Digging Up The Roots Of Human Culture

Deborah Barsky

11-28-2024 ~ *What led humans on the unique path of cultural development? And can we do anything useful with newly reconstructed histories of this process?*

Culture is central to defining humanity. Throughout history, many definitions have been proposed to describe what we mean when we talk about *culture*, leading to considerable confusion.

The word "culture" was once reserved to designate the customs and behaviors of particular groups of people in specific regions and timeframes. In recent years, however, definitions concerning *what is and what is not culture* have widened considerably, to the point where "culture" is now used to describe the behaviors of numerous life forms. For example, it has become common to refer to culture when describing the social structures of [sperm whales](#) and [other animals](#), including [insects](#).

But while animal culture denotes behaviors that are learned and socially transmitted, human cultural practices go further, transforming these behaviors into coded systems that are reproduced within specific group settings. This explains the emergence of *tradition*—a key element of culture that seems exclusive to humans. Traditions provide abstract mechanisms through which humans *symbolically* assimilate the concept of identity over time.

This deeply symbolic derivation is only observed in humans. Human societies imbue culture with a network of meanings that can be shared and understood symbolically by individuals *belonging* to a particular social structure (family,

tribe, community, and nation). The further we go back in time, the more difficult it becomes to reestablish the abstract (contingent) connections that once linked these symbols to their meanings.

Over time, human culture has not only included the concrete manifestations of extrasomatic survival strategies but also encompassed abstract notions that are barely perceptible in archeological records.

The emergence of stone tools [more than 3 million years ago](#) marks the birth of culture in the human lineage. When the first *Homo habilis* remains were discovered at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, in the early 1960s, its name, which means *handyman*, was based on the idea that this hominin was the first toolmaker. This justified its placement at the root of the human family tree: the first species of the genus *Homo*.

However, this anthropocentric denomination proved to be short-lived. [As early as the 1970s](#), the probability that other genuses, like [Australopithecines and *Paranthropus*](#), were also making tools, came to light in some archeological records. This likelihood continues to be [supported by new data](#), including discoveries of sites yielding stone tools that predate the emergence of *H. habilis*.

Because [*they were systematically made using techniques that had to be learned and shared communally*](#), these activities meet the standard definition of culture used by cultural anthropologists. Furthermore, the repetitive technologies employed to make stone tools are defined as traditions, adding further weight toward culture. From this stage forward, for a period spanning almost the entire evolutionary trajectory of our genus (some 2.8 million years), stone toolkits provide virtually the only material evidence that catalogs [successive phases of human cultural evolution](#) leading to the present.

Ancient stone tools are essential for tracking cultures and their interactions. In studying them, we can see how [*culture evolves on uneven pathways on a cumulative trajectory*](#). As human societies grew and sharpened their technological capacity, their cultural repertoire expanded, a process characterized not only by the empirical remains of their material culture but also by increasingly elaborate symbolic behaviors that—we logically infer—mirror the emergence of human consciousness.

The complex interplay of inter- and intra-human population exchanges and the

capacity for learning, along with curiosity and inventiveness, have combined through time to create our species' current state. Despite the fragmentary nature of archeological records, studying ancient stone toolkits brings to light precious information allowing us to recognize culture in the deep past. Lithic specialists, for example, identify and describe the specific stylistic traits and chains of production in the toolkits, permitting scientific inferences that contribute to the knowledge about our cognitive evolution.

Archeologists combine "cultural" data with fossil genomics to track and compare hominin lineages and reconstruct the [2.8 million-year-old story of our genus](#). They are seeing a braided account of populations distinguished by their cultural manifestations and divided into groups with divergent species across continents. Today, however, with only one species of *Homo* remaining on the planet (*H. sapiens*), the supposed intra-human differences no longer have any biological foundation and have been laid bare for what they are: purely symbolic cultural constructions.

Parallels are drawn to compare human expressions of culture and analogous behaviors in other life forms. This is demonstrated in primate studies and has often been recognized in the pioneering work of [Jane Goodall](#) in Gombe National Park, Tanzania, during the 1960s, when she observed wild chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) modifying branches and using them as tools to probe for termites in termite mounds. Some believe these observations could serve as a template for early hominin toolmaking behavior, a hypothesis supported by the [close genetic proximity of chimpanzees to humans](#) and their apparent physical similarities. [Primate toolmaking capacity continues to be explored](#) in the wild and in captivity, yielding probing results.

Interestingly, other animals, such as crows, practice surprisingly similar behaviors, also modifying leaves to probe into crevices to retrieve insects, and [even inventing compound tools](#). These "[crow tools](#)" are uncannily similar to those made by chimpanzees; the manufacturing processes, aims, and outcomes are also comparable.

Undoubtedly, there is a considerable gap separating the degree to which humans have developed material and immaterial cultures and the behaviors we observe in other animals. Through time, only humans have developed toolmaking into a fundamental adaptive strategy resulting in the techno-dependent species we have

become. More importantly, *only humans imbue their manufactured objects and behaviors with symbolically relevant identitarian meaning.*

Language is a central pillar in any discussion about human culture and its origins; its emergence has been linked to the evolution of stone tool technologies. As early *Homo* reaped the benefits of their toolmaking capacity, they also increased their ability to compete with other animals for resources *and* these advantages gave them more free time to develop innovative ways to expand their benefits. Through time, successive hominin ancestors invented new and increasingly complex toolkits, requiring individuals to spend more time learning to make them. This process eventually came to depend on vocal communication strategies.

Paleoanthropologists have demonstrated that the cerebral and anatomical configurations necessary for spoken language could have resulted from changes in craniofacial features occurring over millions of years, as early hominins adapted to upright stature and bipedal locomotion. As hominins came to rely on specific kinds of stone tools, the conditions that *made language physically possible* also led to its selection and development as an advantageous adaptive culture-sharing strategy.

When we think about what is unique about human culture, we often consider technology as central to characterizing civilizations. Technologies have evolved over time to synchronize culture in a way that assimilates individuals into discrete (but potentially huge) collaborative social units; in doing so, it plays a vital role in the mental construction of both personal and shared identities.

Sharing culture and technological know-how creates a common sense of time. Museums, historical sites, and fictional history present the past through symbols of progress or failure and thus serve to chart a shared timeline. Although archeological records correspond to a series of sequential stages—advancing our species through a process of "progress"—there is no inherent hierarchy to these developments, either at the biological or the cultural levels.

For those educated within a cultural framework that explains prehistory as a linear and codependent set of chronological milestones—whose successive stages are understood by conjured logical systems of cause and effect—this outlook is going to take time to be accepted. It takes an intellectual leap to reject such hierarchical constructions of prehistory and to perceive the past as *a system of*

nonsynchronous events closely tied to the [shifting ecological and biological phenomena](#).

This endeavor, however, allows people to recognize and use the lessons offered by the past. Notably, the fact that complexity of modern human culture results from baseline learning processes bolstered through time by biosocial adaptations.

The long-term processes involved in human techno-selection have been compared to Darwinian natural selection: like biological evolution, technosocial innovations can emerge and persist, or remain latent in the human repertory. When specific conditions arise, they can be selected and, if successful, [be developed into defining aspects of the human condition](#).

At each stage of evolution, latent technological capacities exist within the structure of cultural variability; in different regions or time frames, they are selected, used, and refined, leading human groups to choose divergent evolutionary pathways. Refining these skills can even trigger technological revolutions; when the changes lead to positive results, they can set off wider cultural transformations in the populations that use them.

Culture evolves along diachronic trends. Distinct evolutionary stages occur (or not) in different areas of the world, sometimes in very divergent chronological frameworks. Humans have learned to adapt to rapid cumulative technological change by developing complex social behaviors as an adaptive response that favors the survival of our species. This process may have started gradually, but with the accumulation of breakthroughs, it continues in leaps and bounds into the present day.

Triggering a social response that could evolve in parallel to technological progress resulted in the emergence and sharpening of cultural traditions and identities, springboarding our genus toward exponential increases in social complexity. The archeological records and our own intuitive cerebral processes preserve the memory of our acquired anatomical and cultural developments. They are two sides of the same coin that evolved throughout human prehistory and beyond.

Like other primates, humans are social animals, and as individuals, we need to learn, imitate, and emulate "acceptable" behaviors within specific contexts. Culture represents the set of norms transmitted from generation to generation

and dictates how individuals must behave to maintain social balance. Humanity shares and exchanges culture, but over time, we have also learned to exploit the constructed sets of cultural norms that define the social unit we belong to and justify the exclusion of people living in less favorable situations. Humanity uses culture to invent differences between people with identical biological makeup, needs, and desires.

We have an increasingly useful 7-million-year-old global data set to better understand ourselves and how to survive and improve our well-being. With time, it will be increasingly recognized that using this information as a reference and planning tool is advantageous for practically every endeavor.

By Deborah Barsky

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Defeating Trumpism With A People's Agenda

C.J. Polychroniou

11-27-2024 ~ *We should raise walls of resistance as much as we can. More important, though, we should demand from the democratic forces to adopt a socio-economic agenda that puts people's needs above corporate interests.*

A clear consensus has emerged that the economy was the key factor behind Trump's stunning victory. However, that may not be a very accurate description about what led a disaffected electorate wanting to see Trump back in the White House as the U.S. economy had been in a rather good shape from the second quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2024 and was in fact outperforming all other advanced economies by a wide margin. Indeed, surveys had consistently shown that the majority of voters had negative views on the economy at large, thus revealing a disconnect between economic numbers and public sentiment. Unemployment was the lowest it had been in decades, consumer spending was up, and inflation had cooled off. Yet voters still thought the economy was trash.

The U.S economic system does stink, no matter what the numbers show, and the political system is totally dysfunctional, which explains why so many voters were not fazed by Democrats' core message that Trump posed a threat to democracy. They were probably wondering where democracy was to be found when economic elites run the show. Forty-five years of neoliberal economics have exacerbated capitalism's inherent tendencies toward economic inequality, created a permanent state of economic insecurity, and led to the rise of an oligarchy.

The United States is the most unequal society in the developed world. The rich are growing richer with every passing year while the middle class shrinks, and the poor are left to their own fate for survival. Massive social inequalities and economic disparities destroy trust and confidence in government and leave people thinking that the future is unavoidably grim. This is the primary reason for the rise of ethno-nationalism and authoritarian populism in the developed world, including of course Trumpism in the United States. It is the disastrous socio-

economic and political consequences of neoliberalism that produce feelings of neglect, powerlessness and anger and lead voters in turn to cast their ballots for demagogues like Donald Trump who promise a return to a golden era.

The irony is that while Trump is an authoritarian bully who wishes to use the iron fist of the state to rollback immigration and crush social agendas and even those who oppose him, his economic views are overall staunchly pro-market and outrageously neoliberal. In that regard, there is nothing fascistic about Trump when it comes to the economy. Statism lies at the heart of fascist ideology. The state is the all-powerful entity for fascists. The question of state-controlled planning of the economy is of paramount importance to fascism. For fascists, the state should not control all the means of production, as is the case with traditional socialism, but should dominate them.

Trump's proposals for the economy are seen as a mixed bag. That's because while he has proclaimed himself a champion for deregulation, he is in favor of protectionist trade policies. But Trump's trade policy should not fool people that he is not a neoliberal. With protectionist trade policies, Trump, as with the way he runs his own business, only sees the short-term advantages in economic policy. Moreover, protectionist trade policy does not depart from neoliberalism. As has been acutely pointed out by British political economist [Tom Wraight](#), Trump simply uses "the coercive power of the state to force other nations to conform to market-based economic logic."

Trump has promised an anti-regulation blitz from Day One upon his return to the White House on virtually all aspects of the economy, including environmental and public health regulations. After spending months lying to voters about his knowledge of [Project 2025](#), Trump has picked scores of people who worked on this ultra-reactionary policy manifesto for top posts in his administration. The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 agenda for the economy, if fully implemented, would create a far more unequal and harsher society as it entails policies that will lead to massive cuts on all social programs, including Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program and food assistance, and calls for massive disinvestment in public services and a host of new tax cuts for wealthy households and corporations.

Project 2025 is the ultra-right wing game plan for the full completion of the neoliberal economic vision and political nightmare that started nearly half a

century ago. It will produce far greater social dislocation and greater economic anxiety than any other time since the onset of the neoliberal counterrevolution. Most of those who voted for Trump on the basis of their perceptions about the direction of the economy and their belief that [the country is on the wrong track](#) will be deeply disturbed by the new economic and social realities that will emerge in the United States during the second Trump reign and will hopefully rethink their support for Trumpism. The problem is that the Democratic Party is either incapable or unwilling to offer citizens a new vision for the United States, one that will end the rule of oligarchy, restore democracy, and put people and the planet above profit.

Here are some policies that should be included in a socio-economic agenda for the specific needs of the people in the twentieth-first century United States of America:

1. Implementing Universal Health Coverage (UHC). That is, a publicly administered system that guarantees that all people have access to the full range of quality health services when and where they need them. Financing of UHC could come entirely from broad-based tax revenues. Coverage would be universal and automatic. Covered services would include inpatient, outpatient, dental, mental health, and long-term health, as well as prescription drugs. All three levels of the U.S. government (federal, state, and local) would be involved in the health care system.

2. Getting rid of all challenges and obstacles of union organizing, which include making illegal threats to close a plant if workers select a union to represent them and threatening workers with loss of jobs or benefits if they join a union. Current U.S. law makes it difficult for workers to join unions and even excludes certain categories of workers.

3. An industry-level approach to collective bargaining with active participation in social dialogue. An industry-level approach to collective bargaining will secure the best economic compensation possible for workers.

4. Undertaking a large-scale federal program of social housing construction. The United States faces a deep and persistent housing affordability crisis that demands active government intervention. It is beyond naïve belief to think that the market can fix the housing crisis. Repairing the house market with market-

oriented solutions such as [liberalizing zoning rules](#) and other regulations have never worked. They do not lead to a major increase in housing supply or in more affordable housing. A strong housing safety net should also be introduced to address the problem of homelessness and ensure home security for the most vulnerable.

5. Raising the federal minimum wage to $15 or even $20 per hour. The current federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour has been stagnant since 2009 and maintaining it is a scandal of grand proportions. No decent society, let alone the richest country in the world, should accept having such a thing as the "working poor."

6. Fighting poverty and inequality. Poverty should not be defined one-dimensionally based on income alone. Poverty should be seen as access to a variety of resources, such as education, health, energy, jobs, rights and personal security. The task of eliminating poverty should include both short-term (cash handouts) and long-term approaches (delivering social services and addressing the structural causes of poverty with initiatives such as the guaranteed-jobs program).

7. Implementing the [Green New Deal](#). Greening the economy is a vital and urgent task to save humanity and the planet from the impacts of global warming but also provides a macro-economic approach to sustainable economic growth. It's a win-win situation and only vested interests (fossil fuel industry, banks, oil-producing nations) and lack of political stand on the way to transitioning to a green economy.

8. Cutting military spending. The United States spent [$820 billion](#) on national defense during the fiscal year 2023. It spends nearly [8.4 times](#) as much on its military as Russia does and more than three times the amount of China. While the U.S. comprises just over 4 percent of the world's population, it accounts for nearly [40 percent](#) of global military spending. Between 2001 and 2022, the U.S. spent [$8 trillion on war](#). The notion that such enormous defense spending is important for national security questions is utterly absurd. The U.S. homeland has never been invaded and no nation threatens U.S. national security. The obscene amount of money that the U.S. spends on defense, which different methodologies estimated to be [above $1.5 trillion](#) for the fiscal year 2022, is for the building and maintenance of the U.S. empire. The U.S has over 750 overseas military bases,

which only provoke geopolitical tensions and harm the United States, as [David Vine](#) demonstrates in his book *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*. Money saved from cuts in the defense budget can go towards supporting social programs and/or for reducing the national debt. Arguing for reforms in Social Security and Medicare when the country spends so much money on the military is morally indefensible and will become politically unacceptable if people realize how wasteful and harmful military sending is.

At the heart of the neoliberal vision is a societal order based on the prioritization of corporate power and free markets and the abandonment of public services. The neoliberal claim is that economies would perform more effectively, producing greater wealth and economic prosperity for all, if markets were allowed to perform their functions without government intervention. This claim is predicated on the idea that free markets are inherently just and can create effective low-cost ways to produce consumer goods and services. It is all rubbish, of course; nothing but an ideological pretext to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Neoliberalism is indeed not simply an economic doctrine but also a socio-political ideology that places individual self-interest before the common good, displays indifference to social inequalities and economic disparities and subsequently justifies plutocracy.

Trump's approach to government and corporate interests, which he will undertake with an extra heavy authoritarian twist, will magnify all aspects of the neoliberal nightmare that has engulfed the United States under both Republican and Democratic administrations for the past several decades. Unfortunately, a majority of the U.S. electorate refused to see what Trump really stands for and was duped into believing that their great leader is the one to take on the detestable liberal/neoliberal establishment and create in turn a system that works for the average citizens, not just the rich.

The next four years promise to be one of severe cruelty for the most vulnerable people in the United States and a nightmare for the environment. We should raise walls of resistance as much as we can. More important, though, we should demand from the democratic forces to adopt a socio-economic agenda that puts people's needs above corporate interests and consigns neoliberal capitalism to the dustbin of history.

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A Reformist Program On Immigration (Or What Harris Might Have Said)

Richard D. Wolff

11-26-2024 ~ The immigration issue has split and/or weakened both center and left parties and movements across many nations in recent years. Serious economic and social problems afflicting national working classes have been "managed"—at least temporarily—by scapegoating immigrants as if they were responsible for those problems. Leaders on the left fear that many among their

supporters are vulnerable to that scapegoating. In contrast, leaders on the right often see that scapegoating as a means to achieve electoral gains. Trump reflected and strengthened the view that such scapegoating can get votes. The widespread perception that Kamala Harris too would be "tough on immigrants" showed that she offered no real alternative program on immigration. Thus, the classically reactionary posing of the issue as "protecting the nation against an immigrant 'invasion'" widely prevailed.

Appeals to morality, multiculturalism, and compassion for the plight of most immigrants failed to dissuade many on the left from disengaging and moving politically rightward. The center or moderate left needs but lacks clear, strong support for immigrants that does not alienate portions of their traditional electoral base. "Me-too" opposition to immigration, even if less harsh and hostile than that of the professional demagogues, will fail, as Kamala Harris's campaign discovered. Moreover, classic left reformism suggests a radically different program on immigration. It is derived from the reformist program (the "Green New Deal") to address climate change when it faced a parallel problem with job-holders in polluting industries. A parallel reformist program to deal with immigration might be called an "Inclusive New Deal."

In contrast, conservative, right-wing, and fascistic political forces have used extreme opposition to immigration to grow their ranks. Those forces boldly accuse immigrants of bringing crime, disease, downward pressure on wages, competition for jobs, and burdensome, costly demands on schools, hospitals, and other public services. Even in the United States, a country mostly composed of successive immigrant waves (who obliterated and replaced the indigenous people), many of those immigrants' descendants now hold anti-immigrant views. Despite massive evidence to the contrary, they rationalize those views by insisting that, unlike former immigrants, today's differ in being "unwilling to work."

Rightists advance their radical "solutions" such as sharply tightening immigration rules, refusing all further immigration, and deporting millions. Even where moral, ethical, and religious traditions call us to welcome immigrants, right-wingers have found that anti-immigration politics can work well. They attack center-leftists for seeking future votes by being pro-immigration or only weakly anti-immigration. In the United States, they attack the Democratic Party for not putting their American-born constituents first. Patriotism, as defined by such rightists, now entails a strict anti-immigrant position that displaces traditional religions'

endorsement of the opposite.

Immigrants forced to arrive as slaves, Black people in the United States, for example, fared differently: their integration was mostly slower and much more partial. Brown immigrants who arrived as other than slaves also suffered slower and partial integration. Anti-Black-and-Brown racism added further discrimination and life difficulties to the experience of those immigrants. Institutionalized racism denied opportunities for such immigrant communities to develop their members' levels of education, job skills, businesses, personal wealth, and social confidence. All immigrants suffer delays in their access to those qualities and capabilities, but the addition of racism worsens and lengthens those delays, including in U.S. society today. The difficulties usually endured by immigrants slow and skew the development of the economy they have entered. The occasional explosions of immigrants' resentments and bitterness at their treatment—and the usually very violent subsequent repressions—then add further damage to their host economies.

Repeated efforts by those opposed to immigration have rarely succeeded in stopping it. The broad range of social forces—including the persistent effects of colonial and neo-colonial subjugation, uneven capitalist development, and climate change—that propel people to emigrate usually outweigh their concerns for their own economic, personal safety, and family interests. For employers, immigration can cheapen labor costs by expanding the supply of labor power (especially when the opposite is threatened by falling birthrates or when capital accumulation risks bidding up wages). Undocumented immigrants offer employers notoriously outrageous opportunities for super-exploitation. Hence, they often support it.

An important social cost of immigration is the opportunity it has regularly presented to demagogic politicians. They have repeatedly scapegoated immigrants to deflect genuine mass discontent where it might otherwise threaten the domestic employer class. Is there unemployment? The demagogue suggests that jobs are being preferentially reserved for immigrants. Are public services inadequate? The demagogue suggests that immigrants are placing excessive demands on them and corrupt officials are directing them to immigrants to secure cheap labor or votes. Demagogues often insist—again despite evidence to the contrary—that immigrants commit more crimes and bring and spread more disease than the native-born.

The campaigns of Donald Trump and many Republicans scapegoated immigrants. Many Democrats' campaigns likewise featured the scapegoating of immigrants. In contrast, the real, basic economic problems of the United States were not seriously addressed in the latest presidential election campaigns. One of those is the immense gap between haves and have-nots that has widened over the last 40 years. Another is the economic instability that has the economy oscillating between inflation and recessions. Still another is the obvious decline of the American empire (the relatively declining roles of U.S. exports, imports, investments, and the dollar) within the global economy. These issues were marginalized or, more often, ignored. Instead, candidates relentlessly scapegoated 12 million undocumented immigrants (among the poorest of the poor) as if they were the cause of and thus to blame for the deep problems of U.S. capitalism, an economy of 330 million people. Likewise, they excoriated China for the economic competition its economic growth has brought to the United States. Doing that conveniently deflects blame from the corporate employers who made the decision to move production from the United States to China. As usual, all social blame or criticism must be kept from touching the U.S. capitalist system that accounts for those profit-driven decisions.

Deep, costly, and lasting consequences have followed the demagoguery and divisions in societies that split over immigration. Much energy, time, and money is diverted from dealing with the nation's real economic problems to obsessive "coping with" immigration (homeland security budgets, border patrol budgets, and wall construction and maintenance). Still more is devoted to housing, policing, feeding, and otherwise "processing" undocumented immigrants. If high-priority policy instead created good jobs with good incomes for immigrants, huge portions of these social costs would be unnecessary. Moreover, worthwhile alternatives to failed existing immigration policies are available if sufficient political power places them on the social and political agendas of societies confronting immigration. A remarkable flaw of today's global capitalism lies in its provocation of massive migration of people alongside its massive, costly failure to plan or manage that migration.

One such alternative policy could solve *together* the recurring problems of unemployment, inadequate housing and social services, *and immigration.* In the U.S. case, another Marshall Plan or "Inclusive" New Deal, green or otherwise, is needed. It could create jobs performing public services (paid at or above the

current median for such jobs) that would be provided, as a right, to every unemployed citizen as priority #1. As priority #2, equivalent jobs would be provided, as a right, to all immigrants. As priority #3, the jobs thus created would include expanding the housing and all other social services needed to adequately accommodate the entire population, native plus immigrant. The tragic social divisiveness of immigrant-vs-native competition for jobs might thereby be sharply reduced.

Such an Inclusive New Deal could be funded by (1) billions of dollars no longer needed for unemployment insurance, (2) increased income and other taxes paid by newly employed native and immigrant workers, (3) increased taxes paid by businesses profiting from increased spending by those workers, and (4) an annual wealth tax of 2 percent on all personal wealth above $20 million. Immigration could be reduced for the first five years of this Inclusive New Deal to get it fully established and running.

A major side benefit of this Inclusive New Deal would be the huge boost in receipts for Social Security. Another such benefit would be the reduced demands placed on social services by the better physical and mental health of all newly employed workers. Finally, as a social dividend from such an Inclusive New Deal, the official work week in the United States for all workers could be reduced from 40 to 36 hours (with no pay reduction).

Imagine the enormous social benefits that would accrue to the entire U.S. population, native and immigrant, from this different reformist approach to the immigration issue. In the United States and beyond, such an approach would reduce the social divisions over jobs, incomes, housing, homelessness, social services, and immigration. A strong, growing economy attracts immigrants, integrates them productively, and thereby impresses the world. A weak, declining economy not only fails to employ all its people productively but by deporting immigrants advertises its failure to the world. A radical program would embrace the freedom to migrate as universal and therefore reorient the global location of investment to serve that freedom both domestically and internationally.

By Richard D. Wolff

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The Hunter-Gatherer Guide To Keeping Society Equal

*Brenna R. Hassett –
Photo:
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11-26-2024 ~ There is a great deal of attention in modern societies to inequality and the social problems it causes. Often inequality is considered to be the

[unavoidable consequence](#) of how society operates in many cultures, with large population numbers and competition for resources requiring a hierarchy of successful and less-successful individuals. While our globalized world may seem dominated by this kind of society, there remain groups around the world who even today live very differently, despite continual and sometimes inescapable pressure. Anthropologists, whose science is the study of humans, have been fascinated by the diversity of ways our species have found to exist, and never more so than when confronted with cultures whose ethos and way of being are radically different from the urban societies that dominate our world: where words are weapons that actually win; where showing off your skills will get you mocked, and where every aspect of life is carefully organized so that no one person should ever have any more power than anyone else.

How do some people come to live in a group that has no one at the top, telling the rest what to do? Anthropologists call societies that do not have ranks *[egalitarian](#)*, which means that everyone in them is equal to everyone else. This is a form of social organization that is almost exclusively seen in groups of people who are not settled in one place, tied to one type of food or resource. Rather, they spend quite a lot of their time in small groups, moving around as suits their needs. These kinds of groups have been called hunter-gatherers, but a more accurate name might be foragers: they make their living by walking through their world and exploiting what comes to hand. More than a century of research into the groups who follow their food through the landscape, and do not tie themselves to one location or one crop, has built up a picture of societies that choose to organize themselves very differently from nation-states and kingdoms, and, most importantly, actively refuse to allow any sort of rank among themselves.

For a long time, there was [an assumption](#) that egalitarian societies were egalitarian simply because they were… simple. Living in small groups and moving constantly, they just couldn't build up mountains of wealth to wield power over other people. And with very small numbers of people in a group—say no more than a few dozen—anthropologists theorized that it couldn't be that complicated to run a society, so you wouldn't need a chief or a king making big decisions. As archaeology has revealed the shape of our distant human past, it is clear that before about 15,000 years ago, every human on earth lived the same mobile lifestyle. Living with only what you can carry and constantly on the move [would seem very taxing](#) to the armchair academic of the previous century. The rather

impolite implication then is that modern human societies who chose to live in these mobile, egalitarian societies, were simply the last vestiges of a primitive form of human social organization—people who hadn't 'evolved' civilization.

It is actually quite remarkable that this idea that an equal society was an easy thing to maintain hung around for so long. One of the problems may have been that the groups who lived these mobile lifestyles were often in the process of being colonized and controlled when anthropologists arrived to study them, and so were in the middle of considerable social upheaval. But another problem may simply have been a failure of imagination. There was considerable shock when anthropologists like James Woodburn began to conduct fieldwork by actually learning the language of the group they were studying and going to observe and ask questions of the people themselves about how life worked in a small foraging group. His work with the Hadza people of what is now Tanzania set in motion a train of research that pointed out that life in a small group is anything but simple. Tempers flare, relationships break down, and when you depend on your group for survival, any social unrest could have fatal consequences.

Groups from around the world who maintain an egalitarian ethos have shown that rather than being too simple to 'invent' rank, they are instead too complex to allow one person or group of people to simply take charge. Keeping everyone in a group on equal footing requires a huge amount of effort, and has to be constantly maintained. The Ju/'hoansi people of southern Africa reckon it is particularly important to 'cool young men's hearts'; to stop them being prideful and boastful if they display some special skill, everyone agrees it's very important to bring them back down to earth. A hunter is never allowed to distribute his own meat; instead, the distribution is done in public, with everyone watching. Among the Ju/'hoansi, the proper etiquette is to gently mock a successful hunter—for instance telling them the giraffe that they have killed and will be feeding several camps for days was actually a bit scrawny, perhaps.

Mockery seems to be one of the most critical tools in the political inventory for groups that actively try to achieve equality. Jerome Lewis, an anthropologist who lived with the Mbendjele of Northern Congo for several years, tells how poor behavior is subtly (or not so subtly) corrected by women who act out whatever foolish or misguided thing someone has done. The improvisational theater always has an appreciative audience, and all of the group will laugh resoundingly at the person who has done something wrong. What might seem a recipe for social

disaster in a group that must get along in order to survive is anything but; the mockery only ends when the person who is being made fun of eventually gives up and laughs along with the rest of the group.

We can now see that in those groups that refuse to have ranks among themselves, there are many ways that equality can be actively maintained, but they are almost entirely social. Many groups have a policy similar to that of the Ju/'hoansi when it comes to sharing meat or indeed, anything else that is in the camp—that it would be the height of rudeness not to. Those who transgress against the rules of society may have to face their whole society laughing at them. Even when and where groups choose to move is determined partly by social concerns. If you live in a small group, it is very important to stay connected to friends and family who live somewhere else, in case, for instance, you decide you just can't stand who you are living with at the moment. It seems that the last human societies on earth to live the mobile lifestyles that our species maintained for hundreds of thousands of years do so largely as equals—but equals who must be very careful to stay that way.

By Brenna R. Hassett

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Source: Human Bridges

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Towards Dialogue And Negotiations: Conflicting Narratives And The UN's Potential Role In Ending The War In Ukraine

Heikki Patomaki – Photo: University of Helsinki

11-25-2024 ~ *The war in Ukraine appears to be nearing its end. It is time to start considering what the peace process could look like.*

Introduction

Military solutions received the most attention in Europe and the US during the first two and a half years following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In late 2024, the situation has started to change. In the West and Ukraine, peace negotiations are now discussed more widely. What a lasting peace between Ukraine and Russia would look like and how could it be achieved? For example, after the June 2024 "Ukraine Peace Conference" (held in Bürgenstock Resort in Switzerland on 15–16 June 2024), both the Swiss organisers and President Zelensky have said that Russia should be involved in the next phase of the Conference. In September 2024, Zelensky explained that Ukraine's attack on Russian territory was pre-emptive and part of his plan to force Russia to negotiate. President Putin has in turn said he would be willing to revive negotiations on terms

first discussed at talks in Istanbul at the start of the full-scale invasion.

The shift also reflects changes in the domestic politics of various countries. According to many reports, there is deep war weariness in Ukraine and the tension between stated goals (winning the war) and actual situation and actions (willingness to sacrifice for a common cause) is becoming sharper. Although Russia's economic situation has remained relatively good despite the war and sanctions – and probably [also because of them](#) – the long-lasting war of attrition is eroding the legitimation basis of Putin's regime. In Western countries, right-wing populism favours peace negotiations, and it is difficult for conventional parties not to react to their proposals. In the US, President-elect Donald Trump has promised to negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war. In Germany, as a response to the rise of the nationalist-populist Alternative for Germany (AFD) and the more left-leaning party of Sahra Wagenknecht, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said it is time to rekindle diplomatic efforts to end the war in Ukraine. Moreover, from a global perspective, it is clear that the vast majority of humanity is either ambivalent about the war or inclined to adopt a Western-critical attitude towards it and background factors such as the expansion of NATO. Russia is a key member of the expanding and evolving BRICS coalition, which is increasingly partaking in articulating the voice of the global south.

Despite signs that the willingness of the parties to negotiate is increasing, the war continues and, simultaneously, the tendencies toward further escalation remain strong as witnessed by the decision of President Biden to allow Ukraine to strike Russia with long-range US missiles and British Prime Minister Starmer to do the same with UK Storm Shadow missiles. Increasingly daring strikes and attacks on Russian territory, on the one hand, and threats of retaliatory strikes or other escalatory measures, on the other, mean that the war could expand further, possibly even into a nuclear war. And despite expressions of willingness to negotiate, many key Western actors continue to bolster their commitment to exclusively military solutions. A case in point is the European Parliament which in September 2024 called for lifting restrictions on the use of Western weapons and strengthening sanctions against Russia while neglecting diplomatic paths to end the war. Moreover, NATO is considering concrete steps toward Ukraine's membership even while the war is waging on. Meanwhile, in Russia, there is a vocal group both inside and outside the Putin administration demanding increasingly drastic measures to resolve the war in Russia's favour.

Under these circumstances, de-escalation requires creative solutions, indicating the need to problematise and reframe the prevailing stories, to find room for negotiations where issues can be discussed, debated, and agreed upon. This requires reframing and reimagining goals. Also, new ideas regarding institutional arrangements are needed. In this piece, I first discuss the possibility of telling better stories about the conflict and its possible solutions; and then consider institutional solutions that could enable overcoming the currently prevailing zero-sum logic. I propose an international transitional administration (ITA) in Eastern Ukraine led by the UN. ITA refers to the temporary responsibility for providing the principal governance or functions of government by an inter- or supranational organisation. The UN has many historical experiences of such arrangements, applicable to the situation in Ukraine. The UN experience has not been used to consider ways of ending the Ukraine-Russia war, but priorities may now be changing, as peace negotiations can be expected to resume in early 2025, even if this remains contingent on various developments.

Narratives about the war in Ukraine

In any conflict, the prevailing narratives in conflicts tend to be selective, biased, and simplistic. Narratives are also interactive and dynamic, i.e. they evolve during the conflict. Narratives can be functional from the point of view of the unity of the political community as well as intertwined with established interests, or with interests that have developed as a result of a conflict. Apart from the actions of the other – framed and interpreted in terms of the ego's dominant narrative – a variety of social mechanisms can maintain and reinforce particular narratives within the parties of the conflict, and these mechanisms can involve anything from encouragement and reward to public shaming and punishment and censorship. Although each conflict is historically specific, types of narratives are common and appear across many different conflicts. The war in Ukraine is no exception to the rule.

In the West, there are two different competing narratives about the war in Ukraine that started in 2014 and expanded into a full-scale invasion in 2022. Leaving aside the deep-seated continuities, the role of background theories, and manifold contingent historical developments, the (still) prevailing Western narrative can be summarised as a struggle between the "bad guys" and "good guys". Russia led by dictator Putin represents imperialism and is alone responsible for this unprovoked war which violates international law, whereas Ukraine represents freedom and

democracy as well as courage and heroism. The prevailing Western framing also involves the idea that countries are and must be free to join NATO or any military alliance if they so wish. The forces of evil must be won decisively, so NATO should be strengthened further. The likelihood of conflict escalation is played down as it would lessen the resolve to reach a total victory.

To the extent that the Ukraine war is seen through moral prescriptions, as a struggle between good and evil, tendencies toward further escalating the war are strong. This framing generates a curious mixture of liberal idealism and power politics. It is (neo)liberal and universalising in the sense that it assumes the superiority of "our side" in every confrontation, justifying moralising interventionism, while it is also based on an asymmetrical cynicism and militarism: the evil others only understand the language of force. In this black-and-white, moralistic framework, it is not surprising that only a few peace proposals have been presented and that actors tend to resort to increasingly harsh military measures, stricter sanctions, and further escalation of conflict. Militarists have become the oracles of the future and politicians and diplomats their servants. From the narrative-analysis viewpoint, what is of particular concern is that this narrative involves the negation of the narrative of the other party in the conflict; anything associated with the other's narrative can then be labelled as propaganda or misinformation.

The main Russian narrative provides a sharply contrastive view of locating the good and the evil. Attempts in the 1990s to seek Russian identity and place in the post-Cold War (neo)liberal world order were complicated and disturbed by developments such as the rapid concentration of wealth, major socio-economic difficulties, widespread crime and murder (another indicator of insecurity of everyday life), partial state collapse, and a sense of humiliation. As the West-recommended reforms failed, all political forces in Russia started to stress the importance of *samobytnost'* or the national distinctiveness of Russia. The counter-hegemonic framing and story emerged already in the 1990s but evolved further and started to shape developments in the 2000s.

During the extended Putin–Medvedev era, "the new Russia" of Boris Yeltsin has gradually been replaced by a discourse stressing long-term continuities in Russian history. This discourse has redefined the identity and aspirations of Russia. A turning point was the 2007 Munich speech, where Putin warned against NATO's eastward expansion and that the unchecked US dominance would lead to an arms

race. Particularly since the turning points of the 2000s and early 2010s, the "nationally distinct" identity has included elements such as competitive victimhood (i.e., the belief that one's own nation has suffered more than the others); distinction between the decadent values of the postmodern West and the more authentic and traditional values of Russia; belief in the importance of a developmental state for economic stability and growth; the idea that a full recognition as an equal (great power) requires economic and military power; securitisation of Western attempts to interfere in the domestic politics of the former Soviet states and especially Russia itself; concerns about EU and NATO expansion; and last but not least, criticism of Western exclusionary practices and double standards. All this is consistent with a global vision of cultural and political pluralism in a multipolar international system, sometimes associated with claims for more democratic decision-making, sometimes with power balancing.

This sense-making narrative is not only itself historical (for example, during the 2013-14 events in Ukraine, the geopolitical othering of the EU and the West became stronger and the majority of Russians turned against the EU and the West. It also concerns world history and involves narratives about Russia's place in the wider scheme of things. While various beginnings and conflicts appear important for mainstream Russian stories, since the 2000s, it is the great patriotic war (WWII) that has shaped most of them. Given the dominance of the prevailing framings and narratives, it is easy to understand how, from this point of view, the expansion of the EU and NATO and related episodes such as the Euromaidan have appeared as threatening to Russia's distinctive identity and security. Under these circumstances, the expanding West (both the EU and NATO) has increasingly, especially since 2013-14, assumed the role of a potential or actual enemy. Also in Russia, anything associated with the enemy's narrative can then be labelled as propaganda or misinformation. Moreover, in Russia, the increasingly autocratic state (though in its own official documents Russia continues to be defined as a democratic country) has tended to forcefully prevent the presentation of dissenting views, especially so in times of war.

The conflict is not just between the West and Russia. There has been a low-intensity war in Eastern Ukraine since 2014. In February 2022, Russia started a full-scale invasion. The question of Ukraine's identity and agency complicates the picture, as does the suffering of the Ukrainian people. The main "competition" about victimhood is thus between Russia and Ukraine. Since the collapse of the

Soviet Union, Ukraine's identity has been the subject of ongoing disputes, which have involved the entanglement of historical narratives about Ukraine with the relations between the West, Europe and Russia and their definitions. Until 2014, perhaps a third of the Ukrainian population identified Russian as their native tongue (the Bolsheviks transferred large parts of Russian territory into Ukraine); moreover, a majority of citizens used Ukrainian and Russian interchangeably in different contexts. The economy of the Eastern part of Ukraine remained entangled with Russia, whereas the Western part was increasingly geared towards the EU. Economic and cultural orientations changed in 2014-22. Especially since February 2022, Russian has become associated with the aggressor, leading many Ukrainians to adopt Ukrainian more fervently, even in areas where Russian was traditionally spoken.

Following the failed negotiations of March-April 2022, and half a year after the start of the full-scale war, Russia annexed four regions of eastern Ukraine, which, it seems, have been forcefully Russianised, though interpretations vary. Meanwhile, also as a consequence of the war, ethnic nationalism prevails in the rest of Ukraine (pro-Russian and leftist political parties are banned, etc.). The project of ethnic nationalism is thereby aligned with the EU and NATO definitions of democracy and human rights (and civilisation). This is enabled by the shared commitment to the idea of Ukrainian victimhood. Also, the dominant Ukrainian narrative has included the goal of "winning the war" against Russia. This narrative too has been reinforced through autocratic mechanisms, though it may now be changing.

The problem of revising the prevailing narratives

Contrasting narratives interact. Given a negative spiral, the further the mutual collapse of trust among states (or their coalitions) goes, the more each side begins to believe that the other's behaviour can be modified by force and deterrence only. Even under the circumstances, there has been a minority view in the West arguing that reality is more complicated than what the majority suggests. In this view, the unfortunate and shortsighted Russian invasion violates international law and has caused an enormous amount of suffering in Ukraine and turmoil, for the warring states, Europe, the US, and the world, but this invasion was not unprovoked. While there are different ways of articulating the specifics of the narrative, this storyline involves the idea that also the West and the US in particular bear partial responsibility for the tragic outcome of the long process of mutual alienation and escalation of conflict between Russia and the West. Moreover, the minority view

includes many alarmists who warn that the escalation has already continued or can continue to a point where the world is verging on nuclear war.

Although in the mid-2020s Russia, an explicit foreign policy opposition is largely suppressed and excluded from the public sphere, Russia remains a neo-revisionist power, criticising unipolarity and the one-sidedness of the rules ("who makes them?") and their application in the current system rather than trying to drastically change those rules. The fact that Russia is committed to many of the existing rules – including via BRICS – and uses the inherent contradictions of the prevailing "liberal world order" opens possibilities for dialogue and an eventual overcoming of the war. Russia's challenge to the US hegemony is in part based on the idea that Russia has the right to act like the West has always acted (i.e. it reserves the right to ignore rules that do not fit its priorities). This is an explicit and contested idea, but many background assumptions are considered self-evident – and may not even be noticed – by the actors. Even when A and B struggle violently against each other, they can share a number of the same, similar, or analogical background assumptions, some but not all of which may be conducive to dialogue. Resolving conflicts requires the possibility of changing understandings, rules, and practices. Adjustments to the rules or their application presuppose the revisionist's or challenger's reciprocal readiness to shoulder responsibility for the reformed order. A scenario is that a reformed global system creates a conducive context for Russian internal reforms, which in turn feeds Russian support for the system.

A mutual dialogue presupposes some readiness and willingness to revise, at least to a degree, the prevailing conflict narratives on each side. The problem of transforming violence into politics and diplomacy faces many obstacles, however. In open systems, attempts at a dialogue may fail due to the factors intrinsic or extrinsic to the dynamics of negotiations themselves. Both entrenched interests and the drive for community unity (also for the sake of winning the conflict) can sustain – together with the various homogenising mechanisms – the prevailing stories. The effects of the revisions of the narrative depend on the context. There is for example evidence that although a more inclusive narrative about suffering tends to reduce the support for aggressive policies toward the other, a concern about outside support (some trusted third party or a grouping of states and organisations) may reverse this connection. The other side of the coin is that the relevant third party can thereby be in a position to shape responses to the revision of narratives (Ukraine is not only dependent on the support from the West, but also

the role of less involved outsiders such as Brazil, China, and Turkey can be important). Moreover, the peace interest does not lie in the attempt to overcome all contradictions or causes of conflicts, but rather in handling the transformation from violence to politics and diplomacy in a sufficiently acceptable and sustainable way. This requires a degree of de-polarisation and de-escalation of the conflict and thus at least some adjustments of the prevailing narratives, often in terms of reframing or reimagining goals.

Reframing and reimagining the goals: the potential role of the United Nations

Given the prevailing narratives and the fight over territories in Ukraine, it is thus not surprising that in 2024-25 the conflict in Ukraine tends to be framed in zero-sum terms. In the March-April 2022 negotiations, Russia would have been satisfied with the situation that existed before the February invasion assuming Ukraine's commitment to neutrality and disarmament and some other conditions such as ensuring the status of the Russian language inside Ukraine, but after Ukraine ended negotiations under pressure from the Western leaders, NATO, and domestic opinion, Russia decided to annex the four oblasts in clear violation of international law. In 2024, Russia regards the newly annexed oblasts of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, in addition to Donetsk and Luhansk within their administrative borders, as part of its territories, while Ukraine and the West regard the internationally recognised borders of 1992 as valid. The diametrically opposed perceptions of the other party's actions and justice appear to mean that the territorially defined zero-sum situation can only be rectified through military force. In this kind of context, the transformation from violence to politics and diplomacy could be achieved by partially de-territorialising the conflict.

Russia's view of international cooperation has traditionally relied on the UN system, where it has a special status as a permanent member of the Security Council. Also Ukraine, the EU, NATO and the US are committed to the principles of the UN. Commitment to rules and principles does not mean that they are always followed or that they are interpreted impartially and consistently, but they can nevertheless provide, in principle, a basis for dialogue, some kind of cooperation, and a possible agreement. Also, dialogue and negotiations about the situation in Ukraine may be helped by modifying the wider context to be a degree less threatening and cooperative. Consider for example the possibility that NATO starts to plan and prepare for the withdrawal of all US nuclear warheads from Europe and Turkey prior to negotiations. The actual withdrawal would be carried out once

peace terms were agreed between Ukraine and Russia. In the situation of 2024, this proposal could also include a tentative promise to refrain from placing new American military bases in the Nordic countries (partly right next to the Russian border, where the permanent military presence of the US and NATO especially on Finnish territory constitutes from a Russian viewpoint [a threat to Russia's national security](#) – in line with the standard security dilemma).

These kinds of moves would not weaken NATO militarily but could get Russia's attention and might facilitate dialogue and the ensuing negotiations. In the literature, such a strategy is called "altercasting". The point is to persuade the other (alter) by casting/positioning them in a new way in relation to oneself. The idea is to propose a new relationship so that the other will be inclined to act in that new role, in this case involving a move from the logic of deterrence to a more cooperative orientation. This is what Michail Gorbachev did with regard to Ronald Reagan in the mid-1980s. Any reciprocal action on such an initiative from the Russian side could restore confidence to the point where dialogue and negotiations may be recommenced.

The war in Ukraine concerns peace and security in the world as a whole, and the UN was built to tackle such problems. The mutual conflict between the members of the Security Council prevents the effective functioning of the UN, but that does not mean that the UN cannot have other ways to intervene in the course of events. For example, in the current situation involving the risk of nuclear escalation, the UN Secretary-General could resort to a rarely used leadership measure the founders of the UN Charter endowed to him: the use of Article 99 of the Charter. The Article says that the Secretary-General can "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security". It is difficult to imagine a more urgent and appropriate use of Article 99 than the increased risk of nuclear war in Ukraine. Secretary-General Antonia Guterres has warned about the risks of escalation and nuclear war several times. Even if the Security Council turns out to be unable to act despite the warnings and Article 99, the UN General Assembly could also take the initiative. Many peace processes also require third parties to act as mediators. Third-party facilitators and mediators should come primarily from countries that are seen as being sufficiently outside of the conflict by both parties (for example, Indonesia or Thailand) and they could include representatives from institutions such as the International Court of Justice or the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Also, various

ad hoc contact groups and attempts at Track 2 diplomacy could be helpful.

My proposal ([first made with Tapio Kanninen](#)) is that the UN could play an important role in de-escalating the conflict through deterritorialising, at least to a degree, the conflict in Ukraine. The process would involve also reframing and reimagining the goals of the parties. This idea is built on both current initiatives and historical UN experiences. For example, on 11 November 2022, the Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability issued a [Call for Armistice in Ukraine](#), signed by five former heads of State of Government. The initiative asks for a transition from a general cease-fire to a final peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine which is to be supervised by the UN and possibly other international organizations. Demilitarisation of the occupied areas and a larger demilitarised zone between the armed forces of the belligerents could be a part of an agreement. The plan also calls for immediate efforts to repair civilian infrastructure, including in the areas to be placed under temporary international administration, and to secure an adequate supply of food, water, health care and energy for the inhabitants. A somewhat similar proposal was made by Indonesia in June 2023. Indonesia's then defence minister Prabowo Subianto, now President of Indonesia, proposed establishing a demilitarised zone by withdrawing 15 kilometres from each party's forward position, observed and monitored by a peacekeeping force deployed by the UN. This could be a step toward a wider UN involvement.

The proposal is not only to establish a demilitarized zone like in Korea. The concepts of demilitarized zone and UN-managed territory could cover all the main areas contested in the war. Their long-term status could be specified later in diplomatic and democratic terms, following the principles of dialogue, cooperation, and the rule of law. An international transitional administration (ITA) in Eastern Ukraine could assume temporary responsibility for providing the principal governance or functions of government. The aim is to facilitate a future resolution and provide functions of government during the transitional period. ITAs are sometimes introduced to act as neutral arbitrators and mediators, ensuring that no particular ethnic group dominates the political process while the region transitions to a peaceful settlement. Important historical precedent cases include the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) (1992–1993), United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) (1999–2002), and various similar authorities and administrations that were established in the former

Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

ITAs typically serve one of two purposes: they can manage conflicting sovereignty claims leading to a future resolution, or they can provide legitimate governance where there is none or is lacking for some reason. The legitimacy of ITA is of course anything but automatic and must be demonstrated in practice through clear processes and context-sensitive management requiring sufficient resources. What is important here is that the option of using the UN's presence in Ukraine is an already much-tested model for the de-escalation of war and building elements for peace. Instead of seeing the conflict as a mythic struggle between good and evil, what is needed is a sense of nuance, context and reciprocal process. The reliance on common institutions and especially the potential of the UN presence on the ground as a tool for de-escalation would be a step in this direction. Negotiations are always possible if there is a political will to engage in them.

The idea is that following a period of necessary back-channel diplomacy and negotiations, the UN Security Council could declare or the parties could directly negotiate a binding ceasefire, with the deployment of a peacekeeping force and other UN personnel. The areas of Ukraine occupied by Russian forces would become demilitarised and governed temporarily by the UN, with some flexibility in specifying the territories and their boundaries. The example of East Timor is instructive, although there are also significant differences between the cases and required processes. The tasks in East Timor included maintaining security and order, providing relief assistance, assisting in rebuilding physical infrastructure, administering the territory based on the rule of law, and assisting in the drafting of a new constitution and conducting elections. A key problem in East Timor was that locals often felt that they had no say in decision-making even during the ITA . The problem was solved with the transfer of power to the locals, but in eastern Ukraine, this issue is more complex, due to changes in the composition of the population (including those changes that have already occurred and those that will occur after the situation has become stabilised under the rubric of the UN) and a longer transition period.

Compared to East Timor, in Ukraine, a longer period of transition may be required, possibly as long as 10 to 20 years. Eastern Ukraine is also a large land area and would require large peacekeeping and other resources and administrative personnel. "The UN Transitional Administration of Eastern Ukraine" would also have the task of assisting in negotiating and drafting a new legal basis for the

status of these regions and conducting regular elections, as well as a possible referendum in the future. Ukraine's military non-alignment remains a key issue and must be part of negotiations.

The reframing and definition of goals and objectives cannot, of course, be limited only to those questions that concern disputed territories and competing sovereignty claims in Ukraine especially in Eastern Ukraine. The war is a consequence of decades of conflict escalation between Russia and the West, and in world politics and global political economy more generally. The construction and reproduction of the dominant narrative on each side concern interpretations of history as well as many theoretical, methodological, conceptual, and normative choices. Many social mechanisms powerfully maintain the prevalence of particular narratives. When a certain narrative is taken as the starting point for thinking and action, any deviation from it is easily seen as untruth or even as conscious lying (disinformation, propaganda). The central task of common global institutions is to provide a space where different narratives and frames of reference can meet peacefully and be reassessed through dialogue, debate, and compromise. The UN may be in many ways anachronistic, yet it remains the main institutional framework for reframing and reimagining possibilities.

Source: https://braveneweurope.com/heikki-patomaki-towards-dialogue-and-negotiations-conflicting-narratives-and-the-uns-potential-role-in-ending-the-war-in-ukraine

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Canada Reinvents The Xenophobic Wheel

Saurav Sarkar - sauravsarkar.com

11-22-2024 ~ Bikram Singh is running out of time on his post-study work visa in Canada.

Singh is one of about [70,000](#) migrants who were sold on the Canadian dream of eventually making the country their home but now face an uncertain future with their work permits set to expire by December 2024. They came from places like India, China, and the Philippines, and sold their land and belongings in their home countries, took out loans, or made other enormous commitments to get themselves to Canada.

"We came here for our future. They promise you an easy permanent residency here." However, due to the backlog of the Canadian immigration system, it has become more difficult to secure permanent residency now compared to in the past, he says.

"We are demanding a fair chance. Now they are saying, 'We never promised [permanent residency],'" Singh says.

Canada has a system of post-study visas for students who graduate from Canadian colleges and universities. This year, with an upcoming election in 2025, Canada's political parties are playing with the lives of migrants by tightening the country's immigration policies, resulting in their visas no longer being eligible for renewal—as they were during the COVID-19 pandemic. The parties have also been engaging in xenophobic campaign tactics.

Singh says, "All political parties are playing this dirty [blame] game," where immigrants are blamed for unemployment, housing crisis, and inflation. As a result, Canadian voters "don't know their real enemy. The ruling class of Canada diverts their anger," says Singh, from the "Canadian imperialist capitalist system."

More than 50 worker-activists with [Naujawan Support Network](#) (NSN) and the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) Committee have established a 24-hour outdoor encampment in Brampton, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto. As of November 19, 2024, they have been there rain or shine for more than 80 days.

They want their work visas extended for 2024 and 2025—more than [200,000](#) work permits. They are further [demanding](#) five-year work visas for all international students, a fair pathway to permanent residency, and an end to exploitation under Labor Market Impact Assessments (LMIAs).

LMIAs are documents that Canadian businesses must obtain to hire many categories of temporary workers. Through these documents, they show that no Canadian citizen or permanent resident was available for a particular job.

While this may sound harmless in theory, Singh says that, in practice, LMIAs are a way to generate money for businesses under the table while tying workers even more closely to a single employer. It's a recipe for exploitation and illegal, "but everyone knows that this is going on," says Singh.

LMIAs aren't the only way that Canadian institutions have made money off migrants. Singh says colleges and universities overenrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic to make money off students taking classes from home in sending countries.

In 2024, several protests have taken place in other provinces of Canada, like those in [Manitoba](#) and [Prince Edward Island](#), besides the NSN and PGWP Committee protest.

Canada's upcoming election is just the latest to be affected by xenophobia. In 2024, anti-immigrant politics have become prevalent across the globe, from [India to Tunisia to Donald Trump's U.S.](#), in a year replete with major elections.

As of 2020, there were about 281 million migrants around the world comprising [3.6 percent of the global population](#), according to the United Nations. Remittance flows, or money sent from migrants back to their home countries, amounted to $831 billion in 2022, a figure [bigger than the economies of many nations](#).

By Saurav Sarkar

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Source: Globetrotter