How Powerful Are The Remaining Royals?

07-20-2024 ~ *Most royal families continue to face a decline in relevance, yet their ongoing efforts to adapt means they cannot be discounted entirely.*

Recently appointed British Prime Minister Keir Starmer pledged his loyalty to British King Charles III on July 6, 2024, continuing a tradition that dates back centuries. However, since the leadership role taken by Prime Minister David Lloyd George in World War I, the monarchy's political influence has become progressively ceremonial and even more precarious since the death of the late Queen Elizabeth II in 2022.

This trend is not unique to the UK; in recent centuries, the role of royalty in politics has declined considerably worldwide. As political ideals began challenging royal authority in Europe, European colonial powers began to undermine their authority overseas. The strain of World War I helped cause several European monarchies to collapse, and World War II diminished their numbers further. After, the Soviet Union and the U.S. divided Europe along ideological lines and sought to impose their communist and liberal democratic ideals elsewhere, and the remaining monarchs faced accelerating marginalization.

Today, fewer than 30 royal families are politically active on a national scale. Some, like Japan's and the UK's, trace their lineages back more than a millennium, while Belgium's is less than 200 years old. Several have adapted by reducing political power while maintaining cultural and financial relevance, while others have retained their strong political control. Their various methods and circumstances make it difficult to determine where royals may endure, collapse, or return.

Alongside the UK, the royals of Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands have all seen their powers become largely ceremonial. Smaller European monarchical states like Andorra and the Vatican City are not hereditary, while Luxembourg, Monaco, and Liechtenstein are—though only the latter two still wield tangible power.

Attempts to exercise remaining royal political power have often highlighted its increasing redundancy. Belgian King Baudouin's refusal to sign an abortion bill in 1990 saw him declared unfit to rule before being reinstated once it passed. Luxembourg's Grand Duke Henri meanwhile lost his legislative role in 2008 after refusing to sign a euthanasia bill. Following increasing scrutiny of Queen Beatrix's influence, the Dutch monarch's role in forming coalition governments was transferred to parliament in 2012, and she also lost the ability to dissolve parliament.

The British monarch's decline in political influence is also evident, but it can still prove useful. The royal family's global popularity is used to project soft power, while royal visits can help seal important agreements, particularly in countries with other royal families. The leaders of 14 other countries also pledge allegiance to King Charles III as their head of state.

Additionally, the monarchy can be used to bypass certain democratic processes. In 1999 the British government advised Queen Elizabeth II to withhold Queen's Consent, preventing parliamentary debate on the Military Action Against Iraq Bill, which would have restricted the ability to take military action without parliamentary approval.

Royal efforts to cultivate soft power and maintain a positive public image have also been crucial for their survival. Belgium's royal family is seen as a necessary source of political stability and unity. In Spain, former King Juan Carlos played a leading role in the country's transition to democracy in the 1970s. Modernizing their image as neutral political guardians with relatable attributes who engage in advocacy and humanitarian work often gives European royal families higher approval ratings than politicians.

Royal families have also downsized in recent years for discretion and to reduce costs. In 2019, Sweden's king removed royal titles, duties, and some privileges from five of his grandchildren. The Danish queen implemented similar changes in

2022. Norway's royal family now consists only of the King, Queen, Crown Prince, and Princess, while the British royal family has hinted at further reducing its current number of 10 "working royals."

Despite these efforts, European royal families continue to face scandals and intense public and media scrutiny. In 2020, Spanish and Swiss authorities began investigating former Spanish King Juan Carlos for allegedly receiving $100 million from a deal with Saudi Arabia. In 2023, Belgium's Prince Laurent was accused of fraud and extortion by Libya's sovereign wealth fund. The UK royal family's recent treatment of Megan Markle and the departure of Prince Harry and Prince Andrew's association with Jeffrey Epstein have also rocked Britain. The British monarchy's unprecedented challenges are reinforced by record-low support since the death of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022. The King's and Princess Kate's cancer diagnoses have also added to the sense of fragility.

Across Europe, cultural shifts, concern over royal expenses, and increasing political irrelevance have threatened its royal families. Movements like the Alliance of European Republican Movements, created in 2010 to abolish monarchies altogether, reflect the increasing disregard for royal power.

The opaque nature of royal finances, however, has granted some respite. Officially, Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg's $4 billion makes him Europe's richest royal. However, suspicions abound regarding billions more in assets like trusts, jewelry, and art collections that point to larger degrees of wealth.

Extensive efforts go into hiding these fortunes. Liechtenstein's royal family operates a bank criticized by the U.S. Senate for aiding clients in tax evasion, dodging creditors, and other misconduct. Queen Elizabeth II once used Queen's Consent to change a draft law so that her wealth remained concealed, while the Panama Papers leaks revealed huge undisclosed European royal assets. Europe's poorest royal family in Belgium saw King Phillippe declare the monarchy's wealth at roughly £11 million in 2013, but the European Union Times estimated it at £684 million.

Estimates for King Charles's worth range from $750 million to more than $2 billion, while the fortunes of the entire British royal family, also known as "the Firm," can range from $28 billion to almost $90 billion. Britain's monarchs also enjoy more institutionalized ties to national wealth than other European royals.

Through the peerage system that upholds British nobility, a network of support from wealthy Dukes, Marquesses, Earls, Viscounts, and Barons helps the monarchy remain firmly entrenched in the UK's wealth centers.

Royal families in the Asia-Pacific consist of Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Brunei, Japan, and Tonga. Thailand's King is the world's richest, with a net worth of $43 billion, but faces his own controversies relating to personal scandals and the use of political powers that have led to an anti-monarchy movement. Malaysia has a rotational system of nine sultans that rule their own states and serve as head of state every five years. While formal authority is limited, the sultans command influence in cultural and religious matters, and despite their powers being curtailed by constitutional amendments, occasionally intervene in politics. In Cambodia, the monarchy is similarly politically and culturally influential.

Brunei's absolute monarchy has granted its Sultan, Hassanal Bolkiah, supreme authority over his country for more than 50 years. His $288-billion fortune makes him the second-richest monarch in the world. However, as a microstate, Brunei's influence in international affairs is limited. The reduced power of Japan's monarchy since 1945 has meanwhile made it most like European monarchies, though its powers have remained steady since then. In sub-Saharan Africa, partnerships with British colonial authorities have allowed Lesotho's monarchy to retain largely ceremonial influence, while Eswatini's King Mswati III exerts strong control over the country.

Nonetheless, alongside Europe, most regions have seen general declines in royal power over decades. Bucking that trend is the Middle East, where monarchies previously had limited authority under the Ottoman Empire. Its collapse after World War I allowed them to increase their power considerably, even those under loose French and British protectorates.

By exploiting their increasingly valuable resource reserves, Gulf monarchies in particular managed to thrive. Today, absolute monarchies exist in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait with complete control over media, government branches, and law enforcement. No opposition is tolerated, and they are backed by religious lobbies that reinforce their status as custodians of cultural traditions. Despite the heavy-handed approach they largely enjoy strong support, even among the youth—the Saudi Crown Prince has long been popular among younger Saudis in particular.

As in Europe, Middle Eastern royal wealth is often hidden and difficult to discern. Estimates for the combined wealth of the Saudi royal family range from roughly $100 billion to $1.4 trillion. Other estimates put the UAE's Al Nahyan family of Abu Dhabi as the richest royal family in the world, with more than $300 billion in wealth. The royal families of Kuwait and Qatar also have fortunes often measured in the hundreds of billions.

The other Middle Eastern royal families in Oman, Jordan, and Morocco, have less influence, but still more so than in Europe, and have also withstood democratization pressures by promoting stability. During the Arab Spring, as other Middle Eastern states faced revolutions and civil wars, the monarchies and their political systems survived in place.

However, the downfall of royal families in Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, North Yemen, Libya, and Iran during the 20th century shows the risks of instability. Today, this often comes from within the royal families themselves. Saudi royal disputes regularly play out in public, including a mass purge in 2017. In 2023, Jordan's crown prince was placed under house arrest for an attempted coup, only to emerge days later and pledge loyalty to the king. The 2017–21 Qatar-Saudi Crisis meanwhile saw Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt sever diplomatic relations and blockade Qatar following accusations of supporting terrorism and supporting Iran.

While some of their positions may be precarious, royal families maintain some solidarity among them. Marriages between European royals throughout history mean that the current ruling royals in Europe are all related, similar to some Middle Eastern monarchies. Following controversy over corruption allegations, Spain's Juan Carlos meanwhile lived in exile in the UAE for two years.

Royals have also taken more active roles to support one another. The British royal family played a significant diplomatic role in supporting the Arab monarchs against the Ottoman Empire in World War I. And in 1962, the British monarchy, which had a close relationship with the Brunei monarchy, helped lobby to send British forces to the country and quash an armed rebellion, maintaining British influence in Southeast Asia.

Other royal families could still return to power. More than 20 royal families remain without a country to reign over, with Spain's monarchy being restored in

1975 and Cambodia's in 1993 the latest to be reintegrated into politics. In Romania in 1992, an estimated one million people took to the streets to welcome former King Michael, who abdicated in 1947. The daughter of former King Michael, Margareta of Romania, now lives in Elisabeta Palace in Bucharest, and other family members have taken a growing role in politics.

Bulgaria's former Tsar, Simeon II, lived in Spain after being overthrown in 1946 and returned to Bulgaria after the communist government crumbled, serving as prime minister from 2001 to 2005. Albania's Prince Leka, grandson of former King Zog I, attempted to reinstate the monarchy in a 1997 referendum but failed. In 2007, family members of former Italian King Umberto II sought damages for their exile and the return of assets, countered by Italy's government suing for damages due to royal collusion with Mussolini.

The Italian royal family's case shows how disputes among exiled royals can have geopolitical implications. Greece's royal family now lives in London, frequently appearing at royal functions. Meanwhile, members of Iran's former royal family, as well as descendants of Ethiopia's and Russia's, live in the U.S. Although there is no current method or desire to launch a political movement to put them back into power, leveraging diaspora communities' support for royalty can still help host governments wield influence through them.

Having survived fascism and communism, monarchies have largely relinquished political power in the modern liberal world order. Yet, as symbols of state continuity, some monarchs have maintained their relevance by providing long-term stability. While incompatible with communism, royalty's adaptability to democratic and fascist regimes highlights their resilience. Their ability to reinvent themselves and demonstrate their usefulness to contemporary politics may secure their survival—though their dwindling numbers suggest this will remain challenging.

By John P. Ruehl

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in December 2022.

Source: Independent Media Institute

Sex Workers In Chile Continue To Face The Consequences Of COVID-19 Without Government Assistance

A little over a year ago, WHO declared the end of the COVID-19 health emergency. The pandemic had disastrous consequences for workers, especially those in the informal sector. According to a World Bank report, the last five years will reflect the lowest figures for economic growth in the last 30 years: 40 percent of low-income countries will remain poorer than they were before the pandemic.

In Chile, 2 million jobs were lost during the pandemic. A report by the Economics Institute of the Catholic University of Chile indicates that the employment rate could only recover to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2026.

In this context, informal sector workers face an unaccounted crisis: the non-recognition of their work leaves them outside the ambit of adequate public policies for their recovery. As part of this sector, sex workers face the great limbo of the legal status of sex work in Chile: it is not prohibited, but it is not recognized as work either. Persecution is concentrated in the places where it is practiced. Herminda González, president of Fundación Margen, tells me that this option leaves only one option for the workers: the streets. From that place, the

Fundación provides the assistance that the State does not provide.

The Solidarity Fund

During the quarantine, Herminda and Nancy Gutierréz (Margen's spokesperson) took advantage of the early morning darkness to sneak into the Foundation's headquarters, where they distributed boxes of food for the sex workers. "We did it because we knew the girls were waiting," says Herminda. "And if it wasn't us, who was going to do it? Only the people help the people."

As the pandemic progressed, they decided to design protocols for safe sex. "Along with condoms, we distributed masks and latex gloves," because, despite the restrictions, the work did not stop. "There were colleagues who earned a lot of money during the pandemic," because obviously, the risk increased the value of the services. However, in any situation that meant not being able to work, the girls were completely unprotected, as they were not covered by any of the government schemes designed to protect workers recognized as such.

"Many of the sex workers support their families; they are mothers, daughters," Gonzalez tells me. In the absence of the state—which only donated food to the foundation during the entire pandemic—"the aunts," as the younger workers affectionately call the foundation's leaders, decided to create a solidarity fund for sex workers, where allies and close clients made donations that allowed them to survive the pandemic crisis.

The Solidarity Fund is still active and is used to support sex workers during the hardest times of the year, including when it is time to buy school supplies, for example.

The Irruption of the Virtual

One of the strategies to continue working during the pandemic was the leap to virtuality. "As everything evolves, so does sex work," Herminda tells me. The new generations play a fundamental role in this evolution. The range of women in sex work has expanded to include, for example, university students.

"Here in Chile, there are only the poor and the rich," says Herminda, the president of Margen "But people disguise themselves as middle class just because they can send their children to school or pay a rent." So, when in a poor household there are children who study and also someone who starts studying at a high school or university, that someone looks for the job that best suits him or

her.

Sex work allows young women to manage their time in a way that other jobs do not, but because of the clandestine situation, it does not allow them access to mortgages, loans, or retirement. The foundation believes that the legalization of sex work would allow all of this and, in addition, would put an end to the guilt that sex workers carry with them.

“Sex work is not like in the old days when it was limited to intercourse and the brothel,” Herminda tells me. Today it is very diverse: it also includes work via webcams and the telephone, as well as selling photos. “All the exchange of your body for money is sex work, but we find it hard to recognize it because of the stigma.”

*Sex Exchange for Convenience*In the early 1990s, Monsignor Alfonso Baeza, a human rights priest, was a parish priest in downtown Santiago. He would park near the church, and sex workers would come there to be blessed. The priest offered them a room in the parish to meet, urging them to organize. There, sitting at a large table while drinking tea, Herminda González heard for the first time the voices of other sex workers, talking about their children, their problems at home, at work, their happiness, and their sorrows. At that time, she also met Eliana Deltone, the first sex worker union leader in Chile.

In 1995 they held the first national meeting of sex workers and began to hold workshops, to which women came who were not sex workers, but who were interested “even in sexuality advice,” Herminda tells me. Then they organized the first “sex for convenience exchange workshop.” Amid the economic precariousness of the 1990s, “there were women who slept with the greengrocer, the butcher, the bus driver,” but they did not recognize this as sex work. “It took us years to recognize ourselves,” says González, “as dancers, we couldn’t realize that we were doing the same thing as other sex workers. It wasn’t until they began to take workshops and learn about the subject that we realized that we were doing the same thing, that maybe we weren’t trading sex for coitus but we were showing our bodies for others.” Herminda is convinced that this is a process. “It is not easy to say, ‘I am a sex worker’ because discrimination begins [there].” That’s why girls today prefer to say they are “escorts,” as if that were a university degree.

Potential Customers

Herminda says that hypocrisy is one of the main obstacles to the legalization of sex work in Chile. “Everyone is a potential client,” she says. But there is a backlash, “because they speak and decide for us. Who decides that sex workers can’t be sex workers because that’s what a woman who is more educated or has more money thinks?”

The Margen Foundation and the Angela Lina Union made great progress and were even received by the former president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet.

However, this link with the state ended after the pandemic. Herminda comments that the stigma extends to feminism. When sex workers attended the Women’s Day march wearing their dance costumes, they were singled out by other women for “promoting the objectification of the body,” says Herminda. However, she says, when the women gathered to chant “The Violator is You,” and when they did this bare-chested, then they were not accused of objectification. This moral hypocrisy creates its own discrimination.

The “aunts” of the Margen Foundation confront discrimination with actions. In the middle of the cold Santiago winter, they hand out condoms and lubricants as well as hot chocolate and tea to the workers, who are forced to be on the streets by the restrictions of the law. Although the pain and fear of having been so close to death “never goes away,” says Herminda, “the pandemic also left us with good things: the girls’ confidence in us.”

By Taroa Zúñiga Silva

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Source: Globetrotter

Tariffs Don’t Protect Jobs. Don’t Be Fooled.

Richard D. Wolff

07-11-2024 ~ Both Trump and Biden imposed high tariffs on imported products made in China and other countries. Those impositions broke with and departed from the previous half century’s policies favoring “free trade” (less or minimal government intervention in international markets). Free trade policies facilitated “globalization,” the euphemism for the post-1970 surge in U.S. corporations’ investing abroad: producing and distributing there, re-locating operations there, and merging with foreign enterprises there. Presidents before Trump had insisted that free trade plus globalization best served U.S. interests. Both Democratic and Republican administrations had enthusiastically endorsed that insistence. Dutifully performing ideological support duties, they stressed how globalization’s benefits to U.S. corporations would “trickle down” to the rest of us. Globalizing U.S. corporations used portions of their profits to reward both parties with donations and other electoral and lobbying supports.

Our last two Presidents reversed that position. Against free trade they favored multiple government interventions in international trade, especially imposing and raising tariffs. Instead of advocating free trade and globalization, they promoted economic nationalism. Like their predecessors, Trump and Biden depended on financial support from corporate America as well as votes from the employee class. Many U.S. corporations and those they enriched had shifted their profit expectations in response to the competition they faced from new, powerful non-

U.S. firms. The latter had emerged during the free-trade/globalization conditions after 1970, above all in China. U.S. firms increasingly welcomed or demanded protection from those competitors. Accordingly, they financed changes in the political winds and shifts in "public opinion" toward economic nationalism.

Trump and Biden thus endorsed pro-tariff policies that protected many corporations' profits. Those policies also appealed to those for whom economic nationalism offered ideological comforts. For example, many in the United States grasped the relative decline of the United States and its G7 allies in the global economy and the relative rise of China and its BRICS allies. They welcomed an aggressive counteraction in the forms of tariff and trade wars. Both corporations (including mass media) and their subservient politicians worked to build popular and voter support. That was needed to pass the tax, budget, subsidy, tariff, and other laws that would realize the shift to economic nationalism. A key argument held that "tariffs protect jobs." A political struggle pitted the defenders of "free trade" against those demanding "protection." Over the last decade, those defenders have been losing.

These days, most candidates and parties perform this particular ideological task for capitalism: persuading Americans that tariffs protect jobs. Note, however, that over the 50 years before around 2015, the same parties and their candidates mostly performed the opposite ideological task. Then they denounced tariffs as unnecessary, inefficient, and counterproductive government interferences. "Free international markets" would, they insisted, be much better for workers and capitalists. However, we need not and should not have been fooled then or now. Neither ideological claim is true.

Free trade profits some industries, but not others. Those that profit rely on exporting their outputs to foreign markets, invest there, or rely on importing products from there. Similarly, tariffs profit some industries (those they protect), but not others. As industries evolve and change, so do their relationships with international trade. Correspondingly, their attitudes toward free trade versus tariffs change.

Capitalist economies almost always pit pro-free trade against pro-tariff protection industries. Their battles vary from open, public, and intense to quiet and under-the-table. Their weapons include bribes, donations, and other kinds of deals offered to politicians mostly by the employers in the interested industries. Both

sides also compete to enlist the public and especially voter support—"public opinion"—in order to swing politicians their way. Employers on each side spend millions to persuade the employee class to support their side. Politicians usually split according to which side offers more donations threatens more opposition in the next election, or has spent more to shape public opinion. Each side seeks to prevail, to make government policies favor free versus tariff-protected trade. One way to achieve that is endless repetition by politicians, business leaders, journalists, and academics of one side's perspective in the hope and expectation that it becomes "common sense."

Each side's arguments are driven by their respective industries' financial self-interest, not any shared commitment to the "truth" about tariffs versus free trade. As we show below, the truth is precisely that neither tariffs nor their opposite, free trade, necessarily protect jobs. At best, both protect some jobs at the cost of losing others. The truth is that we cannot know—and thus cannot measure—all the effects on profits or jobs caused by either free trade or protectionism. So politicians cannot know what the net effect on jobs will be of either free or protected trade policies of governments.

A simple example can clarify the basic points. Chinese auto-makers currently sell high-quality electric vehicles (EVs), cars, and trucks, globally, at very competitive prices. Those EVs can be found on roadways around the world, but not in the United States. That is because, until recently, a 27.5 percent tariff was applied in the United States. For example, if a Chinese EV's port-of-entry price was, say, $30,000, it would cost a U.S. buyer $30,000 plus the 27.5 percent tariff (an additional $8,250) for a total U.S. price of $38,250. Recently, President Biden raised that tariff from 27.5 percent to 100 percent, thereby raising the Chinese EV's price for potential U.S. buyers to $60,000. The EU plans similarly to raise its tariff against Chinese EVs from 10 percent to 48 percent, thereby raising the price to potential EU buyers to $44,400.

Those tariffs protect makers of electric vehicles inside the U.S. and EU precisely because those EV makers need not add any tariff to the prices they charge. Thus, for example, if EVs made in the U.S. and EU had cost $40,000, they would have been uncompetitive with the Chinese EVs priced at $30,000. Prospects of profit for them would have been grim. With the tariffs now imposed by the U.S. and proposed by the EU, their EV makers see profit bonanzas. Makers in the EU can raise their EV price from $40,000 to, say, $43,000, and still be cheaper than

Chinese EV imports suffering the planned EU tariff and thus priced at $44,400. EV makers in the U.S. can raise their prices to, say, $50,000, sharply improving their profits while still outcompeting Chinese EVs priced at $60,000 (including the 100 percent tariff).

Barring interference from other factors (possible automation, changing tastes for cars, and so forth), we may assume that the raised tariffs increased the profits of EV makers inside the U.S. and EU. We may also assume that those tariffs also saved jobs at those U.S. EV makers. But that is *never* the end of the story. EV jobs are *not* the only jobs affected by raised tariffs on EVs.

For example, many corporations in the United States buy fleets of EVs as inputs. Many compete with corporations outside the United States who likewise buy such fleets as their inputs. The raised U.S. tariff seriously disadvantages EV fleet-buying firms inside the United States. Firms inside the United States cannot buy Chinese electric vehicles for $30,000 each. They have to pay much more for the tariff-protected U.S.-made EVs. In stark contrast, their competitors outside the United States can buy Chinese EVs at the far cheaper $30,000 price. It follows that those outside competitors can offer lower prices for whatever products they sell *because they enjoy lower (because free of tariffs) input costs*. Those firms will gain buyers for their products around the world at the expense of their inside-the-U.S. competitors.

Jobs will likely be lost in such competitively disadvantaged firms inside the United States. While raising tariffs on Chinese EVs may have protected U.S. workers at EV producers inside the United States, it also deprived other U.S. workers of jobs in other U.S. industries competitively disadvantaged by the EV tariff.

In our examples above, U.S. and EU makers of EVs can and likely will raise their prices because of tariff protection. In this way, tariffs tend to worsen inflations. Inflations in turn tend to hurt exports as rising prices lead customers to buy elsewhere. Reduced exports usually mean reduced jobs making such exports.

Still more factors shape tariffs' job effects. Often "forgotten" by tariff boosters are possible retaliations by affected other countries. Evidence already suggests retaliatory Chinese tariffs coming on imports of U.S.-made large-engine vehicles. If that happens, U.S. exports of such engines to China will shrink or end. Jobs entailed in those exports will also end, offsetting job gains from the U.S. tariffs

imposed on Chinese EVs.

Since China is the chief target of U.S. and EU tariff policies it is important to see how China can retaliate in ways that threaten large U.S. and EU job losses. China has now successfully surrounded itself with allies in the BRICS (a total of 11 countries). The economic damage inflicted upon China by U.S. tariffs incentivizes China to offset much or all of that damage by shifting to sell output instead to the world outside of the United States and the EU and especially to its BRICS partners. As China redirects its exports, that will also impact where its imports will be sourced. All those changes will affect many U.S. and EU industries and the jobs they sustain.

Honest economists shrug and plead irreducible uncertainty when asked whether tariffs will "protect" jobs. No matter how hard-pressed or bribed to give a definitive answer, honesty precludes it. Nonetheless, politicians eager to get votes by promising that a tariff they impose will protect jobs can rest easy. They will easily find economists who will give or sell them the answers they want to hear. Trump and Biden did and do.

The implications of this analysis for the U.S. working class are significant. The struggle between free traders and protectionists pits shifting alliances of capitalist employers against one another. One alliance of capitalist employers fights another to win the working class's votes. Each side promotes its false narrative about what is the best policy for jobs.

The working class should not be fooled or distracted by these free trade versus protectionism struggles among capitalists. Whoever wins them remains profit-driven first and foremost. The ultimate impact on jobs is not a priority for any of them. It never was. The working class's interest in shaping the quantity and quality of jobs can only be genuinely prioritized if society progresses beyond capitalism. That happens when employees (running democratic worker coops) replace employers (dominating hierarchical capitalist enterprises) in the driver seats of factories, offices, and stores. When employees have become their own employers, they will make the quantities and qualities of a society's jobs a key policy objective rather than a side-effect of policies focused elsewhere.

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French Elections: What The Global Left Should Learn About Defeating The Far-Right

C.J. Polychroniou

07-11-204 ~ *A united left is a formidable opponent that cannot only halt the surge of neo-fascism, but can also offer a positive and inspiring vision for the future.*

Far-right forces have gained ground across Europe, particularly in Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. In fact, the Netherlands has a new government, a coalition between far right and right, and the far right came first in the first-round of France's snap election. But fearful of the prospect of a neo-fascist and xenophobic party in government, French voters came out in record numbers and rallied not behind Ensemble—the centrist coalition led by President Emmanuel Macron—but behind the coalition of left forces calling themselves the New Popular Front (NFP), delivering in the end a blow to Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) which had made historic gains in the first round and topped the poll with 33.15 percent of the votes cast. NFP came in first in the run-off election, with 188 seats, but falling short of majority.

France's snap parliamentary election results help us to make sense of the surge of the far right and offer valuable lessons for the left all over the world, including the U.S. where a centrist democrat and a wannabe dictator face off in November.

First, it is crystal clear that the main reason for the rise of Europe's far right, authoritarian, and ethnonationalist forces is the status quo of neoliberal capitalism. The neoliberal counterrevolution that begun in the early 1980s and undermined every aspect of the social democracy model that had characterized European political economy since the end of the Second World War has unleashed utterly dangerous political forces that envision a return to a golden era of traditional values built around the idea of the nation by fomenting incessant and socially destructive change.

True to its actual aims and intent, neoliberalism has exacerbated capitalism's tendency to concentrate wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer, reduced the well-being of the population through mass privatization and commercialization of public services, hijacked democracy, decreased the overall functionality of state agencies, and created a condition of permanent insecurity. Moreover, powerful global economic governance institutions—namely, the unholy trinity of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization—took control of the world economy and became instrumental in the spreading of neoliberalism by shaping and influencing the policies of national governments. It is under these conditions that ethnonationalism, racism, and neofascism resurfaced in Europe, and in fact all over the world.

In France, the rise of the far right coincided with President François Mitterand's

turn to austerity in the 1980s as his government fell prey to the monetarist-neoliberal ideology of the Anglo-Saxon world. Once Mitterand made his infamous neoliberal turn, the rest of the social democratic regimes in southern Europe (Greece under Andreas Papandreou, Italy under Bettino Craxi, Spain under Felipe Gonzalez, and Portugal under Mario Soares) tagged along, and the eclipse of progressivism was underway.

Less than two decades later, reactionary political forces had emerged throughout Europe as extreme neoliberal economic policies had paved the way for the emergence of political tendencies with an eye to exploiting the catastrophic social and economic impacts of neoliberalism by tapping into a huge reservoir of public anger and discontent with the establishment. Indeed, as neoliberalism tightened its grip on domestic society, far right forces gained more ground. The surge of Marine Le Pen's RN occurs against the backdrop of Macron's obsession with converting France into a full-fledged neoliberal society.

A crucial lesson offered by the results of France's snap election (as well as by Labour's victory in UK) is that economics remains the rule of the day. Political forces that seek to promote multiculturalism and social rights while pushing at the same time the neoliberal economic agenda will, in the end, get the short end of the stick.

Initially, Macronism was a strategy of trying to appeal to a wide range of center-left and center-right voters by defending secular social rights and even making gestures to LGBTQ people but always with an eye to transforming the social contract and freeing up the "energy of the workforce." Macron's "progressive liberalism" philosophy worked up to a point. It backfired in a big way along the way when workers, farmers, and minority groups realized that their economic future was at stake by Macron's pro-market policies—and that was clearly far more important to them than concerns over social issues and even the environment itself. The "yellow vest" movement that rocked Macron's presidency in 2018 and left an "indelible mark" on French politics was the first indication that any set of government reforms that carried a disproportionate impact on the working and middle classes was going to be severely challenged.

In the end, Macronism even lost the support it initially had from women's and LGBTQ organizations, and not simply because Macron's stance on social policies hardened along the way as part of an opportunistic and desperate attempt on his

part to stir conservative voters away from the arms of the far right. It is worth pointing out here that, unlike most social movements which are male-dominated, the "yellow vest" movement was distinguished by the "high proportion of women" that took part in the protests. It was economics that drove French women out into the streets, demonstrating against Macron government's unjust tax reform measures.

Again, the lesson here is that voters are unlikely to be deceived by the sort of political rhetoric that emphasizes diversity, multiculturalism, and environmental concerns while policies are being pursued in favor of a brutal neoliberal economic setting. Social rights under neoliberalism is a mirage. This is a critical lesson for all left forces in an age in which multiculturalism and the politics of identity play such a prominent ideological role. We see the counter effects of this ultimately "pro-capitalist-stratagem" in the U.S. where voters without college degrees, which amount to over 60 percent of the population, are overwhelmingly on Trump's camp. A similar tendency can be seen in the Latino community as a growing segment of Hispanic voters are joining Trump's GOP party.

For the benefit of political expediency and ideological integrity alike, the left should stick to its universalist traditions while remaining of course sensitive to diversity and particularism. But it has no business playing the game of identity politics that has become the hallmark of corporate capitalism and of the liberal political establishment. Last thing we need is a cultural and post-material left morphed into a movement vying for space in a capitalist dominated universe.

More important, as the unique experience of the formation of a coalition of leftist parties in France for the snap parliamentary election attests, the left's best hope for making major inroads in today's western societies, which are unquestionably highly complex and diversified, is by introducing and promoting an attractive yet realistic economic agenda that addresses the immediate concerns of average people but without losing sight of the broader objective of the leftist vision which is none other than social transformation.

The "shocking" success of the New Popular Front in the run-off election in France did not materialize simply because French voters wanted to halt the rise of the far right to power, which is the mainstream interpretation. French voters backed NFP for two key reasons: first, because they finally saw the left leaving behind factionalism and, second, because they were lured by its radical manifesto.

For the first time since the 1930s, not only has an anti-fascist alliance been revived in France but there is now hope for the future of the left because of its economic vision, assuming of course that the left can stay united beyond the election. And this is perhaps the greatest lesson leftist forces should draw from the French snap elections: a united left is a formidable opponent that cannot only halt the surge of neo-fascism but can also offer real hope for a humane and sustainable future.

Source: https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/french-elections-lessons

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The Sahel Stands Up And The World Must Pay Attention

Vijay Prashad

07-10-2024 ~ On July 6 and 7, the leaders of the three main countries in Africa's Sahel region—just south of the Sahara Desert—met in Niamey, Niger, to deepen

their Alliance of Sahel States (AES). This was the first summit of the three heads of state of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, who now constitute the Confederation of the AES. This was not a hasty decision, since it had been in the works since 2023 when the leaders and their associates held meetings in Bamako (Mali), Niamey (Niger), and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso); in May 2024, in Niamey, the foreign ministers of the three countries had developed the elements of the Confederation. After meeting with General Abdourahmane Tiani (Niger), foreign minister Abdoulaye Diop (Mali) said in May, "We can consider very clearly today that the Confederation of the Alliance of Sahel States is born."

There is a straight line that runs from the formation of this Confederation to the pan-African sentiments that shaped the anti-colonial movements in the Sahel over 60 years ago (with the line from the African Democratic Rally formed in 1946 led by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and through the Sawaba party in Niger formed in 1954 and led by Djibo Bakary). In 1956, Bakary wrote that France, the old colonial ruler, needs to be told that the "overwhelming majority of the people" want their interests served and not to use the country's resources "to satisfy desires for luxury and power." To that end, Bakary noted, "We need to grapple with our problems *by* ourselves and *for* ourselves and have the will to solve them first on our own, later with the help of others, but always taking account of our African realities." The promise of that earlier generation was not met, largely due to France's continued interventions in preventing the political sovereignty of the region and in tightening its grip on the monetary policy of the Sahel. But the leaders—even those who were tied to Paris—continued to try and build platforms for regional integration, including in 1970 the Liptako-Gourma Authority to develop the energy and agricultural resources in the three countries.

Departure From Subordination

The current trend emerged because of the deep frustration in these countries with a host of problems, largely associated with the interventions of France. These include: the creation of a dangerous situation of al-Qaeda militancy fostered by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's destruction of Libya (2011); the failure of the French military intervention to stem that militancy and the anger at the civilian casualties due to the French and U.S. military operations in the three countries; the use of the French exchequer to benefit from all financial transactions in the three countries; and the manipulation of anti-terrorist discourse to create an anti-migration infrastructure to benefit Europe more than

Africa.

These frustrations resulted in five coup d'états in the three countries since 2020. The three leaders of the countries are all products of these coups, although they have drawn in civilian leaders to assist them. What unites them personally is that two of them are very young (Assimi Goïta of Mali was born in 1983, while Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso was born in 1988), all of them have had military careers, each of them seems to be informed by the frustrations against the French that they share with each other and with their populations, and none of them has any patience for the pro-Western "stability" politics of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In January 2024, the AES states said that they would not seek to rejoin ECOWAS after their expulsions over the past few years. "Under the influence of foreign powers and betraying its founding principles," the AES leaders said, ECOWAS "has become a threat to member states and peoples." ECOWAS was founded in 1975 as part of the pan-African dynamic and in close association with the Organization of African States (OAS), set up under the leadership of Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah in 1963. ECOWAS expelled the three Sahel countries because of the military coups, when in fact ECOWAS itself was the product of several military Generals who ran their countries (such as Nigeria's Yakubu Gowon, Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma, and Ghana's Ignatius Kutu Acheampong). At the founding of ECOWAS, General Acheampong said, "The major purpose of the formation of the community was to remove centuries of division and artificial barriers imposed on West Africa from outside, and to recreate together the kind of homogeneous society which existed before the colonialists invaded our shores." At the Niamey summit to create the Confederation, the leaders said that they would no longer want to return to ECOWAS even though they have laid out plans for transitions to civilian rule.

Economics of the Confederation

In his powerful speech at the closing of the AES summit, Burkina Faso's Traoré said that the "imperialists see Africa as an empire of slaves" and that they believe that "Africans belong to them, our lands belong to them, our subsoils belong to them." Niger's uranium lights up Europe, he said, but its own streets remain dark. This, Traoré noted, has to change. At the summit, agreements were made to allow for the free movement of people and goods, to create a stabilization fund in place of dependence upon the International Monetary Fund, and to develop an

investment bank rather than rely upon the World Bank.

In February 2024, the UN Development Program (UNDP) released the *Sahel Human Development Report 2023*, which noted the immense wealth of the region that sits alongside the poverty of its people. These countries are blessed with reserves of gold and uranium, lithium and diamonds, but it is largely Western multinational mining companies that have been leeching the profits, including through illicit accounting practices. The UNDP report notes that the Sahel has "one of the world's highest solar production capacities—13.9 billion kWh/y compared to the total global consumption of 20 billion kWh/y," while the World Economic Forum notes that the region is capable of earning hundreds of billions of dollars from the export of health foods produced in the Great Green Wall that runs from Senegal to Ethiopia (such as Balanites, Baobab, Moringa, and Shea). These are untapped potentials for the people of the region.

In 1956, Niger's Bakary had written that the people of Sahel needed to fix their problems by themselves and for themselves. In November 2023, the government of Mali hosted a meeting of ministers of the economy from the three countries along with experts from the region. They spent three days developing innovative projects in common. But none of this can advance, they said, in the context of the sanctions placed on them by their neighbors in ECOWAS. Sixty-three years after independence, said Niger's Minister of Finance Boubacar Saïdou Moumouni "our countries are still seeking true independence." This journey into the Confederation is one step in that process.

By Vijay Prashad

Author Bio: This article was produced by Globetrotter.

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Source: Globetrotter

Photographers’ (Grand) Daughter

Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

Photography played a central role in the life of my family when I was growing up in Curaçao. This was certainly not the case for most others in the nineteen fifties and early sixties as it is today, when everyone carries a camera in their pocket and visual culture dominates our life. Then it was a matter of privilege that not many had.

Paíto, as we called my maternal grandfather Benjamin Gomes Casseres, began to photograph as a young man before 1910, and continued to do so throughout his life. Undoubtedly, he had the time and resources to devote himself to his passion of black and white photography. His many photo albums attest to his outstanding talent as an artist.

As the co-owner of a local camera store, my father, Frank Mendes Chumaceiro, and my mother, Tita Mendes Chumaceiro, had access to the latest equipment, allowing my father to become a pioneering cinematographer on the island, while my mother took color slides, having shifted her artistic talents from painting to photography. Through the years, she won many prizes with her color slides, and her photos of the island's different flowers were chosen for a series of stamps of the Netherlands Antilles in 1955.

Together, my parents edited my father's films into documentaries with soundtracks of music and narration and graphically designed titles and credits. Sometimes these films were commissioned by various organizations and government institutions, including the documentation of visits by members of the Dutch royal family. Movie screenings were regularly held in our living room and at the houses of family and friends who would invite my parents to show their work, as well as at some public events. That was our entertainment in the nineteen fifties, long before television came to the island.

Both my brother Fred and I owned simple box cameras from a young age, working up to SLR cameras as we grew older. Still, I did not take photography seriously as an art until the digital age, when I began to feel I could finally have more control over my output. That was in 2005, when I got my first digital point- and-shoot camera, gradually professionalizing my equipment through the years.

My father and mother with their cameras on top of the Christoffel, 1956, photographer unknown

It was only recently that I began to think about the many ways my rich photographic lineage impacted my life and the directions I have taken as an artist, how it has influenced the development of my own photography. I have discerned six ways that account for this influence by my background – ranging from the circumstances in which the photographs were produced and viewed, to the attitudes that underlie the practice of photography as an art.

A. A treasure trove of photographs

Countless photo albums could be found in our home in Curaçao, with photos by both my parents in their younger years, and later by my brother and me.
After Paíto died in 1955, my mother inherited his albums with family photos, as well as albums with larger prints of his more artistic photographs. Paíto's family albums documented his leaving Curaçao for Cuba with my grandmother in 1912, where he joined another member of the Curaçao Sephardic Jewish community in buying a sugar cane plantation, which seemed a good business opportunity that also sparked his adventurous spirit.

My mother, Tita, her sister Luisa, and their much younger brother Charlie were born in Havanna. Paíto took their photos from infancy through their teenage years, mostly studio photos often printed in sepia, with the children dressed up for costume parties and other special occasions, posing with their toys and bicycles and with their friends. Paíto would set up his studio in a closed balcony in their house in Havanna with special lighting and curtains or a large painting of a landscape in the background.

The albums also contain photos of their excursions to the beach, where the children learned to swim at an early age, unlike their Curaçao agemates of the same social class, as well as many photographs of trips to the sugar cane plantation, a day's train ride from Havanna, showing various stages of sugar cane growth and sugar production. With the fall of sugar prices in the twenties, the family was forced to move to a small town much closer to the plantation, where life would be less expensive. Those were exciting years for my mother, when they would play tennis on an improvised court, and ride horses into the fields – years that laid the foundation for her love of nature.

In 1929 my grandparents, returned to Curaçao with their Cuban-born children – totally bankrupt. With the help of his extended Curaçao family, my grandfather was able to establish himself again in business. Here he continued to photograph – landscapes and people in the Curaçao countryside, and especially his grandchildren playing in the yard of their house in Schaarloo, as well on his photographic excursions in nature.

The many photo albums in our house encouraged the ritual of listening to our family members' stories, to imagine growing up in a different country. In today's era of digital photography and especially after the cellphone camera came into popular use, every event in life is recorded, and immediately shared on social media. But do we preserve these photographs? Do they remain for others to see, in later generations? Do we view them together, telling their stories?

I am fortunate to have grown up with such a wealth of photographs to document our family history, to bring back memories that have strengthened my sense of who I am, that have fostered a sense of security and connection to the past and to a loving family. It is a sense of grounding. Clearly, many others who grew up in less secure material and emotional circumstances, did not have the same visual record of their families and of their own early years, especially people whose lives were uprooted and had to flee, leaving all visual relics behind.

B. The photographic excursion

The many Sunday trips with Paíto to the Curaçao countryside were what planted the seeds of my own spirit of exploration in nature. He took photos of us, his grandchildren, climbing heaps of salt mined from the island's saltpans or resting under the huge mango or coconut trees in the shady groves. On these trips Paíto

also took photos of old abandoned plantation houses, the ruins of cisterns or stone bridges from the times of slavery, and of the North Coast where the wild sea would splash against the rocks.

Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

Access to many of the island's most beautiful places indeed depended on privilege – to have the right connections to people who owned private plantations, to get permission to enter what was private property and closed to most of the island's population, often due to racial discrimination. All that, added to the fact that photography in those years was an expensive undertaking, and many could not afford the equipment, the development, and printing of the exposed film.

Owning a car that allowed one to travel on the dirt roads outside the city was also a question of financial privilege. Paíto had a chauffeur who drove his shiny black car and who would clean off the dust and mud when he returned. I don't remember if Paíto drove himself within the city, but on these excursions, it was Marty, the chauffeur who did the driving, allowing Paíto to fully concentrate on his photography and not to worry about losing the way or getting stuck on the bumpy country roads.

Our photographic excursions continued with my own parents, when they made documentary films about the island, while my mother would take her beautiful color slides. Particularly the nature film "*Rots en Water*" in 1956, took us to many wild places on the island – to climb the Christoffel for the first time, the highest

hill on the island, before there was a park that laid easier access roads; to explore the cave of Hato with a guide carrying a torch of a dried datu organ-pipe cactus; and to visit the eastern tip of the island, where few would get permission to enter.

My own love of the countryside led to my becoming an avid hiker, going on treks especially in the deserts of Israel, where I moved after attending college in the US. It was while hiking that I started to photograph more seriously, as an art. I was excited to discover how framing through the lens allowed me to penetrate deeper into the landscape, into the textures of the rocks, the interstices between them, as I sought abstractions and a sense of place.

C. Being the subject of the photograph

I was the only girl among Paíto's four grandchildren. He loved to say, in Spanish, "*tres varones y una hembra*", three males and one female, terms that refer to the gender of animals but were clearly meant in an affectionate way and made me feel special. His fourth grandson was born just a month after his death and was named after him.

Photograph of me, by Benjamin Gomes Casseres, around 1952

As the only girl, I was his favorite subject. Perhaps also because I was always a calm and introverted child, able to concentrate on what I was doing without being

aware of his photographing me. He did not have to ask me to pose, which might have been annoying. He captured so many different faces of me – pensive, deep in thought, playful and mischievous, or bursting out with joy – as if he could see deep inside me. Through his photographs, I came to know myself.

The attention I got from being photographed so frequently gave me a sense of being loved, being special. That feeling was strengthened by the home movies that my parents took of me dancing my improvisations to the records playing on our gramophone, and of my brother and I riding our bikes in the yard, walking on stilts, or acrobatically climbing between two walls in a narrow passage. Seeing those movies through the years reminded us of that love, while also shaping our memories of childhood.

Photograph of me, by Benjamin Gomes Casseres, around 1952

D. Understanding Photography as Art

In the summer of 2006, only a few months before my uncle Charlie died, I interviewed him about Paíto's photographic practice. He made a drawing of the camera Paíto used in his earlier years as a photographer, the Graflex – a pioneering camera with extension bellows. Paíto would send his photos to be developed in a laboratory in England and he drew lines on the contact prints, indicating where they should be cropped, then sent them back to England with the negatives to be enlarged. Long before Photoshop, he would ask the laboratory

to add a sky from a different photo to one of his landscapes. It must have taken a very long time to get the finished photos when mail was mostly carried by ship across the Atlantic.

Paíto's photographs were admired immensely, though I am not sure if anyone else who was not a family member or friend would see them, as his photographs were never part of a public exhibit – they were in family photo albums, to be viewed only in intimate circumstances. I do not even remember seeing them framed on the wall. Paíto was known in our circles, the Sephardic Jewish community, as one who photographed beautifully – though I am not sure if he was referred to as an "artist". I always understood his work was different from the snapshots that others made, I could tell there was a lot more to these black and white photographs that were carefully composed, beautifully capturing a different era, mystery, serenity, and longing.

Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

As a child, I would observe how he worked with depth and devotion – never cutting corners. I noticed his patience, measuring light with an external light meter, figuring out the exposures, choosing the right angle, waiting for the sun to come out from behind the clouds. It was not a question of capturing the moment – but of looking deeper and further into a place and time – all for just one final image. Then he would select the best shots from his many prints, pasting them in his albums, after carefully drawing guidelines on the pages.

I must have understood at an early age, that is how you do art. That this is the seriousness with which the artist works. I am also one who goes through a long process to arrive at the final work, though I don't believe I have the patience and sense of perfection he had.

Perhaps I also developed a feel for composition by looking at his photographs, intuitively understanding what made them special, as well as how he captured a feeling of mystery, space and distance in his work. I certainly noticed his subject matter – a romantic preference for remnants of the past, old plantation houses, ruins of forts and towers, a lonely house in the fields, the peaceful atmosphere in the old groves of tall, shady trees – the *hòfis* – that he set as the goal of his

excursions, ships sailing away into the distance, as well as his attraction to the old crafts, trades and festivals that were slowly disappearing from the island.

E. Witnessing teamwork

My parents' editing setup – photo by Frank M. Chumaceiro

My parents started out by making family films and went on to create a large body of mostly documentary films. Their studio was in our living room and study, complete with editing machine, sound equipment, projector, and portable screen. They were assisted by the writer Sini van Iterson in their very early days and later by others, most notably Jan Doedel as narrator and sound technician.

"Curafilms" is what they called their joint venture. The titles always said: "*by Frank and Tita M. Chumaceiro*", without specifying the functions of director, cinematographer, editor, art director, sound designer. Though it was my father who held the film camera and physically spliced the film in the editing machine on the desk in his study, my mother was a full participant in all the stages of production – sharing her creative insights; scouting locations; discussing the editing options and coming up with new ideas. To have parents doing creative work, and especially when they do it together, was not the norm in the environment I grew up in.

In many ways it was also a project of the entire family, as our parents always shared their ideas with us, and most of the time, we participated in the search for locations and were present at the filming of the movies that involved excursions

to lesser-known places of the island. Even when I was still in elementary school, they would share their thoughts about the making of each film with us, and we were there to watch the film-in-progress when they projected it its various stages on the screen in our living room. However, when they worked at night, we had to go to sleep, and I was upset I could not be part of the action.

I learned from my parents the benefits and pleasures of teamwork, even though I am a loner, preferring to do all the work by myself, not because I need to get all the credit, but rather out of a need to be self-sufficient. When I was a curator, and the director of the Antea Gallery for feminist art that I founded in Jerusalem, together with another artist, Nomi Tannhauser, I worked closely with the artists we exhibited, as well as with other curators, when it was a co-curated exhibit. There is a tremendous joy in working together, inspiring each other, and the feeling of satisfaction in completing a shared project, when the finished work is more important than the ego.

Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

F. The photographer as both outsider and insider

Studying Paíto's photographs, I realize that what made them so remarkable is that he saw beyond the familiar, exploring the boundaries of what is seen with the eyes, what it means, what it evokes, seeking to see the aura of his subject.
It is an act of looking deeper and further into space and time. In his photographs of ruins and relics he conjures a whole era that once was and is no more; in his closeups he penetrates deeper into the details of what is; and in photos of his landscapes and those of the ships he loved to photograph, he looks out into the distance, past the horizon.

The act of photographing required him to take a step back, to look from the outside, at a distance, with the attitude of the outsider. But the photographic act also required him to penetrate beyond the surface, to have the intimacy of the insider, to look lovingly, to acknowledge the other as a subject. In other words, his photography shows that he was both insider and outsider.

With this realization of the outsider/insider stance that is inherent in the practice of my grandfather's photography, I have come to better understand my own relation to the medium, being myself both an insider and outsider to my native Curaçao, which I left in 1965, and where I return only as a visitor.
I arrive at the island with the eyes of the outsider – even being a bit of an outsider as I was growing up – but with an insider's familiarity. I am searching for something – perhaps of the past, perhaps of the hidden secrets that eluded me as a child yet continue to fascinate me today. As I photograph the island, I deepen my vision as outsider/insider as I develop my art, seeking to look beyond the

surface, into the interstices, deep into the unconscious – thankful for everything my photographic lineage has given me.

Photograph by Benjamin Gomes Casseres

Jerusalem, May 21,2024

For my own photographs, see www.ritamendesflohr.com