disrupting the status quo.<sup>31</sup> They overhaul constitutions, topple governments, and force presidents and prime ministers to resign (as we recently saw in Chile, Peru and Guatemala). Yet because they represent the crisis of a stagnating capitalism, and make that stagnation ungovernable, the non-movements point to the need for a universalism that goes beyond the ruins of the workers' movements.<sup>32</sup>

In a world where identity mediates class, proletarian rage takes the color of yellow (as with the Gilets Jaunes) or black (as with the George Floyd uprising) rather than red. The trajectory from a world of workers to a globe of proletarians — which Gáspár Miklós Tamás has described<sup>33</sup> — has moved class struggle beyond the traditional forms and rhetoric of politics. But our point is not only to insist again that the workers' movement has been weakened globally since the 1970's, that class composition itself primarily reveals itself negatively, as decomposition, and that new ideological symbols are therefore shaping protests and reconfiguring social movements. What we want to emphasise is that the logic of the non-movement expresses the antagonistic dimension and social basis of "identity politics" as such, whether it comes from the right or the left. Rather than call out the litany of identitarian cul de sacs, the point is to show how an increasingly disruptive status quo is necessarily

shot through with problems of identity, and that any discussion of emancipation has to begin here, namely, in the inability of a movement to mobilize a people.

What we are witnessing today is a generalized identitarian confusion. We can see this not only in the United States, where college-educated liberals are tearing down statues and have joined black proletarians and a handful of white militiamen in a popular front against the police, but also in France, where workers in the streets once chanted the *internationale* but now make their war cry “Aou! Aou! Aou!” (from Zack Snyder’s film *300*) and wave French flags while desecrating France’s most patriotic monument — l’Arc de Triomphe. In Chile, the slogan “*evade*”, raised initially by secondary-school students — the real vanguard of the uprisings — against the hikes of transport fares in October 2019, soon generalized into a uprising against austerity and police repression that took for its symbol the indigenous Mapuche flag, rather than the red or black flags of the left.<sup>34</sup> With these confusing chants and symbols the non-movements declare themselves to be on the side of the “barbarians” against the state (or empire) and start to question a mode of production that can no longer produce welfare or prosperity.<sup>35</sup> They express a need for a new reproduction of quotidian existence, a need that pushes men and women to revolt all over the world in an unprecedented manner.

It is true that this need is often only expressed as lack, hunger, or even literal starvation. But there is, as we have seen since the return of food riots since 2011, nothing more ungovernable than starving men and women. And the nine years from 2011 to 2020 have been years of increasing desperation and immiseration. The struggles of Puerta del Sol, Tahrir, and Syntagma in 2011 were soon eclipsed. However, the drive behind the strug-

gle did not disappear, it was simply exchanged for the even greater fury and desperation of the Gilets Jaunes or the uprisings in Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and now Peru and Guatemala. If capitalism is unable to reform its social reproduction, it will be impotent when called upon to satisfy the growing and increasingly explosive needs of the non-movements.

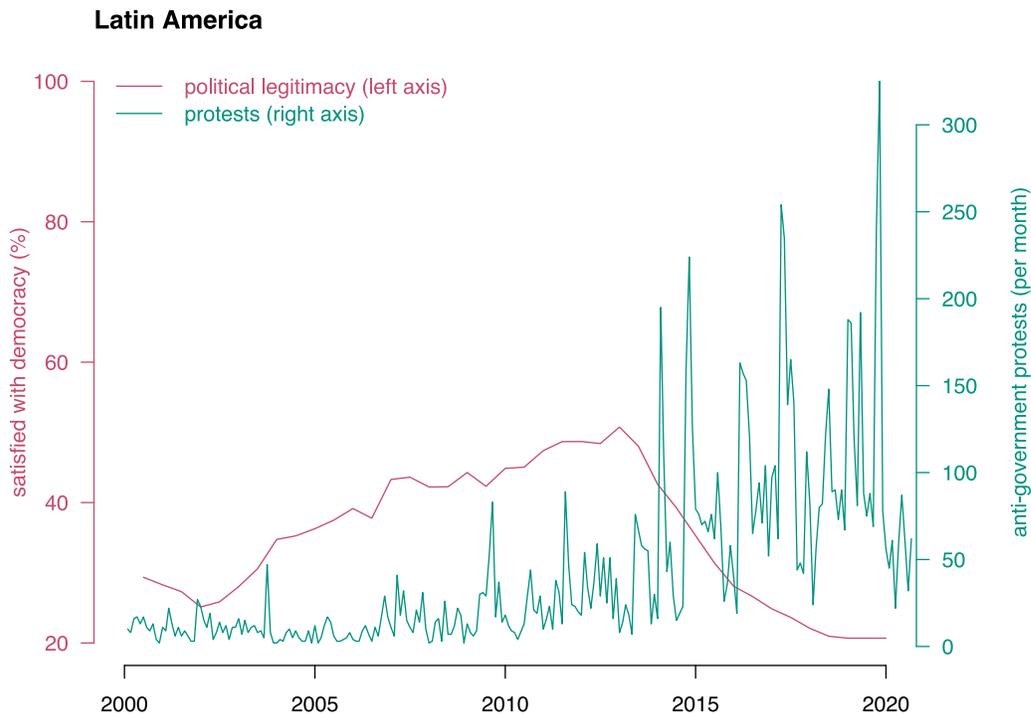


Figure 3: Protests and political legitimacy, Latin America 2000-2020

## 2. CONFUSION AND UNGOVERNABILITY

A unifying feature of the non-movements is that they struggle on the ground of a stagnating capitalism (see figure 1 above). Just as the stagnation of its own brand of capitalism and industrialization led to the fall of the Soviet Union, so the current era of stagnation and deindustrialization has led to the weakening of European social democracy, first via a turn to the right, and then through its *pasokification*. This process has run parallel to the rise of illiberal parties and, since 2008, harsh

austerity measures. In reaction we have seen in the non-movements the disruptive aspect of both liberal values and the defense of basic needs for an immiserated proletariat increasingly differentiated into sharply distinct fragments. But this fragmentation does not necessarily entail division. On the contrary, it often forces people together into real but feeble alliances, such as that of the “the 99 percent”, or the mosaic of groups that came together in Chile’s *estadillo social* [social uprising]. There the movements have turned to Victor Jara’s song *El derecho de vivir en paz* — “the right to live in peace” — not because they identify with the song’s hero (Ho Chi-Minh) but because peace and even order have become a radical demand in an increasingly catastrophic world.

The non-movement doesn’t just designate the explosions of riots and square occupations where disenfranchised middle class and lumpenproletariat, people from the *banlieues* and hinterlands; islamists and feminists; militia men and poor blacks, can at least potentially link arms against a common enemy and thereby begin to undo their separations. It also points to a repertoire of habits and experiences, a daily politics that make such spectacular ruptures and violent outbreaks possible. The fact that a majority of the people involved in the George Floyd uprising were white, and that Floyd’s death could become a catalyst for a broad-based uprising against Trump, reveals sociological and demographic changes that make the confusion of the non-movements possible and that go beyond the uprising themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Even the formal organizations that, at least for a period of time, succeed in representing a particular social reality, must adapt to the logic of the non-movements. We can see this in the French Unions, initially hostile to the Gilets Jaunes, who were

able to tap into that non-movement in September 2019 in launching their strike against Macron's pension reforms.<sup>37</sup> In this sense the non-movement has become the hegemonic form of struggle, but only insofar as they reflect a broader crisis of representation. In this sense the non-movements can be described as destituent rather than constituent processes.<sup>38</sup> But against those who fetishize destitution as a positive or revolutionary way forward, we would emphasize that today every power is becoming destituent, in the sense that not only the flows of capital, but also the drives and needs of the populations, make the political order increasingly hard to govern.

This ungovernability can also be seen in the formation of the non-movements as responses to draconic or increasingly irrational governance, especially as a response to police violence. One of the few things that most workers, students, the unemployed, and so on, in any given country have had in common in recent decades is that they have been victims of venal policies that allocate dwindling state resources to elite insiders. While such corruption can be a source of popular anger at any point, that anger is exacerbated now that state politics has been reduced to fighting over the distribution of a fixed or shrinking pie, and when commonly heard calls for belt-tightening make any unfairness in that distribution all the more intolerable. As we argued in "The Holding Pattern", a diffuse rage against the blatant injustice of a crisis regime administered by a corrupt and incompetent political class has largely defined a rising tide of class struggle and popular mobilization around the world since 2008. This, we argue below, is also why today's non-movements have so often focused on police, as the brutal face of corruption and injustice, and it is part of the reason that anti-racism has been such a central mobilizing force in the US.<sup>39</sup>

However, what every wave of mass mobilization comes up against is the limited ability to move beyond a negative unity (a unity against racism/police/elites) to establish a positive and creative social or political force. The perpetual problems of identity politics are symptomatic of this limit: the inability of a wave of struggle to embody and sustain itself given the atomization and fragmentation of its constituents. At some point each wave crashes and shatters on those fragments. The non-movements tend to both attack and withdraw from a state they perceive as withdrawing from them. In this sense the American demand to “defund the police” reflects a broader tendency (in many ways an advance) to no longer struggle to take over the state but simply clash against the state apparatus: austerity against austerity.

While traditional movements formed around relatively stable ideological structures and real communities, such as the union, the mass party, or the state socialist countries, those that have spread across the globe since 2008 express the collectivized desires of increasingly atomized populations. But while the end of the age of movements is in a sense the end of ideology, it is, as we have seen, not the end of identity. On the contrary, identities proliferate in an increasingly racketized and subculturalized economy where, as Tyler Cowen has argued, the average is over.<sup>40</sup> There is no longer any stable centre, but rather a highly segmented class structure that reconfigures the ground of classical movements such as fascism and social democracy. If the centrist politics of Clinton and Blair during the 1990s, and the rise of identity politics since the 1970s, already signalled this change, the period since 2008 reveals instead an increasing *confusion* of identities.

The non-movements are, as we have been insisting, the sub-

jective expression of a more general disorder that has its roots in capitalist stagnation. It is the sheer quantity of protests and riots — their increasing *normality* — that distinguishes our era from, for instance, the anti-globalization years. This is why we say that our era is marked by the production of revolutionaries on a global scale. Men and women from across the spectrum of political ideology and identitarian stratification are confronting the reigning order with their disgust, fear, and anger, and increasingly defend their right to “evade” the unbearable costs of capitalist life. They are revolutionaries without a revolution, but in their confrontation with capitalist reproduction, as well as in their hunger for community, the non-movements express a potential conflict with the logic of capital as such.

In such a context, politics — in the classical form of enmity and schism — comes back with a vengeance. Identity politics today announce a return of the political rather than the birth of a post-political era (as many left-wing critics of identity politics have argued). But politics can no longer produce any meaningful stability. It splits the population against itself and moves nations to, if not civil war, at least heightened conflicts and deeper schisms. Yet while the aporia of identity represents a loss of what we might call community, we see little by way of longing to return to the horrible worlds of social democracy and fascism. On the contrary, we tend to see a hunger for communal existence based on the liberal demands expressed in the non-movements. Liberalism and wokeness have, strange as it may seem, become disruptive forces at a time when broad sections of the left are becoming increasingly conservative, embracing the nationalist populism that fuels the right.

For this reason, we would reassure the worried reader who now asks: how can one be sure that the disorder of our times won't

simply push us even deeper into an authoritarian order that can only widen the chasm between liberalism and democracy that we are witnessing today? Did not the Arab spring lead to dictatorship and war? Did not Occupy presage Trump? Did not the Brazilian struggles against transport fare hikes set the stage for the anti-corruption protests that gave Bolsonaro power? Does not the identitarian logic that is forming struggles all over the globe push us deep into a fascist world? Illiberal and fascist forces are gaining strength, but it would be irrational to attribute their rise to the non-movements, since they themselves are expressions of the disorder of our era that both left- and right-wing populists seek to exploit. What is more, the cultural backlash which fuels right-wing populism has been going on for decades, long before the crash of 2008 — the prime mover of the non-movements.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, border closures and the turn to nationalism and harsh refugee policies in countries ruled by left-wing governments, such as Sweden and Denmark, and the victory of the populist right in nations such as Poland and Hungary, reveal distinctly illiberal developments in places that have not been torn apart by non-movements. Left to itself, in this world of stagnating productivity and deindustrialization, the contemporary capitalist state will all too readily ground citizenship in language, culture, and work. This is why larger and larger masses of men and women all over the world are mobilized by liberal and democratic values, and increasingly brought to hate a police that has been assigned the dirty chores of an ungovernable order.<sup>42</sup>

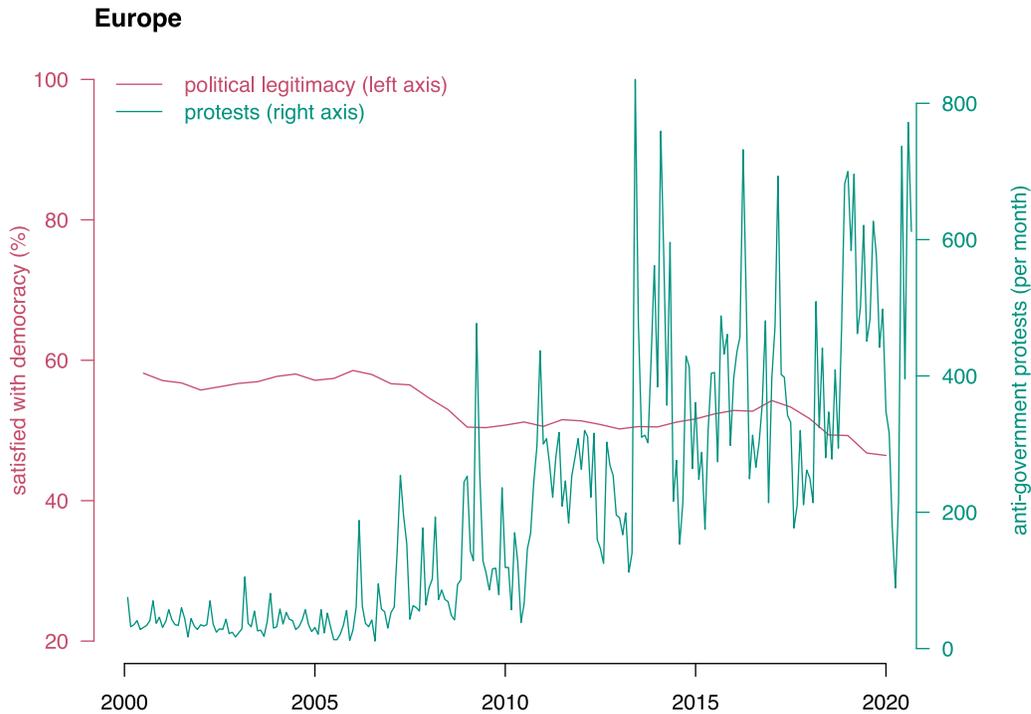


Figure 4: Protests and political legitimacy, Europe 2000-2020

### 3. A NEW WORLD DISORDER

Bayat compares the emergence of the non-movements with what Timothy Garton Ash has called, in reference to Eastern European movements in the 80s and 90s, “refolutions” — violent uprisings for liberal reform.<sup>43</sup> These were indeed important precursors, but for reasons that neither Ash nor Bayat recognize. What Ash failed to see was that these movements were responding to a collapse of the Soviet empire that foreshadowed a crisis for the modern industrial world.<sup>44</sup> The West has since been catching up with the former communist countries in terms of its own stagnation and deindustrialization (see figure 1). The proliferating uprisings of our age, which often disappear as fast as they appear, express the disruptive state of a global economic order in secular stagnation and the crumbling geopolitics of the post 1945 period.

One year after the end of the Second World War, the Italian

Marxist and stubborn sect leader Amadeo Bordiga wrote “Tracciato d'impostazione” an essay so full of rhetorical overstatements and rambling jargon that, when they appear, his real insights glow like gems in mud.<sup>45</sup> Bordiga sought to clarify the definition of a revolutionary movement at a moment when “demo-capitalism” reigned supreme, and communist theory itself had lost its original meaning as a radical, experimental science that predicted social change. For this revolutionary sectarian, the trinity of anti-fascism, democracy, and ultimately Marxism had become the main obstacle for any communist perspective worth the name. Now “exquisitely conservative movements of bourgeois institutions dare to call themselves parties of the proletariat”, he bemoaned.<sup>46</sup> The victory of the Allies in 1945 not only dimmed the prospects of revolutionary war in Europe, it reshaped the original communist imaginary into a democratic one that, ultimately, would alienate proletarians from the worker’s movement. Thus, long before Thomas Piketty warned of the consequences of “the Brahmin left”,<sup>47</sup> Bordiga declared that Marxism was turning into an ideology for middle class managers, or worse, a simple defense of liberalism and democracy.<sup>48</sup>

Bordiga would perhaps have agreed with Mario Tronti, who has insisted that “the worker’s movement was not defeated by capitalism, [it] was defeated by democracy”.<sup>49</sup> Bordiga, however, argued that the communist movement had itself laid the ground for this democratic defeat. His famous criticism of anti-fascism, and his counterfactual musings on why an Axis victory might have spurred civil war and therefore revolution, may seem bizarre to us today.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Bordiga’s diagnosis of the post-World War II era can help us to understand the growth of non-movements, often fighting for seemingly liberal values and putting pressure on the state from below, at the

same time as we see a rise of the populist right that reflects a crisis of the managerial classes. Our time is traversed by disorder from above as well as below, and this crisis appears to be undoing the basis of the long peace (the *Pax Americana*) that interrupted the revolutionary unfolding of an earlier epoch.

The rise of Trump, Bolsonaro, Duterte, Modi, Orban, Putin, and even Macron reveals that the status quo is one of disruption, what David Ranney has called “A New World Disorder”.<sup>51</sup> As we saw recently in Poland and the United States, elections are increasingly fought and won on narrow margins between “liberals” and “conservatives”, with age and education typically more decisive than class in shaping party loyalty.<sup>52</sup> The Trumps of the world divide populations, and even the ruling classes, against themselves and reveal that the fight for liberal democracy can easily be radicalized, just as revolutionaries can easily be co-opted as black shirts ready to struggle with their stones, shields and umbrellas for the democratic status quo. The George Floyd uprising, briefly became, for instance, a channel for the resistance to the autocracy of the new populist leaders across the world. But underneath the “liberal” and “conservative” opposition we can identify what Bordiga might call “anti-formistic” tendencies, escalating conflicts and reshaping the social form of our present order.

In analyzing social conflict and social institutions, Bordiga repudiated value-laden expressions like “conservative”, “progressive”, or even “revolutionary.”<sup>53</sup> The task of Marxism, which Bordiga dubs a “science of the species”, is to understand each social movement or institution in their “conformist”, “reformist”, or “anti-formist” dimensions.<sup>54</sup> A conformist movement is a force that seeks to keep “the existing forms and institutions intact, prohibiting any transformation, and referring

to immutable principles”.<sup>55</sup> Reformist movements are “those which, while not seeking to abruptly and violently upset the existing institutions, signify that the productive forces are pressing too strongly, and advocate gradual and partial changes of the current order.”<sup>56</sup> Anti-formist movements, by contrast, involve an “assault on the old forms, and even before knowing how to theorize the characteristics of the new order, they tend to break the old, causing the irresistible birth of new forms”.<sup>57</sup>

If we adopt Bordiga’s typology, we would argue that it is the latter that we see increasing on an annual basis as more and more people express their frustration with the status quo. The proliferation of non-movements reflect the instability of a post-industrial world and thus can be described as “anti-formist”. Yet these explosions can easily turn into reformist or even conformist movements if they, paradoxically, remain unable to avoid the tendencies towards civil war and nihilist violence implied by such instability. Bordiga’s dream of a revolutionary war has become (or perhaps always was) a naive fantasy that is incapable of producing the basis for a classless society. The civil wars in Libya and Syria reveal how easily war turns revolutionary mass organizations into military rackets in need of money, weapons and recruits.<sup>58</sup>

Even if Bordiga’s affirmation of war was naive, his criticism of democracy still merits serious consideration. The development from 2008 to 2020 shows that the non-movements find their limit in the Janus-Face of repression and representation (or, in their fullest form, war and democracy). The two may be combined to weaken the non-movements, for instance by tying them to the state or turning them into formal parties or unions. Such defeats are born from the needs of the non-movements themselves, from their inability to surpass their immanent lim-

its. But if the accumulation of anti-governmental struggles continues to increase, as it has done annually from 2008, then it will be necessary for the non-movements to develop their instinctive criticism of repression and representation into a ruthless critique of war and democracy.

A strategy seeking to unleash the anti-formist logic of the non-movements would have to entail a discussion of the problems of political mediation, and therefore a defense of what is often called anti-politics.<sup>59</sup> If the uprisings are to avoid the two pitfalls of war and democracy, a strategic perspective is required which challenges the ideological and identitarian divisions inside the proletariat, including those between workers and middle class strata. One can wager that the economic consequences of the lockdowns that already are beginning to force people together into fronts against a stagnating and deteriorating economy will contribute even more to the confusion of identities prevalent and visible in many places around the world. Just as the *Gilets Jaunes* fused men and women from the hinterlands, certainly often conservative or right-wing, with leftist students, dissatisfied members of the middle-class, and proletarians from the *Banlieues*, the slowdown and more recent shutdown of the economy will lay the basis for more *confusion*.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes the uncertainty generated by this admixture can appear frightening, which is perhaps why Napoli youth protesting the consequences of the lockdowns felt the need to declare “We are workers, not fascists”. As Perry Anderson warned in 2017, one of the reasons the system is winning may be that fear, rather than anger, mobilizes the left-wing.<sup>61</sup> But non-movements have courageously challenged police repression, lockdowns and fear of the coronavirus by simply gathering people together in their thousands on the streets. This questioning of a capitalist normality, marked by hysteresis

and its accompanying catastrophism, will be even more important as the economy continues to stagnate and non-movements are pushed in a more revolutionary direction.<sup>62</sup>

A strategic reflection would thus also need to envisage means by which the non-movements might eventually seize control of capitalist stagnation/deindustrialization and unleash the basis for a new world that it contains. This is something that they are neither interested in doing, nor, since it threatens their spontaneity and, in a sense, constitutive passivity, yet able to do. But in order to survive, the non-movements must inspire the creation of life-forms capable of living for something more than money and wage labor. This would imply a new use of the means of production as tools against capital — tools which not only liberate us from work, but also allow us to share the labour needed to ensure that life can become something more than sheer survival.<sup>63</sup> As the “Angry Workers of the World” recently outlined, the immediate goal should be for everyone to “work less at full pay, according to the level that social productivity has reached.”<sup>64</sup>

However, populations willing to live such a communal existence, where the economy is governed by a deindustrialization both made possible and prohibited by capitalism, may only be produced through the form of (let us provocatively call it), inter-classist intermingling so characteristic of our period. Proletarians, students and middle class strata are forced together on the streets. Workers with key strategic power, technicians with the know-how to reshape the industrialized face of the world, such groups will be crucial to the transcendence of capitalism; but the assertion of their power will be a recipe for further class fragmentation unless they can move beyond their sectional interests and converge with segments of the precarious

or unemployed masses of the world. Thus, while it is necessary to be “rooted” in proletarian life, thereby creating international links between struggling workers, it is equally essential to link workplaces to the non-movements whose growth overflows most sectional and even class boundaries.<sup>65</sup> Failure in this respect entails reproducing the divisions that stratify the classes into different segments with distinct and not seldom antagonistic interests. Surely it is something of this oscillation — which both forces people together in feeble alliances, yet creates significant divisions inside the global proletariat — that characterizes our period of decrepit Behemoths and failed Leviathans.

Today a virus has brought the civilizational machine almost to a halt. It has revealed the inability of the capitalist state to shelter life without shutting down an economy that has become almost inseparable from human existence as such. Given that we neither seek nor are we able to recreate the growth machine that was the basis of social democracy the only path forward is, as the Bordigists insisted in 1953, to fight for a radical “de-investment of capital”. For Bordiga this implied that the “means of production are assigned a smaller proportion in relation to consumer goods” and that we prepare an “under-production plan, which is to say the concentration of production on what is necessary”.<sup>66</sup> Such a combination of de-investment and under-production has certainly shown itself to be possible through the lockdowns (as well as the secular stagnation of the economy). But to assert control over capitalist decline would require addressing the social questions that produce the strange convergences between different social strata within the non-movements.

The protests of high-school kids in Chile over a transport hike of 30 pesos became a mass movement against the 30 years of

the neoliberal constitution that was overhauled in October 2020: “No son 30 pesos son 30 años”. A protest against a fuel price hike in France soon became a broad-based mobilization against growing inequality and austerity measures rammed through by an autocratic government. When the struggles are intensified and many initial demands are met — not seldom through the simple fact that repression forces more and more people onto the streets out of disgust for police violence — the non-movements reveal a point of unity in the fact that they all are produced, or at least conditioned, by economic stagnation. In this context, the identitarian *confusion* of the non-movements can help them to become conscious of what they are: subjective expressions of economic decline. We have argued that class consciousness, in the present period can only be the consciousness of capital.<sup>67</sup> Today this, in turn, implies nothing more than the growing revelation that capitalism is without a future. And when the Gilets Jaunes say “end of the world, end of the month”, they are not only expressing what they see as the apocalyptic dimension of our era, but affirming the end of this world and this life as the necessary prerequisite to the creation of a new world and a new life.

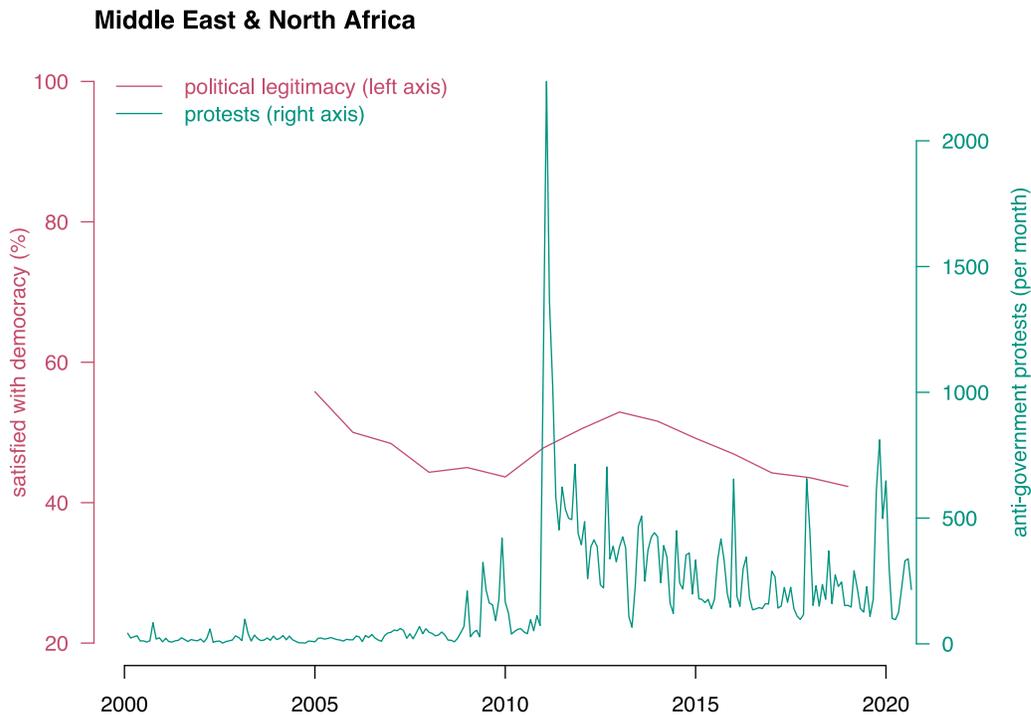


Figure 5: Protests and political legitimacy, Middle East and North Africa 2000-2020

#### 4. WE ARE ALL BASTARDS NOW

We have seen that the flag-waving and national anthem-singing rabble trying to destroy the Arc de Triomphe, as well as the sometimes indiscriminate toppling of monuments in the United States, are all indicative of a wider pattern of what can only be called anti-politics.<sup>68</sup> But, as with many contemporary non-movements, from the Arab Spring to the Gilet Jaunes and Black Lives Matter, rage against the police often comes to stand in for a broader hatred of politics. This is not simply because the police are the immediate manifestation of state repression, a tactical adversary in the streets. If statues are the dead symbols of the state, police are its living ones, and this is especially true in an era of austerity and a deadly pandemic. Since the state has proven itself incapable of protecting the population from a many-headed crisis, it becomes clear that its primary role will be to contain the fallout of these crises by dis-

ciplining the population. That is, the state is being reduced to its policing function.

As such the popular French slogan *tout le monde déteste la police* — “everyone hates the police” — may point to a broader delegitimization of the modern state, whose ancient forerunner, the *polis*, leant both name and form to the “police”. Police violence, the quarantines, social distancing, and lockdown measures (or for that matter the willingness of politicians to reopen the economies) have become triggers for a new wave of social dissent that reflects an acute crisis of political representation. Of course, not everyone literally hates the police. Western Europe surveys often show a remarkable degree of trust in the police (although this varies by class, age, nation and race).<sup>69</sup> While police are widely despised in autocracies, recent austerity programs have given them a particularly degenerate and violent form in some neoliberal democracies, where they have become the state’s primary representative in many poor and working class communities.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly most recent surveys show that trust in the police has fallen, and we can see signs that the police have increasingly become a focus of hate not only from proletarians and racial minorities, but also among segments of the petty bourgeois, and even the wealthy.

Certainly, one reason for this may be a rise in both instances and awareness of police brutality. Police are universally brutal, for the job both selects for and encourages an authoritarian personality, and the role of police in protecting wealth and property has always made police, in Orwell’s terms, the natural enemy of the working class.<sup>71</sup> But police brutality may be amplified by their expanded responsibility to enforce first austerity, and now the lockdowns. Without a commitment increase in police manpower, individual officers who find their time and re-

sources stretched may be more inclined to resort to summary or exemplary punishments. In any case, their role in containing and disciplining the population that revolts against these measures makes an increase in brutality inevitable, and rising levels of brutality in turn will inevitably lead to increased enmity from both victims and bystanders (real or virtual).

Moreover, the experience of being hated can itself give rise to a sub-cultural identity among the police not so different from many of those who fight them: a feeling of being a besieged minority (“blue lives matter”) which may amplify the tendency towards increased brutality. Their sense that they are respected by neither the proletarians whom they discipline, nor the wealthy whom they protect, can also lead to cynicism. Thus while it is true that “all cops are bastards”, it is also true that in reacting to their sense of abandonment (by politicians and elites) and illegitimacy (in the eyes of those they police) the cops come to see themselves as bastard — the unrecognized children of a sick society — and take a delight in flaunting “civilized” norms by brutalizing with impunity.<sup>72</sup> Like Edmund in *King Lear*, they “stand up for bastards.”<sup>73</sup>

The possibility that a growing segment of the population will come to identify with this shameless brutality raises a real fascist danger, and this produces an understandable anti-fascist and anti-police reaction. Yet, as Camatte already pointed out in ‘68: “it is dangerous to delegate all inhumanity to one part of the social whole, and all humanity to another”.<sup>74</sup> For Camatte the risk is not merely that it goes against a core tenet of humanism (and thus of communism), but also that it “effectively rules out the possibility of undermining the police force”.<sup>75</sup> To focus our attacks on the police is, for Camatte, to “perpetuate a certain ritual — a ritual wherein the police are always cast in

the role of invincible subjugators".<sup>76</sup> Rather than assume that attacking the police is the insurgent tactic par excellence, we have to think strategically about how to circumnavigate the police, and even exploit potential contradictions within the enemy camp.<sup>77</sup>

A contemporary *critique of violence*, adequate to an era in which war can spell only defeat, does not necessitate retreat; rather, it can indicate the need for revolutionary intelligence, as when masses of women surround police in Belarus, or the Wall of Moms protects the frontline in Portland. Yet it would be a mistake to overstate the importance of tactics and plans in discussing the spontaneous actions of millions of men and women. The best ways to demobilize police and the security forces are through the escalating (and therefore quite often violent) growth of the protests. It is not the riots that endanger the continued unfolding of the struggles (burnt police stations can mobilize millions as we saw after the murder of George Floyd), rather it is the militarization of the conflict. All forms of professionalized violence hinder the growth of the non-movements, precisely in so far as the latter take the form of masses of non-professional revolutionaries seeking to overcome the divisions of labor that sap the emancipatory potential of the protests.

In the end, the non-movements not only delegitimize the police, but a whole world in which politics is reduced to policing. They can fight the police most effectively by delegitimizing the system as a whole. As we have seen many times recently, this can imply that the military is deployed, raising the specter of civil war. In the end, this specter can only be dispelled through defection. And just as soldiers must defect (traditionally the *sine qua non* of revolutionary success), defections of police and security personnel, such as in the so-called Bulldozer Rev-

olution in Serbia in 2000, will increasingly be required to move beyond the enmity that returns the non-movements to the categories, identities and roles they began to transcend in their *confusions*.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps in hating the police we hate what we have become. Not in the sense that we hate “the policemen in our heads”, but in that we have become dependent on the same austere infrastructure which rests ultimately on the police, yet exclusion from which — what Ruth Gilmore has described as “organized abandonment” — spells premature death, and not only at the hands of the police.<sup>79</sup> We have in a sense all become “bastards”. Yet if so, it is clear that neither “defunding” nor “abolishing” the police would address that deeper problem.

“Defund” imagines that the money spent on police and prisons, if re-allocated to other social programs, could address the underlying social problems that police are expected to manage or contain. But this ignores the fact that police and prisons are the cheapest of social programs, the very expression of austerity, and thus of little use for redistributive redress.<sup>80</sup> “Abolish”, in practice, often means replacing police with some other institution (e.g. professional mediators, social workers, private security) that will likely exhibit similar or related pathologies.<sup>81</sup> But even the more radical visions of abolition tend to stumble over the real social problems which capitalist states assign to the police. Those that put victims in control of punishment and “accountability” can reproduce the punitive bias of the current carceral regime.<sup>82</sup> But while calls for harm-reduction and repair are entirely justified, it should be clear that they are beyond the scope of what any capitalist society could admit (let alone afford). For it would require recognizing that repair is not the same thing as reparation (to clear one’s debts is to buy

oneself out of human relations) and that capitalism makes bastards of us all (though no-one is *merely* that).<sup>83</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising that the slogan “defund the police” took off in a country that possesses not only a comparatively murderous police force, but also a deeply rooted tradition of vigilante justice.<sup>84</sup> The term “organized abandonment” should draw our attention to the fact that when politics are reduced to the police the *absence* of police can be just as political as their presence. We can find various examples of that politics — the presence of that absence — not only in the American fantasy of the Wild West, but also in many situations of war (both civil and non-civil), and in some impoverished neighborhoods abandoned by the state, such as the Brazilian *favelas* that are largely administered by gangs. Less well known, we can also find examples in the Jim Crow South, where police often refused to enter black urban neighborhoods unless whites claimed that they had been victims of black crime.<sup>85</sup> More recently we saw a glimmer in the “cop-free zones” that were declared in certain American cities, such as Seattle’s CHAZ, which, if considered an independent nation (as some participants suggested), would have had the highest homicide rate in the world.<sup>86</sup> On Chicago’s South Side, where the murder rate briefly reached Brazilian levels this summer, we get a clearer sense of what it might look like to abolish the police without abolishing capitalism. The private “police” of the University of Chicago in Hyde Park, an island of wealth amidst the South Side’s poverty, are better funded than all the local precincts put together. Private security is, after all, an altogether more cost-efficient arrangement for the wealthy: why waste your tax dollars on a sprawling city-wide police department when all you really need is to protect your own enclaves?

Under pressure from protestors, in June 2020, Minneapolis city council voted not only to “defund” but also to *disband* their police department. Although it looks like they will rescind that commitment, if they followed the “abolitionist” model of Camden, New Jersey it could simply mean renaming the department.<sup>87</sup> More radical visions of abolition were sometimes touted among the militias that spent the Summer policing the streets of Minneapolis in search of mythical “white supremacist looters”.<sup>88</sup> Divergent accounts of their experience indicate the complexity of the question of violence, as it presents itself differently to activists, store owners, and residents of high-crime neighborhoods. As the 20th century history of revolutions reveals, it is rarely possible to distinguish clearly between political and anti-social violence in the fog of civil war.<sup>89</sup> But the necessarily chaotic attempts by revolutionaries to defend territories won from state and capital should not be confused with a neighborhood watch or the armed wing of a “community organization” protecting private property in open or tacit collaboration with local police.<sup>90</sup>

From these examples it is clear that the struggles themselves can easily become passive expressions of the anarchy and disorder that the Trumps of the world seek to escalate.<sup>91</sup> As Agamben said in Athens in 2013: “true anarchy is the anarchy of power”.<sup>92</sup> We can perhaps see a recognition of this in one of the most popular chants of the Chilean uprisings: *No estamos en Guerra*. This was directed against president Sebastián Piñera, who in an October 2019 speech declared, “We are at war against a powerful enemy, who is willing to use violence without any limits”.<sup>93</sup> In this example, one among several, the non-movements of the world appear to paradoxically represent the party of order, whereas the police are nothing but the armed force of the party of anarchy, which only escalate the

conflicts that rip our world apart.

Of course, it would be foolish to adopt an abstract principle of non-violence. The uprising in Chile has sadly cost the lives of at least 30 people since October 2019, and around 500 have eye injuries. Yet it is clear that the masses on the streets do not desire chaos or long for violence. By renaming the hub for the non-movements Plaza Baquedano in Santiago to Plaza Dignidad, the Chilean protesters declare that they seek a life of dignity. One can perhaps discern a (fraying) red thread that connects the bleak slogan *No Estamos en Guerra* of 2019, to *Make Love not War* of 1968 and even *Peace, Land and Bread* of 1917. For the history of communism is not only the history of class struggle, but also the history of an enmity against enmity, a revolt against the antagonism that divides the subaltern classes into friend and foe. It is in this respect a longing for peace.

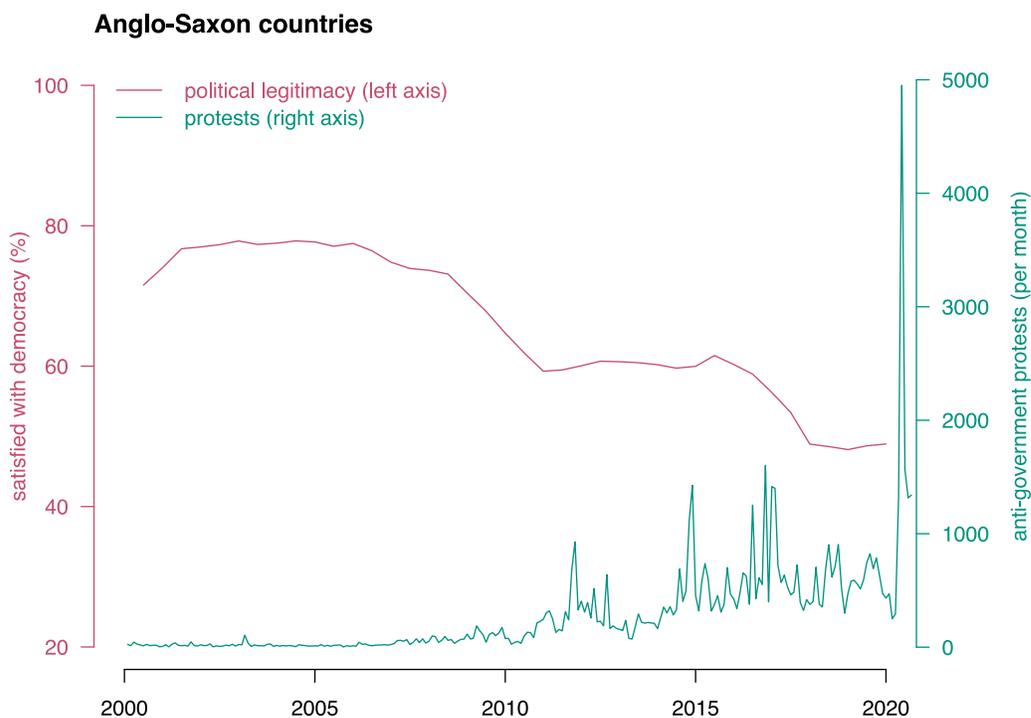


Figure 6: Protests and political legitimacy, Anglo-Saxon countries 2000-2020<sup>94</sup>

## 5. A SCIENCE OF THE SPECIES

In “The Holding Pattern”, in *Endnotes* 3, we described the central preoccupation of the Arab Spring and Occupy as the problem of composing diverse fragments of the proletariat (as well as the disaffected middle class) into a coherent force in the squares. In retrospect, these were early signals of a rising tide of non-movements. But the “problem of composition” is more conventionally understood as a problem of an “identity politics” that appears to have arisen alongside the demise of the workers’ movement.<sup>95</sup>

It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that *anti-identity politics* is the worst product of identity politics. Many left-wing critics of identity politics have assumed that there is one identity question around which the remains of the workers’ movement could still rally, namely the “citizen nationalism” that was never far from its heart.<sup>96</sup> But we have seen that only the right can prosper viably on that terrain. However, “identity politics” is not merely a spectre haunting the social-democratic left. It has in fact become a term of quasi-universal opprobrium. For even the most “woke” tend to employ the same term (or a synonym) to criticize those who sew unnecessary division or make dubious claims to represent ever-finer sub-groups of the oppressed. This is why we take “identity politics” to signal more than just a set of limits that contemporary non-movements must confront. In the broader sense in which we employ the term, identity politics forms the very terrain on which most struggles play out today, and therefore on which such limits must be confronted.

Classical social movements — be they left or right — can only maneuver on the ground of a decrepit capitalism that the non-

movements of the world are today slowly, and perhaps soon rapidly, reshaping. In *Apocalypse and Revolution*, Giorgio Cesarano described early instances of identity politics as “counter-revolutionary liberation movements” that in their partiality nonetheless produce a “hard-won awareness of the real stakes: the liberation of the species from ideology, the necessary overcoming of every separation, the armed conquest of the point of view of the totality”.<sup>97</sup> In Bordiga’s terms, we might say that alongside their conformist and reformist dimensions (the preoccupation of the “anti-woke” litanies) such movements also contain distinctly anti-formist elements, in the sense that they reconfigure the very ground on which contestation plays out.

The central organizing principle of the non-movements has been their rage and disgust against perceived injustice or corruption in general, and against police, politicians, or elites in particular. But there comes a point in the evolution of the struggle that such *negative* unity (unity through enmity) is experienced as insufficient. We are unified through a shared sense of what is wrong, but limited by this very relation to the wrong, which can only be transcended by articulating a shared vision of the good. Moreover, we come together under the banner of the enraged and indignant, but behind it real divisions of interest and allegiance remain concealed. Divisions that inevitably make themselves felt at some point, often violently. This is true even when the fight appears not to be just a fight *against* a particular enemy, but the fight *of* a specific fraction of the class (e.g. blacks, indigenous, youth, migrants) that can present itself as the most exploited or the most enraged, the part that stands in for the whole.

Today the whole as such cannot be represented, such that

some form of identity politics tends to delineate the potentials and limits of any class struggle that extends beyond a particular workplace or a particular section of the class. Indeed, such struggles can only extend themselves by confronting and confusing the identitarian separations in which the working class is enmeshed. The class is fractured into a myriad of situations, each capable of partial representation, but none able to map cleanly onto a political allegiance or interest group. There is also rarely a solution to the coordination problem whereby such partial identities can be aligned to adequately represent the class as a whole.

In the US, for instance, class appears to be mediated by “race”; the poorest and most disenfranchised layer of society is disproportionately of African or indigenous descent, and the visible markers of such descent are often identified with that layer. Of course, the problem with this form of appearance is not only that there is a black and indigenous middle class whose existence is necessarily in tension with these cultural precepts, but also that poor whites are often misrepresented as privileged from this perspective. Within the imagination of liberal America, the white working class has come to be seen as incorrigibly racist, a “basket of deplorables” identified with Trump’s reviled base, while conservatives persist in associating the group with long-defunct male breadwinner jobs — including police officers — whose respectability is contrasted to the supposed pathologies of the black “underclass”. For both the class is thus split along a simultaneously moral and racial line into the *deserving* and *undeserving* poor, but which “race” is associated with which side of this manichean dichotomy is largely dependent on the liberal or conservative allegiance of the observer.

But while the racial politics of the US is an extreme example of a class mediated by identity, this is by no means an American exception. Struggles over identity have everywhere come to dominate the political sphere. Not because people have become more racist, sexist, or homophobic. On the contrary, such views have generally declined even as they have become more salient in contemporary political realignments.<sup>98</sup> The general trend is that younger, more liberal and progressive generations confront conservative, and often older, parts of the populations who have a disproportionate influence over politics (due to their wealth and propensity to vote). In this context nationalism and populism have become more pronounced, but this does not in itself signal a change of direction, for all mainstream politics (of both left and right) are fundamentally a politics of the state, the citizen, the people, and the nation. What has changed is that the non-movements of the world have disrupted such conformist politics with their anti-formist impetus.

Today all politics tend towards identity politics not because identitarian divisions have been clarified and hardened, but rather because they are being increasingly challenged and confused. On the one hand, this is a simple function of ongoing capitalist stagnation, in which transformations in the production process combine with worsening economic trends to undermine expectations of stability in employment, health, residence, and family life. On the other hand, identities are further challenged, up to the point where their very survival is put into question, whenever the need to fight these steadily worsening conditions exceeds the real limits on co-operation between class fragments, and the non-movements spill out into the streets, squares and roundabouts. Such spaces are necessarily confused, for their production requires an active *confusion* of disparate identities. This process is fraught, for it involves a

high-stakes dance of identity politics, always at risk of becoming merely performative, bitter and even violent.

The latest iteration of Black Lives Matter can thereby be viewed as an instance of a general pattern that has characterized the global accumulation of non-movements. The demonstrations, riots, and attacks on monuments that swept the US from May 26th represent a tremendous *confusion* of hitherto separate and even opposed elements. Within this amalgamation internal divisions proliferate, both along the lines of pre-existing identities, and new ones thrown up by the struggle. In the George Floyd rebellion we can point to the divide between the “day” and the “night”, corresponding to more middle class peaceful protests and more proletarian acts of rioting and looting.<sup>99</sup> We could also speak of the divisions between “violent” and “non-violent”, or the division between large cities and small towns, many of which saw their first demonstrations in this moment. But most striking, perhaps, was the racial composition of these protests.

There is little doubt that black proletarians led the way, both in the initial Minneapolis riot and in later instances of targeted looting in Chicago and Philadelphia. In the vast majority of protests, and even in many riots, however, participants identifying as “white” seem to have made up the plurality of the people on the streets.<sup>100</sup> This is visible in the opinion polls that have asked whether people have protested, the crowd surveys carried out by sociologists, most of the arrest reports released by the police, and even in cell phone analysis of some riot locations.<sup>101</sup> This fact is often ignored by both left and right, presumably because it disrupts their own sense of identity. And yet it is precisely the mass mobilization of “white America” that marked this uprising as distinct from other comparable move-

ments, like Black Lives Matter in 2015, as well as the wave of riots that swept American cities in the 1960s.<sup>102</sup>

It is possible to read this as a mass betrayal of whiteness, one that corresponds to a gradual but sustained reduction in racist attitudes, especially among young Americans. But if “anti-racism” was the universal watchword of the movement, it is important to clarify that it meant different things to different people. In the movement’s ripple effects through the culture we can see a notable rise of performative anti-racism, organized around individual claims to racial representation and anti-racist virtue. We see this not only in the usual contexts of online discussion and higher education, but also in parliamentary politics and to some extent in the streets, where it was sometimes facilitated by residual strains of nationalism that are more than willing to police racial boundaries. One can easily identify examples: Democratic politicians kneeling in Kente cloth, white christians symbolically washing the feet of black pastors, and the ever growing number of “diversity trainers” and “black leaders” who always seem to tell middle class whites what they want to hear: move to the back, stay in your lane, remain non-violent, retreat into individual exercises of guilt-expiation and redemption.<sup>103</sup>

However, it’s important to recognize that this was not the dominant form of anti-racism that took hold after May 26th. We saw instead something much closer to the “identity politics” we describe in this article: a politics of those who know that divisions along racial lines must be actively challenged if they are to remain a force against the police (and the politics that stand behind them). Expressions of interracial unity were widely seen on banners and heard in chants, but they were materialized by concerted action towards a common aim, whether it be laying

siege to a precinct, pulling down a statue, or defending the crowd against police attacks. When activists in such situations attempt to racially segregate the crowd (or to verify people's racial bonafides in order to establish the desired level of diversity) they are often rightly seen as completing the work of the cops and fascists by dividing and weakening the movement.

Indeed, one can view the uprising as a revolt of the latter, pragmatic form of anti-racism against the former, performative type. After all, the rioters primarily targeted city administrations led by liberal mayors, many of whom had built their careers on a performative anti-racist grift. These mayors, a remarkable number of them black women, were now protecting murderous cops, supervising the brutalization of protestors, and — in the case of Chicago — pulling up the drawbridges to shut out a predominantly black proletariat from the wealthy city center. Their discourse of diversity and inclusion did not dissuade black proletarians from burning and looting the cities they administered; but nor were they effective in convincing white America to stay home and “do the work”. Instead hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of whites rose up against these liberal, black or POC mayors, and in most cases they were able to fight alongside their black neighbors without patronizing them.<sup>104</sup>

But if the George Floyd rebellion thus represented a “treason to whiteness”, it was not exactly the kind once defended by the journal *Race Traitor*. It was not a strategic betrayal with working class power as its aim, but rather a spontaneous betrayal of neoliberal subjects, fueled by rage and disgust, who refuse to be what they are, and briefly taste, in the confusion of the struggle, what they could be. This is the positive sense of what we are calling “confusion”. It can also be observed when Is-

lamists entered Tahrir square, when Front National supporters joined the roundabout blockades, or when middle class Chileans descended on the streets to fight the police alongside anarchists and ultras. Such *confusion* across political, cultural, and racial lines is both more common and less complicated than the anti-racist liberal imagination is capable of dreaming (especially for proletarians who have less to lose or when the meritocratic order is shaken).

Yet while fusion is possible, even easy, in the heat of the struggle, it rarely endures.<sup>105</sup> And while the confusion of the non-movements is often premised on a betrayal of what we are, they rarely allow us to leave our old life behind. We revolt against a lonely condition (a loneliness only exacerbated by social distancing and lockdowns) but the revolts rarely satisfy the hunger for community that brought the revolts into being.<sup>106</sup> Some activists do meet one another, and many people become activists for the first time, but there is no community of tactics, only a temporary affinity between political and tactical identities: Gilets Jaunes, militias, antifa, frontliners, and “community leaders” — a world of tribes, gangs, rackets.<sup>107</sup> The non-movements have generally struggled to produce neighborhood assemblies or build durable links to workplace organizing. Instead, they abruptly interrupt everyday life, marking time like the numbered “acts” of the Gilet Jaunes, or the mass demonstrations every Friday in Chile, when people gather in unprecedented numbers to express their rage and then immediately disperse, either to their individual lives or to their various identitarian tribes.

Nor is this lack of coherence a tactical or strategic advantage. It was the scale and scope of the mobilizations rather than their diversity of tactics that overwhelmed the police — and it

was the initial brutality of the police that was often responsible for the scale and scope. All participants can see that, beyond a certain point, the confusion of the mobilization, its lack of sustained organization, is an obstacle to the extension of the struggle. Yet by confusing the identity of its participants, the non-movements represent a crucible in which we can see the formation of a new type of human, one less panic-stricken or domesticated than Agamben and others have feared. We have argued that the non-movements harness and radicalize changes in the reproduction of daily existence, and therefore of human life. Changes that make the explosions on the streets that we have seen in the last decade possible. Our wager is thus that this anthropological shift will continue after the struggles on the streets are crushed by repression, or fizzle out due to lack of organization or stamina, since the non-movements are expressions of the anti-formistic logic of our era.

The confusion of identities is the condition of possibility of revolt today, but also a limit that has to be overcome. In the short to medium term we expect it to be increasingly problematized, in both a practical and theoretical sense. This limit may indicate the need for a new type of organization, as one friend recently put it (referencing an underground hip hop group): an Organized Konfusion.<sup>108</sup> One might even call that a “communist party”, though, as some comrades recently argued, it would have to look very different from the parties of old.<sup>109</sup> It would specifically need to appeal to a proletariat no longer interpellated by the remains of the workers’ movement, and which is forced together with sections of the surplus populations and declassed middle strata in revolts against a general immiseration. Thus such an invisible party would have to also appeal to those rebellious groups, be they lumpen or disenfranchised middle class, that have taken to the streets in unprecedented

numbers, in waves that express the volatility of our period. It may even need to appeal to those segments of the class that are currently mobilized against the non-movements, in order to break the enmity that strengthens the police and pushes the struggles towards the logic of war. Yet, given that the non-movements are, as we have repeatedly argued in this text, the subjective signs of the stagnation of capitalism, perhaps their most important task is to become conscious of this latent condition and orient themselves to the potential end of a system that is already in chronic decline. The non-movements signal that the proletariat no longer has any romantic task.<sup>110</sup> It cannot mobilize a people nor fight for hegemony. On the contrary, it can only overcome our tottering order — which is in a sense already undoing the foundations of class society — by continuing to resist all attempts to rejuvenate the world of politics.

The first stumbling steps out of our anarchic era lie in the confusions of identity that the non-movements give witness to in their hunger for human community. This hunger has until now not been satisfied by victories nor stilled by repression, which is why we think our period will continue to be marked by the accumulation of revolutionaries without revolution. The hungry dress themselves in yellow, and use the fragmented language of identity rather than class, because the whole framework of the left has collapsed. If a pragmatic anti-racism overwhelmed the performative kind during the George Floyd uprising, this is because the pragmatics of revolution no longer take its poetry from the dead world of ideologies. The revolution of the 21st century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. Thus the task for a contemporary science of the species is to once more read the runes of our times, in order to understand how the non-movements themselves reveal the anti-formistic tendency of our period, and how, in their con-

fusion, we can identify the eclipse of the social forms that we call capital, state and class. Since communism is the real non-movement that abolishes these social forms, we say to the masses who confront our tottering order — *avanti barbari!* — onward barbarians.

1 In the US these were not really spontaneous rank and file rebellions, but were generally staged by advocacy groups associated either with the push to break up big tech monopolies, or the Labor Notes-affiliated “Amazonians United”.

2 The movement took on a more familiar anti-fascist cast after a rent-a-cop Trump supporter killed two in Kenosha, Wisconsin . The first presidential debate between Trump and Biden, itself a mise-en-scene of our chaotic age, posed a question worthy of a Crimethinc primer: whether Antifa is “an idea or an organization”, while liberal journalists for NPR and the New York Times have been delving into insurrectionary anarchism.

3 See the texts by Cesare Battisti , former member of Armed Proletarians for Communism (PAC), who wrote from prison that “what we are witnessing is no longer a war of ideologies, but a decisive

assault by capital against the human condition as a communion of body and spirit”; by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben , who was attacked by many of the left for daring to criticize the lockdowns; and the situationist Gianfranco Sanguinetti who argued that “[w]e are witnessing *the decomposition and end of a world and a civilization*, that of bourgeois democracy with its parliaments, its rights and powers and counter-powers.”

4 Julien Coupat et alii, “Choses vues”, *Reporterre*, September 4, 2020.

5 World Bank, “Covid-19 to Plunge Global Economy into Worst Recession since World War II”, June 8, 2020 and Carmen Reinhart & Vincent Reinhart, “The Pandemic Depression The Global Economy Will Never Be the Same” *Foreign Affairs*, October 2020.

6 Kamunist Kranti, “A Glimpse of Social Churnings: Attempts at Conversational Interactions during Global Covid Lockdowns”, September 2020.

7 See for instance Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, *Trump’s Counter-Revolution* (Washington, USA: Zero Books, 2018). For a classical text on the concept of counter-revolution see Amadeo Bordiga, “Lezioni delle controrivoluzioni” *Bollettino interno del PCInt* (1951), recently translated in *The Science and Passion of Communism: Selected Writings of Amadeo Bordiga (1912-1965)* (Brill 2020), pp. 268-282.

8 Of course, as Nate Holdren has recently argued , there is little that is truly exceptional about Trump himself. Beyond all the spectacle, Trump merely personifies his class position. He cut his teeth in New York’s fiscal crisis siphoning off public funds in the midst of chaos. Since then, he’s been in constant, frenetic motion, capitalizing on upheaval, indifferent to the source of his wealth, looting what he can before the next big shakeup (or bankruptcy). Yet the takeover of the executive branch by the FIRE sector was in itself politically significant, for the reasons we outline in the text. In the end, what Trump signals

is that the strong men of our era can only produce schisms and raise the fear of civil war. See for example Mike Davis' recent analysis of Biden's victory which ends with the following dramatic conclusion: "Deep structures of the past have been disinterred during Trump's presidency and given permission to throttle the future. Civil War? Some analogies are inevitable and should not be easily dismissed." Mike Davis, "Trench Warfare: Notes on the 2020 Election", *New Left Review* no, 126, 2020.

9 The Venezuelan journalist Moisés Naím argued recently that elections are losing their stabilizing power, "Profound political divisions now plague most of the world's democracies. They are becoming so extreme that many citizens define their political identity in contrast to 'the other side.' ... Often, the anger and animosity toward those with clashing political views are such, that opponents are not even accepted as legitimate political actors." Moisés Naím, "The Winner of the US election? Polarisation", *El País*, 24 Nov 2020.

10 One example of such an illiberal development is the so-called Ley Mordaza, the gag law, in Spain that was implemented against the social movements in 2015 and that has been heavily used during the pandemic. Another example is the French security law that among other things would ban the dissemination of images of police in social media. Obviously, we cannot identify liberalism with democracy, such different figures as the centrist Yascha Mounk and the Stalinist Domenico Losurdo remind us of the aristocratic and undemocratic dimension of the liberal tradition. Yet, liberalism is the main ideology of bourgeois rights and it is the crisis of these rights that to a large extent shape our present period and perhaps even signal the rise of an occidental despotism. Thus, when we argue that struggles have a liberal dimension we are mainly insisting on the fact that (1) people struggle against the eclipse of rights; (2) they are produced as neoliberal subjects and use often liberal rhetoric and raise liberal demands; (3) they express how the meritocratic and

liberal order is in decline and losing legitimacy all over the world.

11 The data in this and all following figures come from the GDEL event database (right hand axis) and the Global Satisfaction with Democracy 2020 report (left hand axis). GDEL uses natural language processing and data mining algorithms to identify protest events from conventional and social media. We extracted all events from their database that were coded as being led by civilians against the government, police, judiciary, business or elites. For their estimates of democratic legitimacy, Roberto Foa and his colleagues collected over 4 million responses from 3,500 surveys on whether people were satisfied or dissatisfied with democracy in their countries. These quarterly data, weighted by population, were kindly shared by Foa.

12 It should be underlined that these protests and uprisings also tend to involve much larger numbers than before, and to last for a longer period of time. 2010 was the beginning of a global strike wave and in 2020 we saw the biggest strike in history taking place in India just as last year saw the longest strike in France since 1968. The George Floyd uprising was the largest movement in the modern history of the United States, and we have seen the largest demonstrations , riots , and university occupations in decades in the United Kingdom, Chile and Canada.

13 Jacques Camatte, "De la révolution", *Invariance*, series II no. 2 (1972).

14 Ibid.

15 In fact, some victories that have been gained have not been feeble but rather decisive. Protests in Tunisia led in the beginning of 2018 to the repealing of the budget; a couple of months later the Prime Minister Hani Mulki had to resign due to protests in Jordan just as the Iraqi Prime minister Adil Abdul-Maahdi; in 2019 protests in Lebanon forced prime ministers Saad Hairi and Hassan Diab to resign; in 2020 the constitution was overhauled in Chile and protests in Peru

led to the resignation of the interim president Manuel Merino and the budget was repealed in Guatemala after parts of the Congress building was burnt down.

16 As Wildcat has convincingly argued, from a global perspective we are as much in an era of strikes as of riots: “The years 2006 to 2013 were characterised by a wave of mass protests on the streets, strikes and uprisings on an unprecedented scale. According to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York 16 the wave is only comparable to the revolutionary upheavals of 1848, 1917 or 1968 - the think-tank analysed 843 protest movements in total between 2006 and 2013, in 87 countries, which cover 90 percent of the world population. Protests of all kinds, against social injustice, against war, for real democracy, against corruption, riots against food price hikes, strikes against employers, general strikes against austerity.”

17 The referendum of October 2020 gave the movements a real victory that doesn't necessarily imply a de-escalation of the conflict through democratic recuperation. On the contrary, it seems to imply a broader, perhaps epochal, change for a period that can be said to begin with Augusto Pinochet's neoliberal dictatorship.

18 An estimated 15-26 million people have taken part in the protests in May and June alone. See Larry Buchanan et al. “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in US History” in *The New York Times*, July 3, 2020.

19 See Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Cairo: American University, 2013) and “The Urban Subalterns and the Non-Movements of the Arab Uprisings”, Jadaliyya website 2013.

20 See Jacques Camatte's “Lettre à propos de Greta Thunberg”, May 20, 2019, *Invariance* website. For Camatte, “passive revolt” is not a pejorative term, nor a reference to Gramsci's “passive revolution”, but rather a form of seismic activity or spasmodic reaction of the species.

21 “The Urban Subalterns and the Non-Movements of the Arab Uprising” Jadaliyya website 2013.

22 As we argue in section 5 below, when the growth engine of industrial capitalism slows down and the labor movement is reduced to a sectional pressure-group, identity increasingly comes to mediate class struggle.

23 While we reject the negative valence of the term “identity politics”, we are not replacing it with a positive one. In the specific sense in which we employ the term we emphasize their “anti-formist” character. The concept for us is analytical rather than normative, it denotes the fraught negotiation of identity that is both premise and consequence of the mass popular mobilizations spreading around the world today.

24 Similar security laws have recently been imposed in Hong Kong. Let’s hope the cortège de tete is more successful than the frontliners.

25 See Christoper Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (Abacus 1980), Jean Baudrillard, *America* (Verso 2010) and Sergio Bologna, “The Tribe of Moles”, 1977. The latter text is especially worth returning to since Bologna depicts a profound transformation of the state that structures the conflicts of our era: “The ‘party system’ no longer aims to represent conflicts, nor to mediate or organise them: It delegates them to ‘economic interests’ and poses itself as the specific form of the State, separate from and hostile to movements in society. The political system becomes more rigid, more frontally counterposed to civil society. The party system no longer ‘receives’ the thrusts from the base; it controls and represses them.”

26 Work, poverty, and income over-determine the non-movements, but proletarianization, as the primary mechanism of separation, posits as well as disrupts identities, or rather posits identities by particularizing interests within an increasingly fragmented labor

market.

27 Matthew Yglesias, “The Great Awakening” *Vox* April 2019. Gilles Dauvé is one who during the last decades has repeatedly reminded us of the anthropological dimension of both capitalism and communism: “Communism is an **anthropological revolution** in the sense that it deals with what Marcel Mauss analysed in *The Gift* (1923): a renewed ability to give, receive and reciprocate. It means no longer treating our next-door neighbour as a stranger, but also no longer regarding the tree down the road as a piece of scenery taken care of by council workers. Communisation is the production of a different relation to others and with oneself, where solidarity is not born out of a moral duty exterior to us, rather out of practical acts and interrelations.” Gilles Dauvé, “Communisation”, *Troploin* 2011, bold text in original.

28 Asaf Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford University Press, 2017), xi.

29 Michael Lind, “The Double Horseshoe Theory of Class Politics” *The Bellows*, July 16, 2020.

30 Carl Schmitt: *Staat, Bewegung, Volk* (Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1933).

31 See Gilles Dauvé, “Yellow, Red, Tricolour, or: Class & People”, June 2019. See also *Temps Critiques*, “L'évènement Gilets Jaunes” May 2019.

32 See point eight of our LA Theses : “This is what we mean when we say that class consciousness, today, can only be the consciousness of capital. In the fight for their lives, proletarians must destroy that which separates them. In capitalism, that which separates them is also what unites them: the market is both their atomization and their interdependence. It is the consciousness of capital as our unity-in-separation that allows us to posit from within

existing conditions — even if only as a photographic negative — humanity’s capacity for communism.”

33 See Gáspár Miklós Tamás, [“Telling the truth about class”](#) *Socialist Register* 2006.

34 The fragmentation of the left in Chile into a myriad of parties, sects, and groups reveals that leftism itself has become one identity among others, and one that in itself is of no great importance for the success and evolution of the non-movements.

35 Here and in the title we are alluding to Amadeo Bordiga’s classic essay [“Avanti, Barbari!”](#) *Battaglia Comunista* no. 22, 1951, translated into English [here](#) . For a fuller discussion of barbarism see Robert Hullot Kentor, [“What Barbarism Is”](#) , *Brooklyn Rail*, February 2010. In his recent book *The Decadent Society* Ross Douthat argues that the barbarians are too “disorganized, poorly led, conspiratorial and anti-intellectual” to threaten our “decadent society”. Tellingly, the American pop-conservative not only scorns the masses for rejecting family, work, and even sex, he reveals that the only thing that today’s conservatives can hope to conserve is capitalist progress. But the non-movements indicate the end of this progress and reveal that decadence may be the only way out of our impasse. This is what T. W. Adorno came close to seeing in his brilliant essay on Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*: “In a world of brutal and oppressed life, decadence becomes the refuge of a potentially better life by renouncing its allegiance to this one and to its culture, its crudeness, and its sublimity. The powerless, who at Spengler’s command are to be thrown aside and annihilated by history, are the negative embodiment within the negativity of this culture of everything which promises, however feebly, to break the dictatorship of culture and put an end to the horror of pre-history. In their protest lies the only hope that fate and power will not have the last word. What can oppose the decline of the west is not a resurrected culture but the utopia that is silently contained in the image of its decline.” T.

W. Adorno, "Spengler After the Decline" *Prisms* (Cambridge 1997).

36 For evidence on the composition of the George Floyd uprising see section 5 below.

37 This became the longest general strike in French history, defeated only through the enforcement of the lockdowns. See Rona Lorimer, "French Strike in the State of Exception", *Endnotes* Sept 2020.

38 This is so even when they lead to a (potentially) new constitution as in Chile, since this change signifies less a turn to a new normality than a deepening of an ungovernable situation. The 80 percent who voted for the new constitution voted also that it should be written by others than the ruling politicians and even though the parties will likely co-opt this process the vote itself was arguably a vote against the political system.

39 Racism is the quintessential American injustice, the one that appears to summarize all the others, as well as the quintessentially arbitrary and thus evil one. Anti-racism thus offers the unifying principle that is otherwise unavailable to immiserated Americans, allowing them to temporarily suspend their differences by uniting against a widely reviled evil. But we argue below that at a deeper level the disgust at racist cops reflects the anti-political frustration and rage already felt by so many towards this crisis-regime. Of course "anti-racism" means different things to different people. For Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, who were killed by a rent-a-cop teenager in Kenosha Wisconsin, it clearly meant joining with their black neighbors in fighting a police force that had victimized them too. As Huber's friend commented : "I wouldn't say he was political, but I think he definitely hated racists." On the other hand for Mark Mason, CFO of Citigroup, it signifies a double-edged opportunity to be rewarded and tokenized by his white business associates, by publicly claiming that he and George Floyd shared a common experience of oppression. See sections 4 and 5 below.

40 For Cowen, industrial overcapacity has split the US into a bimodal system: “a fantastically successful nation, working in the technologically dynamic sectors, and everyone else.” Tyler Cowen, *Average is over : Powering America beyond the Age of the Great Stagnation* (Plume 2014).

41 For an interesting reflection on the growth of right-wing populism as a reaction to the revolution of values that 1968 can be said to signify see Pippa Norris & Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge University Press 2018).

42 The Trumps and Bolsonaros of the world produce the basis for a more general social upheaval with the potential to exceed its current democratic and liberal form. It seems unlikely that the Bidens of the planet can stop this development. Perhaps they can more easily demobilize the middle classes and block the interclassist convergence on the streets necessary to produce lasting change. Yet since Obama couldn't hinder Occupy or Black Lives Matter, and Macron clearly fuelled the Gilets Jaunes, our wager is that Trump's electoral defeat will neither stabilize the status quo nor free us from the danger of illiberal democracy. The crisis of representation is deeper than Trump and the political divisions he entails will continue to plague our world during Biden's presidency. It might buy the system time, but it will not make capitalism less ungovernable.

43 Timothy Garton Ash, “Revolution: The Springtime of Two Nations” *The New York Times*, June 15, 1989.

44 Robert Kurz, *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung: Vom Zusammenbruch des Kasernen-Sozialismus zur Krise der Weltökonomie* (Eichborn 1991).

45 Amadeo Bordiga, “Tracciato d'impostazione”, *Prometeo* no. 1 (1946).

46 Ibid.

47 Thomas Piketty, "Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right: Rising Inequality & the Changing Structure of Political Conflict" World Inequality Database Working Paper (2018).

48 See also Paul Mattick, *Marxism, Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?* (M.E. Sharpe, 1983).

49 See "Tesi su Benjamin" in Mario Tronti, *La politica al tramonto* (Einaudi, 1998).

50 Bordiga's argument was that since fascism lacked legitimacy it would have radicalized the class struggle. He asserted in 1947 in an important text that "the succession is not: fascism, democracy, socialism — it is instead: democracy, fascism, dictatorship of the proletariat." See "Tendenze e Socialismo", *Prometeo*, 1947. Bordiga's counterfactual musings should not be dismissed, but they tend to become a form of perverse fiction and might be compared with Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937) or Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962).

51 David Ranney, *New World Disorder* (2014)

52 Of course age and education can also be thought through the lens of class. "Age" in the sense of the boomer generation who benefited from social democracy (buying property which is now a source of wealth); "education" in the sense that the "democratization" of higher education has not been a uniform process, and many still are shut out from the academy.

53 Amadeo Bordiga, "Tracciato d'impostazione", *Prometeo* no. 1 (1946).

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 And, as a comrade recently stated apropos the Floyd uprising: “[r]evolutionary activity should be measured in terms of its capacity to be sustainably defended by as many people as possible. When revolutionary violence tends to isolate participants rather than defending them, it does more harm than good.” “At the Wendy's: Armed Struggle at the End of the World”, *Ill Will*, November 9th 2020.

59 Moisés Naím wrote tellingly apropos Biden’s victory and the polarisation it will entail that, “Polarisation doesn’t just result from resentments caused by economic hardship or the pugnacity spurred by social media. Anti-politics — the total rejection of politics and traditional politicians — is another important driver. Political parties must now face a plethora of new competitors (‘movements,’ ‘waves,’ ‘factions,’ NGOs) whose agenda is based on the repudiation of the past and on tactics that foster intransigence.” Moisés Naím, “The Winner of the US election? Polarisation,” *El País*, 24 Nov 2020.

60 A revolutionary outbreak may entail an even more radical shutdown of the economy.

61 Perry Anderson, “Why the system will still win” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2017.

62 See René Riesel and Jaime Semprun, *Catastrophism, disaster management and sustainable submission for a critique of a catastrophism that fuels the state as well as many social movements:* “As a form of false consciousness spontaneously born from the soil of mass society — that is, from the ‘anxiogenic environment’ that has been created everywhere — catastrophism thus expresses first of all the fears and sad hopes of all who expect their salvation from a securitization based on the reinforcement of coercive measures. It is also perceived, however, sometimes clearly enough, as an expectation of a completely

*different kind: the aspiration for a break with the routine, for a catastrophe that would really be a culmination that would clear the air, casting down, as if by magic, the walls of the social prison. The taste for this latent catastrophe could be satisfied by means of the consumption of the numerous products of the entertainment industry that were manufactured for just such a purpose; for the bulk of the spectators, this discharge of anxiety-pleasure will be enough.”*

63 Jacques Camatte argued already in 1977 that the utopia of a world beyond work was tending to become a form of capitalist dream in a postindustrial world. He wrote ironically that “The demand for the abolition of labour is also an element of the utopia of capital: the realisation of a toothless and limbless human [une humanité anodonte et phocomœle], if not through the effective disappearance of teeth and anterior limbs, but as a result of their non-use; because man became dependent on capital, its parasitic user.” Jacques Camatte, “La révolte des étudiants italiens”, *Invariance*, series III, no. 5 & 6, 1980.

64 Angry Workers of the World, “The necessity of a revolutionary working class program in times of coup and civil war scenarios” October 2020.

65 The latter calls for a collective investigation of how the non-movements express a real need to overcome the basis of present proletarian (and to a large extent middle class) life, that which keeps us divided and enmeshed in identitarian conflicts.

66 Amadeo Bordiga, “The immediate program of the revolution” *Sul filo del tempo*, May 1953.

67 See note 32 above.

68 Today the general public often express sympathy with property destruction as well as the desecration of certain monuments. Mathew Impelli “54 Percent of Americans Think Burning Down Minneapolis

Police Precinct Was Justified After George Floyd's Death *Newsweek*,  
June 3rd 2020.

69 Silvia Staubli, *Trusting the Police: Comparisons across Eastern and Western Europe* (transcript 2017).

70 “[The police’s] power is formless, like its nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states. And though the police may, in particulars, everywhere appear the same, it cannot finally be denied that their spirit is less devastating where they represent, in absolute monarchy, the power of a ruler in which legislative and executive supremacy are united, than in democracies where their existence, elevated by no such relation, bears witness to the greatest conceivable degeneration of violence.” Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence” *Reflections* (Schocken 1986) p. 287.

71 “I have no particular love for the idealized ‘worker’ as he appears in the bourgeois Communist’s mind, but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on.” George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Harvill 1938) p. 138. Note, however, that proletarians also sometimes rely on police to resolve disputes, avenge harm, and protect their property and dignity against threats from within and without their communities.

72 “The ‘law’ of the police really marks the point at which the state, whether from impotence or because of the immanent connections within any legal system, can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to attain. Therefore the police intervene ‘for security reasons’ in countless cases where no clear legal situation exists.” Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, p 287.

73 “Why brand they us  
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?  
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take

More composition and fierce quality  
Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,  
Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,  
Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well, then,  
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:  
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund  
As to the legitimate: fine word,—legitimate!  
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,  
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base  
Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper:  
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!” — *King Lear*, Act 1 Scene 2

74 “When the conflict comes, as it inevitably will, there should be no attempt to reduce the various individuals who defend capital to the level of ‘bestial’ or mechanical adversaries; they have to be put in the context of their humanity, for humanity is what they too know they are a part of and are potentially able to find again. In this sense the conflict takes on intellectual and spiritual dimensions. The representations which justify an individual person's defence of capital must be revealed and demystified; people in this situation must become aware of contradiction, and doubts should arise in their minds.” Jacques Camatte, “Against Domestication” *Invariance Series* II, no. 3, 1973.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Eric Hazan, “Sur La Police, Une Opinion Minoritaire” *Lundi Matin*, April 18, 2016.

78 In developing Sorel’s distinction between the political and proletarian general strike, Benjamin writes: “While the first form of interruption of work is violent since it causes only an external modification of labor conditions, the second, as a pure means, is nonviolent. For it takes place not in readiness to resume work

following external concessions and this or that modification to working conditions, but in the determination to resume only a wholly transformed work, no longer enforced by the state, an upheaval that this kind of strike not so much causes as consummates.” Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”, pp. 291-292.

79 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag* (University of California Press 2007), p. 178.

80 It is not just that spending on police and prisons is (and will always be) a tiny fraction of social spending, but in the US this form of austerity is written into the federalist system of taxation and spending, for the city governments that pay for police have the least capacity to generate revenue. See Eric Levitz, “Defunding the Police Is Not Nearly Enough”, *New York Magazine*, June 12, 2020.

81 See Tristan Leoni, “Abolish the Police” DDT21, September 2020. See also the example of Camden, NJ discussed below.

82 See Marie Gottshaulk, *The Prison and Gallows* (Cambridge University Press 2006) on the key role of democracy and “victim’s rights” in building America’s carceral state.

83 See Gilles Dauvé, “For a World Without Moral Order” (1983) and La Banquise, “Pour un monde sans innocents”, (1986). The Antagonism Press edition of “For a World Without A Moral Order” had on its back cover the apposite quotation: “Communism knows no monsters”.

84 The US is 30th in the world for police killings per capita, but easily the highest among rich countries (Police Killings by County). On vigilantism see Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch* (Palgrave 2002), which points to America’s tradition of popular sovereignty, as well as its revolutionary-era scepticism towards legal authority, as an explanation for its long-standing predilection for lynching.

85 See, e.g., John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (Double Day 1937). Recent work by Gabriel Lenz indicates that the black homicide rate in Southern cities during this era was higher than in any other place and time in American history. On Black political reactions to “under-policing” see James Forman Jr., *Locking Up Our Own* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2017).

86 Christopher Rufo, “The End of Chaz”, *City Journal*, July 1, 2020. Based on 2 homicides (with 4 additional shootings) over its 24-day history, Rufo estimated a CHAZ homicide rate of 1,216 per 100,000 population. That number is of course inflated by the small size of the CHAZ, but even if we were to assume that Rufo’s estimate is off by a factor of 10, the CHAZ would still have had twice the highest homicide rate in the world (a record currently held by El Salvador, with 61 homicides per 100,000 in 2017).

87 Camden, which some have looked to as the solution for the US as a whole, merely replaced the “city” with a “county” police department (mainly to bust the police unions), rehired all the cops, and added many new hires (they now have one of the largest police forces per capita in the nation) Joseph Goldstein and Kevin Armstrong, “Could This City Hold the Key to the Future of Policing in America?”, *New York Times*, July 12, 2020. Minneapolis recently created the “office of violence prevention”, which at least indicates a more creative re-naming strategy.

88 Some black militia had apparently earlier collaborated with members of the boogaloo boyz in defending local property — an example of what we referred to above as “a *Querfront* worthy of the age of QAnon”. Nevada, “Imaginary Enemies: Myth and Abolition in the Minneapolis Rebellion”, *Ill Will*, November 17, 2020.

89 Dauve and Nestic, “Jailbreak” in *An A to Z of Communitisation*, *Troploin*, 2015.

90 Nevada, “Imaginary Enemies”

91 That disorder divides the population along fascism/anti-fascism lines and raises the spectre of armed struggle. As some comrades recently wrote, “in the current moment the reactionary forces want to draw us into a culture war and armed confrontations — a type of struggle in which the working class can only lose.” Angry Workers of the World, “The necessity of a revolutionary working class program in times of coup and civil war scenarios” *Let’s Get Rooted* Oct 2020.

92 Giorgio Agamben, “For a Theory of Destituent Power” (lecture delivered in Athens in 2013). Agamben was quoting Pasolini who was himself paraphrasing Sade.

93 Piñera’s speech can be found on Youtube .

94 The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

95 See our LA Theses (2016), especially point five: “At the same time, the decline of the workers’ identity revealed a multiplicity of other identities, organizing themselves in relation to struggles that had, until then, been more or less repressed. The resulting ‘new social movements’ made it clear, in retrospect, to what extent the homogeneous working class was actually diverse in character. They have also established that revolution must involve more than the reorganization of the economy: it requires the abolition of gender, racial and national distinctions, and so on. But in the welter of emergent identities, each with their own sectional interests, it is unclear what exactly this revolution must be. For us, the surplus population is not a new revolutionary subject. Rather, it denotes a structural situation in which no fraction of the class can present itself as the revolutionary subject.”

96 Eric Hobsbawm, “Identity Politics and the Left” *New Left Review*, May/June 1996. The official workers’ movement dependence on domestic growth explains why its universalism rarely went beyond

the world of the *citoyen* and the two apparatuses that shaped it: the factory and the state. Identity politics represents the crisis of that world.

97 See sections 122-124 of *Apocalypse and Revolution* and translators' comment in *Endnotes* 5 p. 299. Interestingly Cesarano places workers and employees alongside the other “counter-revolutionary liberation movements”.

98 Bart Bonikowski and Daniel Ziblatt, “Mainstream conservative parties paved the way for far-right nationalism” Monkey Cage Symposium, *The Washington Post*, December 2, 2019.

99 Shemon and Arturo, “Theses on the George Floyd Rebellion”, *Ill Will*, June 24, 2020.

100 White people were not the plurality in majority-black cities like Atlanta and Detroit, but they were over-represented in the streets relative to their share of those cities’ population. Note that the meaning of “whiteness” is itself changeable. Fewer immigrants, and fewer children of mixed race couples, choose to identify as “white” today. If, following Ignatiev, we think of the essence of whiteness as the supposed privilege of “becoming white” then it is one that it seems many Americans are now rejecting. See Paul Gilroy, “Whiteness Just Ain’t Worth What it Used to Be” *The Nation*, October 28, 2020.

101 For public opinion surveys on protest participation see Larry Buchanan et al. “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in US History” as well as later reports by Pew and Civis Analytics. Dana Fischer and her colleagues conducted crowd surveys and report on them here and here . Summaries of early arrest data are reported by the Washington Post and the Marshall Project . Finally see the report by a tech company (since taken down due to political pressure ) of the demographics of cellphone users geo-located within riot areas and times. All these reports suggest that whites were either in the majority or over-represented in protests relative to their share of the

city population. This has in turn been a major focus of criticism from black and other Democratic local politicians threatened by the protests.

102 The conclusion of our article Brown v Ferguson is relevant here “If race could present itself as the solution to one compositional riddle, conjuring a new unity through descending modulations, that unity itself issues in another compositional impasse as a further descent threatens to undo it. Now that the ghetto has rediscovered its capacity to riot, and to force change by doing so, will other, larger components of America’s poor — white and latino — stand idly by?”

103 See: We Still Outside Collective, “On the Black Leadership and Other White Myths” *Ill Will*, June 4, 2020 and Idris Robinson, “How It Might Should be Done,” *Ill Will*, July 20, 2020.

104 Of course much of this too had its performative dimensions, but it was performance that served a practical collective end (fighting brutal and racist police) rather than an attempt by individuals to achieve rank, recognition or redemption.

105 Even if the causes for the confusion certainly preexisted and will survive the struggles themselves.

106 The sense of social isolation appears to be growing in many developed countries and may be another factor in triggering the outpouring of revolt in recent years. See Bianca DiJulio et al, *Loneliness and Social Isolation in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan* (Kaiser Family Foundation 2018).

107 The estimated 10 billion dollars that has been donated this year to a variety of organizations vying for the mantle of authentic racial representation will not “recuperate” anything, but it will enable a new generation of racketeers, some of whom will no doubt play a pacifying role, while others can be expected to support an escalation.

108 Robinson, "How It Might Should be Done".

109 Angry Workers describe the need for "[a]n organisation that is rooted amongst the tech workers without pandering to their intellectual loftiness. Amongst the productive mass workers without ending up fostering their trade unionist sectorialism. Amongst the poor without fanning their insurrectionist illusions and populist tendencies" "The necessity of a revolutionary working class program in times of coup and civil war scenarios".

110 "In Bordiga's conception, Stalin, and later Mao, Ho, etc. were 'great romantic revolutionaries' in the 19th century sense, i.e. bourgeois revolutionaries. He felt that the Stalinist regimes that came into existence after 1945 were just extending the bourgeois revolution, i.e. the expropriation of the Prussian Junker class by the Red Army, through their agrarian policies and through the development of the productive forces. To the theses of the French ultra-left group 'Socialism or Barbarism' who denounced the regime, after 1945, as state capitalist, Bordiga replied with an article 'Avanti Barbari!' ('Onward Barbarians!') that hailed the bourgeois revolutionary side of Stalinism as its sole real content." Loren Goldner, "Communism is the Material Human Community: Amadeo Bordiga Today" *Critique* no. 23, 1991.