

Introduction

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The Radical Review series aims to normalize asking *why* human beings and institutions function as they do to help strategize social and societal transformation more effectively. By asking why something is the case, we confront the core or root causes that produce said thing in its current form. In the context of “radical change” such an understanding can establish what informs and shapes existing states of being and affairs, which can then be challenged using alternative vantage points and by rejecting the limitations of the root causes of the status quo. Radical thinking in this form often reveals that what is deemed “radical” is context dependent rather than “universally” or “objectively” different from what is “normal” as normalcy is assumed here to be socially constructed.¹ By illustrating the context dependency of radicalism, this series also establishes the value in strategizing social change using cross-cultural knowledge exchanges as well as, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge production; the latter of which, has been identified as a radical response to the disciplinary boundaries in academia.² To these ends, this introductory volume of Radical Review explores radical ideas that can improve governance in a COVID-regulated world.

The COVID-19 pandemic produced for many of us

1 Max Travers, “The Phenomenon of the ‘Radical Lawyer,’” *Sociology* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 1994): 245–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038594028001015>; Tim Jacoby, “Understanding Conflict and Violence: Theoretical and Interdisciplinary Approaches,” *Understanding Conflict and Violence: Theoretical and Interdisciplinary Approaches*, July 5, 2007, 1–242, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203028827_38; William Eckhardt, “The Radical Critique of Peace Research: A Brief Review,” *Peace Research* 18, no. 3 (1986), 55.

2 S. Fish, “Being Interdisciplinary Is So Very Hard to Do,” *Undefined*, 1991, https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Being-Interdisciplinary-Is-So-Very-Hard-to-Do-Fish/60762cf2f00410f88edcbb1a97d575c43ccf1938_103.

unprecedented time and space in which to carefully evaluate the worldviews, assumptions, values, and interests that drive how our respective governance systems operate.³ More specifically, inhabitants⁴ across the world analyzed actors and bodies that generate and enforce laws, market forces, security forces, and network trends such as subnational and national governments and regional and international bodies as they coordinated public response to the pandemic. We examined their levels of transparency and how they disseminate information; their ethical decision-making patterns; resource allocation strategies; and service delivery trends. For example, we observed service delivery gaps in some contexts and healthcare systems ill-equipped to support crisis response, demonstrating the inequality *between* nations. In other contexts, we witnessed elders be neglected by their healthcare systems and subsequently lose their lives, reinforcing the minimal value often placed on a human life that can no longer generate profit for the state. We also observed various governance bodies prioritize certain communities over others along ethnic, racial, and religious lines as well as the urban-rural divide. And as these realities were exposed in necessarily public decision-making processes, even people that typically benefit from the status quo could no longer deny the inequalities embedded in their social order. Thus, it comes as no surprise that there was a spike in social movements calling for fundamental societal change that is necessarily radical to eradicate inequality. The

3 Zygmunt Bauman, “Getting to the Roots of Radical Politics Today,” in *What Is Radical Politics Today?*, ed. Jonathan Pugh (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 17–26, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230251144_2.

4 The term “inhabitants” is used in place of “citizens” throughout this essay to account for the range of status agents can assume in a particular society including refugees, stateless persons, migrants, tourists, expats, international students, etc.

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reflective essays in this volume explore diverse radical ideas in this context, which in the current political climate is a high-stakes endeavour.

UNDERSTANDING AND RECLAIMING THE CONCEPT OF “RADICAL”

The word radical comes from the Latin word “rudix” meaning root.⁵ As a noun, “radical” often refers to the core of someone or something as being extremely different from the status quo. In the context of social and societal change, “radicals” are historically known for seeking to fundamentally transform their social, economic, and/or political systems, which is referred to here as “radical change”.⁶ Two basic features contribute to producing social and societal transformation that is “radical”. The first includes asking “radical questions” that unravel the core or root of something or someone. Radical questions move past what something is and how something functions to asking why it exists as it does (i.e., examining root causes). And in unearthing the answers to why, “radical solutions” can be proposed that replace or significantly transform the identified root causes of the status quo, which is the second feature. Together, asking radical questions and proposing radical solutions produce strategies for radical social and societal change.

In the context of governance, “radical politics” proposing principally different social orders are traditionally celebrated, particularly in the theoretical realm. For example, Feminism, Modernism, Neo-conservatism, and Marxism have led to many radical social transformations by changing constitutive norms.⁷ Today’s most “legitimate” social order, namely, (Neo) liberalism was seen in the 1970s as a radical model meant to liberate corporate power. However, radical thinking and radical politics more specifically today remain quite weak for myriad reasons. One reason could be that there are too many radical factions, weakening the ability to collectively mobilize under a single movement for radical change.⁸ However, radical “fragmentation” allows for diverse views to inform change and any one in particular serving as the “grand

vision” of radical change, marginalizes other views and in effect can fuel inequality. Another cause could be that many radical thinkers are on the margins of society and therefore are disconnected from and less able to penetrate other parts of the system. Radical politics could also be weak because radical thinkers do not work hard enough to reach other parts of society, undermining collective action for societal change.⁹ Though these and many other reasons are indeed valid, another reason worth emphasizing here is the entrenchment of (Neo)liberalism as the only legitimate social order at the turn of the twenty-first century,¹⁰ which was amplified and reinforced by the Global War on Terror (GWOT).¹¹

The attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, affected every facet of the international order be it legal, political, social, or economic. This event continues to be depicted by the United States and other western liberal democracies as an attack on their way of life and something that should be combatted even if the use of force is required.¹² Whereas (Neo)liberalism was once celebrated for its “radical” nature, proponents of this ideology often problematize contemporary radical alternatives as existential threats. Consequently, “radical” is now coupled with “anti-liberal” and “anti-west”, and most devastatingly, “violent extremism” in post 9/11 public, political and academic discourses.¹³ Exploring radical

5 Jonathan Pugh, “What Is Radical Politics Today?,” in *What Is Radical Politics Today?*, ed. Jonathan Pugh, 2009th edition (Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

6 Astrid Bötticher, “Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 4 (2017), 71.

7 Pugh, “What Is Radical Politics Today?,” 2.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 “The Radical Centre: A Politics without Adversary (1998),” in *Chantal Mouffe* (Routledge, 2013), 18.

11 Gordon Lafer, “Neoliberalism by Other Means: The ‘War on Terror’ at Home and Abroad,” *New Political Science* 26, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 323–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0739314042000251306>.

12 Guardian Staff, “Full Text: Tony Blair’s Speech,” the Guardian, January 7, 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/jan/07/foreignpolicy.speeches>; Rashmi Singh, “Defensive Liberal Wars: The Global War on Terror and the Return of Illiberalism in American Foreign Policy,” *Revista de Sociologia e Política* 23 (March 2015): 99–120, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1678-987315235306>.

13 “Obsession: Radical Islam’s War against the West: A Response,” *Islam Ahmadiyya* (blog), February 22, 2010, <https://www.alislam.org/articles/obsession-radical-islams-war-west-response/>; Kabir Sethi, “The Allure of the Radical: Understanding Jihadist Violence in the West,” *Macalester International* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 2009), <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol22/iss1/14>; Alastair Bonnett, “Western Dystopia: Radical Islamism and Anti-Westernism,” in *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History*, ed. Alastair Bonnett (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2004), 143–62, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-21233-6_8; Bonnett, “Putin and Naryshkin Resort to Radical Anti-Western Rhetoric,” *Warsaw Institute* (blog), September 29, 2020, <https://warsawinstitute.org/putin-naryshkin-resort-radical-anti-western-rhetoric/>.

alternatives to the western (Neo)liberal mainstream is identified as a precursor to becoming a violent extremist.¹⁴ This is a process referred to in counter-terrorism discourse as “radicalization”, which is a notion often used by states to reference “a process through which an individual adopts an increasingly extremist set of beliefs and aspirations. This may include, but is not defined by, the willingness to condone, support, facilitate or use violence to further political, ideological, religious or other goals.”¹⁵ Such a definition significantly raises the stakes for anyone, particularly academics and practitioners in global affairs, to propose radical alternatives to the (Neo)liberal hegemony. Additionally, this high-stakes environment is partially why many so-called “radical” ideas become subsumed in the (Neo)liberal mainstream model as they challenge threads of the status quo but fall short of calling for an overhaul of its foundations.¹⁶ Consequently, some of the contributors to this volume of Radical Review have experienced adverse reactions to their radical ideas in personal, public, and professional spaces.

To further exacerbate disengagement with radical social and societal change, many of the industries that fund and disseminate research are dominated by staunch proponents of the current (Neo)liberal international system.¹⁷ Thus, radical theorists are often dismissed, and their research and programs are underfunded or restricted to (Neo)liberal parameters as a condition of securing resources.¹⁸ For this and many other reasons, practice in related fields and public awareness informed by research and theory are not

penetrated by radical ideas as effectively as those of the orthodoxy.

To counteract the counterproductive trends discussed thus far, this volume of Radical Review works to decouple “radical” from necessarily leading to “violence” and “violent extremism”. To this end, contributors were asked to use “seemingly” radical solutions to the governance challenges they raised as opposed to contributors having free range to propose any fundamentally different solutions that occur to them.¹⁹ More specifically, the contributors were asked to propose a radical idea that would help to address essential problems in existing governance structures that produce inequalities spotlighted by the recent pandemic. They then show how their idea is indeed acceptable or normalized in other academic disciplines, areas of practice, cultural contexts, and/or historical periods, as well as in the context of the pandemic itself. In so doing, the authors demonstrate their ideas are not necessarily violent, harmful, or implausible, but instead can be helpful, achievable without harm, and worth exploring. This approach further demonstrates that what is understood as “radical” is contextually dependent and therefore interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, and cross-cultural engagement can provide myriad models and ideas to help us strengthen governance in our respective societies and at a global level.

EMBRACING THE RADICAL TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE IN A COVID-REGULATED WORLD

It is timely to explore radical alternatives to current governance systems as calls for radically different approaches to social organization continue in the current post-liberal era.²⁰ Although radical models and solutions could indeed challenge the realm of possibilities known to humanity, contributors instead show how their radical ideas were used in another context. Accordingly, commentators with varied cultural, academic, and professional backgrounds draw on their experiences in one of two ways to propose radical thinking and radical solutions to governance challenges foregrounded by the recent pandemic.

14 “Tactical Reference Guide: Radicalization into Violent Extremism - A Guide for Military Leaders” (Asymmetric Warfare Group, August 2011), https://www.wired.com/images_blogs/dangerroom/2012/10/Radicalization-FINAL090911.pdf; Loretta E. Lynch, Karol V. Mason, and Nancy Rodriguez, “Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned From Canada, the U.K. and the U.S.,” Conference report (National Institute of Justice, July 28, 2015), <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249947.pdf>.

15 Human Rights Council, “Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General” (United Nations, July 21, 2016), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/162/55/PDF/G1616255.pdf?OpenElement>.

16 “Populism, Radicalism and Extremism: At the Margins and into the Mainstream,” accessed May 29, 2021, <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/SectionDetails/911>.

17 Mary-Beth Raddon, “Neoliberal Legacies: Planned Giving and the New Philanthropy,” *Studies in Political Economy* 81 (March 1, 2008): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19187033.2008.11675072>.

18 Sandra Rubli, “Transitional Justice by Bureaucratic Means?” (Swiss Peace, April 2012), http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Publications/WP4_2012.pdf.

19 For an example of this approach to proposing seemingly radical solutions, please see the comparison of radical centrism and triangulation in “The Radical Centre.”

20 Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Peter Finkenbusch, “‘Post-Liberal’ Peacebuilding and the Crisis of International Authority,” *Peacebuilding* 4, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 247–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2016.1193937>.

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In one approach, authors show how the pandemic revealed something radically different to a specific audience or context that could help to improve governance in a COVID-regulated world. More concretely, Marisa Tramontano offers several examples of COVID-19 accelerating the movement to defund and abolish the police in the United States, which reinforced this seemingly radical movement as one worth pursuing. Using the same case study, Emily Sample discusses how the pandemic encouraged people to spend more time outdoors, particularly engaging “public” green spaces such as parks, which city dwellers have difficulty accessing. But a newfound appreciation for the environment due to COVID, provides opportunities to transition from a specifically American capitalist view that pits nature against city infrastructure, toward a merging of the two to build more inclusive and equitable ecosystems that are safe for human beings and the environment.

Drawing on examples from Canada, the United Kingdom, Uganda, and the United States, Saghar Birjandian argues that the pandemic revealed how individuals often function as “administrations of justice”. She claims that understanding individuals in this way can serve as a useful analytical device to more effectively theorize the types of social and societal change required to establish just societies. Monica Macias offers a more structured comparative analysis of COVID-19 response strategies between western countries like the United Kingdom driven by individualism and countries like South Korea that are shaped by collectivism. She concludes that collectivism fosters more effective response to crisis and is worth promoting in a COVID-regulated world. Lastly, at the international level, Yatana Yamahata shows us how looking at the role of international institutions during the AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics reveals the power of these entities over state behaviour, which challenges conventional international relations theories that posit only the reverse as true.

In the alternative approach, contributors explain different ways the pandemic illuminated how we need to fundamentally change our thinking and behaviours and then propose some seemingly radical ideas to address said needs. For example, Calvete documents a conversation between university students and lecturers based in Brazil and the United Kingdom about missed opportunities to challenge the status quo during the pandemic. They identified that the hegemonic view of

individualism and capitalism is so deeply entrenched that even during a global pandemic that naturally disrupted that status quo, the masses did not mobilize to demand a new international political economy. To counter this, the participants propose to replace the prevailing individualistic worldview with collective thinking and organizing.

Also centering his analysis around the masses, Henry Okoth examines why in Uganda, the military’s atrocities against civilians during the pandemic and coinciding political elections, call for community led responses. He proposes a seemingly radical idea to use the family unit and the clan to hold state and military personnel accountable for their crimes, which has been successful in the past. Using the same case study, Tonny Kirabira points to an opportunity caused by the pandemic halting a long and drawn-out court process against a low-ranking Lord’s Resistance Army rebel. He suggests that given the perpetrator is also understood as a victim by many survivors across northern Uganda where rebellion unfolded, it is worth exploring the use of victim participation in plea bargaining processes as a way for survivors to bring elements of their customary dispute resolution into post-atrocity justice processes. This could in turn, help courts of law to foster reconciliation in legally plural societies like Uganda.

Lastly, Shelly Clay-Robison problematizes information disseminated by governments during crises response as too superficial to help inhabitants participate in shaping governance. She proposes that governments, especially during public health crises, could more effectively communicate the research expertise of the social sciences to communities experiencing social and economic issues using the arts. In the conclusion of this volume Danny Lord and Marisa Tramontano reflect on these contributions and outline some implications for the masses as we move toward imagined futures.

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