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The left today: A group portrait

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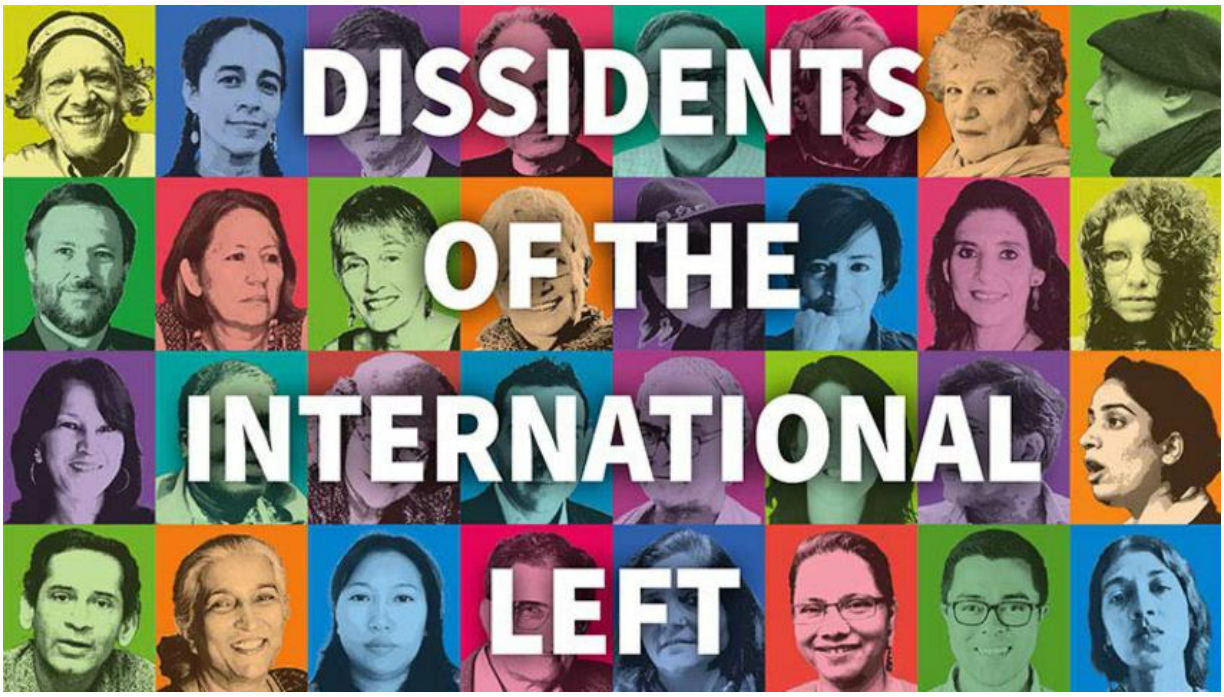

A diverse and often divided family, the international left is on the rise today in response to economic failures and right-wing demagoguery. A new collection of 77 interviews captures the contemporary leftist zeitgeist, revealing its promises and weaknesses alike.

Andy Heintz's Dissidents of the International Left, published earlier this year, is a collection of interviews with 77 people

on six continents, all of whom are politically active and consider themselves to be on the left. The interviewees include NGO workers, academics, writers, intellectuals, and militants. Although some, such as Noam Chomsky, are internationally known, many are not: one important service the book performs is to bring them and their work to each other's attention as well as to that of a wider readership.

The book can be seen as a group portrait of the "dissident international left" in 2019. This portrait is sketched using interviews organized by continent (usually, but not always, that of origin) and then alphabetically by author. Recurrent topics and reference-points connect some of the interviews across geographical location (on ex-Yugoslavia and Rojava/Jazira"Rojava" is a Kurdish-language term for the territory in northern Syria claimed by Kurds as part of a future independent Kurdistan. "Al-Jazira" is the Arabic term generally preferred by Syrian Arabs for the territory east of the Euphrates River, which largely overlaps with "Rojava.", for example), pointing to certain thematic connections across the global left that are not explicitly reflected in the book's basic ordering principles. Because the interviews are each quite short (an average of four pages), the book works best when multiple perspectives converge on a particular topic, like those just mentioned, giving readers a sense of that topic's complexity. The book's main disadvantages—a lack of provided context and a feeling of compression in the interviews—are consequences of the inclusiveness of Heintz's group portrait.

I write as a historian of the twentieth-century European left at a time when the post-1945 international order is fraying and neo-fascism has become ascendant. Paradoxically, perhaps, in the US at least, incompetent authoritarianism

appears to have revived the left at the mass-political level: membership in the Democratic Socialists of America has exploded since 2016; Bernie Sanders is a viable candidate for president in 2020. So Heintz's book arrives at an interesting moment and provides an opportunity to reflect on the left in 2019 in a frame that is beyond social media, domestic electioneering, and national borders. The book shows a largely professionalized left mostly comprising NGO workers and academics. Very few of Heintz's interview subjects talk about radical social transformation; most talk about what amounts to interest-group politics centered on problems of service delivery. The range of locations represented is reflected in the book's diversity of priorities (the extractive capitalism central to the concerns of many Latin America-based militants is not so for European or North American respondents, for example). But most respondents take contemporary capitalism as a necessary horizon for thinking and acting. They advocate adjustments, greater inclusivity in some cases, greater restrictions on destructive activities in others. I see all this as symptomatic of the social-historical situation of the contemporary left, a claim I discuss in the next section of this essay.

The left of 2019 is not composed of revolutionary organizations turned mass-political parties with extensive systems of internal communication that work to create and maintain cultural spaces apart from dominant, bourgeois society, as had been the case with the French or Italian communist parties of the past. Instead, leftists are mostly integrated into the dominant society and the systems of communication they use are simultaneous with and differentially shaped by other fields of cultural production. Seen from a viewpoint that emphasizes such field effects, the left of 2019 is fairly heterodox. The second section of

this essay looks at this issue. The discussions Heintz presents about former-Yugoslavia reveal a marked difference between what respondents located in Yugoslavia talk about and what Anglophone leftists talk about. “Rojava” has the perverse status of a political brand in anarchist circles because of associations of the PYD with the work of Murray Bookchin, a construction that points to the influence of academic ways of prioritizing information. After looking at the field effects of inclusion, I turn briefly to exclusion and the Syrian revolution. These show field effects being performed, but not thematized as the problems they are.

The final section of this essay looks at other aspects of Heintz’s group portrait to consider what we can learn from the book about the effects of neo-fascism on “the national question” and the extent to which “the organization question” in 2019 refers to NGOs, inter alia.

The international left in 2019 as symptomatic

In what ways is the group portrait Heintz presents usefully understood as “the Left”?

“The Left” acquired its name because of the seating arrangement in the French Assemblé Nationale of 1789. The name has since designated a political space developed and inhabited by historically-contingent social movements, organizations, and political figures. In this sense, “the Left” names a space that is consistent in its isomorphic relation

to the right, but which has otherwise transformed many times and can even disappear. But any name renders what is named transcendent and thereby naturalizes it. In the case of “the Left” the effects of naming are reinforced because the term maps onto basic subjective spatial orientation (left/right, front/back, up/down).On spatial metaphors in cognitive linguistics, see the work of George Lakoff and his collaborators. At the level of its name, the Left is a historical phenomenon that appears a fact of nature, as if where there is a right there must always be a left. That the Left can appear as a “fact of nature” has the curious effect of rendering its history amenable to erasure or forgetting.

The Left in 2019 is a self-designation that allows actors in the present to situate themselves synchronically with reference to other positions, and diachronically to a sense of tradition and history. But these traditions and history have almost entirely disappeared: the Left as it was intertwined with the history of the workers’ movement, then with Marxism, its history and that of its pulverization, for example“Pulverization” alludes to the title of a 1990 essay by Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Pulverization of Marxist-Leninism” available here: https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/cornelius-castoriadis-the-pulverization-of-marxism-leninism. A direct, visceral encounter with what has been disappeared can be had by viewing Patricio Guzman’s astonishing documentaries “The Battle for Chile” and “Chile: Obstinate Memory”.; the Left as a mass-political movement, as a space of organization-building and popular mobilization; the Left that informed anti-colonial struggles that later fossilized into brutality.Chris Marker’s remarkable documentary film “Le fond de l’air est rouge” (English title: Grin Without a Cat) is

the best single source on these trajectories and how they intertwined through 1978. From at least the mid-1970s, the right actively encouraged this forgetting. In the interviews Heintz presents, there is very little sense of connectedness to this past: it does not orient; it does not inform a common language or frame shared sets of analytic or political questions. And yet one finds in Heintz's collection that curious traces of this past continue to function. The book's title characterizes the people interviewed in it as "dissidents," which echoes a past of internal opponents of the Soviet system and western anti-Stalinist leftists. The association entails a space for Stalinism, one that is presumably occupied by the "orthodoxies" of the "anti-imperialist left" (which are largely excluded from the book). The elements from the past that function seem arbitrary. I think this reflects the fact that there is (still) a conceptual and historical problematic regarding the history of the LeftIn other work I use the expression "the Marxist Imaginary" as well, which is at once more and less precise: cf. Looking for the Proletariat: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Problem of Worker Writing (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017) that has not been taken up. This problematic would involve a reckoning: where does the collapse of an entire social-imaginary formation leave us, what can be taken from it and repurposed in light of contemporary needs and struggles, and what should be abandoned?

For example, as evident in Heintz's book and elsewhere, people have lost the sense that a future is possible that might be something more than and different from the present with details rearranged. The idea of revolution expressed this possibility. In previous times, the idea of revolution leaned on Marx's stadial theory of history, according to which feudalism gave way to capitalism that

would in turn give way to socialism via the revolutionary action of the proletariat. But the question of how to understand this future in relation to the present was amenable to multiple answers. People attracted to a more dialectical materialism imagined a socialist future as the result of an abrupt, radical break with the present, and lived in the state of permanent anticipation characteristic of what Walter Benjamin famously called “messianic time.” Those inclined toward historical materialism saw pre-figurations of the future as emergent features of the conflictual institution of the present. During the 1950s, the Paris-based revolutionary group Socialisme ou Barbarie [SouB] hewed to the second option. They considered shop-floor conflicts in advanced industry (automobile manufacturing) to be fundamentally important not just because of the historical role attributed to the proletariat in Marx but also, and more importantly here, because such conflicts involved the most advanced expression of capitalist rationality (Fordist automation of production). In this context, workers continually struggled to maintain personal and professional autonomy and a degree of control over the organization of their work. SouB saw the collective forms workers adopted in the course of these conflicts as pointing beyond the present, as pre-figurations of a “content” of a direct-democratic socialism. It was the role of theory to describe conflicts (over hierarchy, organization, and the nature of skill) and to draw out their political implications.See Cornelius Castoriadis, “On the Content of Socialism III: The workers’ struggles against the organization of the capitalist enterprise” in David Ames Curtis, trans., Political and Social Writings vol. 2 (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota Press, 1988) pp. 155-192. Electronic copy of complete volume available here: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v2.pdf As the group moved away from its Marxist underpinnings and the

working class lost its centrality in their shared vision of revolutionary praxis from 1960, SouB attributed similar importance to a wider range of social conflicts that included those of anti-colonial struggles, those of women and young people, as well as those triggered by transformations in media organization (the Belgian general strike of 1961, for example).The Belgian strikes are covered in issue 32. The complete run of the journal Socialisme ou Barbarie is available as scans here: http://soubscan.org/ I dwell on the above to point to a type of analysis of the conflictual institution of the present with an eye toward pre-figurations of a different future society that originated within Marxist historical materialism but did not depend on it, and which functioned quite well independently. It is useful to think about, not least because it looks to critical sociology for ways to imagine a different future and does not rely on the illuminated vision of a theorist, novelist, or mystic.

In Heintz's interviews, there is almost no such attending to social conflicts. Most of Heintz's respondents view social problems as matters of service delivery to be expanded or adjusted in a future that is an optimized present. The main exception to this view of social problems is militarized situations because, in them, other considerations take precedence (ex-Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, for example). Characterizing questions of inclusivity that extend to basic human and political rights for women or LGBTQ people as matters of service delivery should not be taken as minimizing their importance: even under neoliberalism, service delivery is basic to the legitimation of contemporary states, and there is no service more basic to that legitimation than the provision of a sense of justice. But the focus on service-provision comes with an implicit assumption that all social problems are resolvable by way

of adjustments to the current order of things, which is not at all obvious and seems to follow from the collapse of a sense that an alternate future is possible.

The revolutionary tradition was the practical association of the Left and a future different from the present. From around 1919 in Europe, the revolutionary Left was not dominant politically but was nonetheless basic to the identity of the field: all parties and smaller left organizations jockeyed for position relative to each other using language shaped by the revolutionary tradition. But all that is over now and there is no going back. As Yassin al-Haj Saleh put it in the ~~interview~~ included in this collection, we need “international movements with new ways of thinking, imagining, communicating and acting.”DIL p. 253. The revolutionary project must be rethought and remade. Cornelius Castoriadis characterized that project (the project of autonomy) as a:” [S]ocial-historical project [that] proceeds neither from a subject or a definable category of subject. Its nominal bearer is never but a transitory support. It is not a concatenation of means serving ends defined once and for all, nor is it a strategy grounded on an established knowledge placed within given “objective” or “subjective” conditions, but rather the open-ended generation of significations oriented toward a radical transformation of the social-historical world, borne by an activity that modifies the conditions under which it unfolds, the goals it gives to itself, and the agents who accomplish it, and unified by the idea of autonomy of [human beings] and of society.” Castoriadis, “Question of the Workers’ Movement” in Political and Social Writings volume 3 (1961-1979),tr. David Ames Curtis: (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) p. 198. The possibility of a future different from the present is basic to hope and hope is basic

to political action.

Meanwhile, realities continuously unfold and problems surface and mutate within them that affect vast populations, human and otherwise. People on the left struggle to respond critically to those problems using the conceptual tools at hand, and to organize pragmatically in order to effect meaningful change. This is largely what one sees through Heintz's collection. But that does not obviate the need to rethink fundamentally the bases for radical political action: only matters of situation and degree separate critique and problem-solving within the existing order from putting the existing order itself into question. The problem of how to rethink the conceptual basis for radical politics only unfolds at the margins of the book.

Group portrait: The international left in 2019

Heintz sees his international left as a space that allows for open-ended interrogations of the world. This allows him latitude to include interviews with "human rights activists, feminists, liberals, progressives, anarcho-syndicalists, democratic socialists and adherents to libertarian and democratic socialism."Intro p. 10. I imagine a room in real life with this range of people in it as filled with people talking past each other. But the book's format creates the impression that the international left is a manifold in which the parts work simultaneously on multiple planes in a coexistence that is, for the most part, peaceful. I think the sense of peaceful coexistence results from the interview

format Heintz adopts, which requires each interlocutor to describe and contextualize a specific issue or topic that politically engaged him or her in a compressed way. But in an email, Heintz presented me an image of the international left for which conflict is more integral:

> I think there are lots of different segments of the left, and I think within those segments there is a lot of within-group disagreement. I think it's hard to find much continuity (…) but there were a few ideas that I thought had pretty widespread acceptance: refugee rights, economic rights, gender equality, and opposition to the far Right as well as neoliberalism.

Field effects: Dissident voices and how they talk about what they talk about

I mentioned at the outset that thematic continuities link together various interviews that the organization of the book often separates. This section looks at two of these continuities—ex-Yugoslavia and Rojava/Jazira—to show how aspects of Heintz's group portrait of the dissident international left work. One characteristic of this Left in 2019 is that the actors are integrated into the dominant

order, often as NGO workers or academics, and that they communicate (and see the world) in ways that are differentially imprinted by the fields of cultural production in which they operate. The effects of this imprinting are performed but not recognized as problematic—this is another symptomatic feature of the international left in 2019.

Former Yugoslavia

In his introduction, Heintz links the genesis of his book to the former Yugoslavia. The project is a response to watching the fragmentation of the Anglophone left, primarily on the Internet.Ibid, 10. The fragmentation unfolded on social media, which has effects on political communication that are important for understanding the state of play in 2019, but which are not thematized in DIL. This fragmentation was driven by various debates, among which figured prominently the question of whether humanitarian military interventions can be justified in situations where genocide is already or might imminently be happening. An alternate phrasing might be: under what conditions can the Right to Protect (R2P) be invoked and what are the implications of doing so.Intro 10-11. See also the review of Samantha Power's memoir "Education of an Idealist" by Daniel Bessner "Fog of Intervention" in New Republic https://newrepublic.com/article/154612/education-idealist-samantha-power-book-review Given that, under present arrangements, any such intervention would involve one of

the main “imperialist” military powers, or an umbrella organization like NATO, the debate had space for anti-imperialist positions that typically expressed their skepticism or opposition by way of questioning great-power motives. From there follow conflicts over appearance versus reality and over who gets to make the determinations as to what is what. As these conflicts over naming are also conflicts over social position or power that often do not present themselves as such, arguments can get quite heated, and this heat can drive a sense of fragmentation. Heintz’s efforts to understand the stakes behind the sense of fragmentation led him to start contacting people.

Heintz includes in the book interviews with people from the former Yugoslavia who opposed (fascist) nationalism, in which he asks what happened up through the NATO intervention and afterward. These include Pedrag Kojovic, founder of Nasa Straga, a multi-ethnic political party in Bosnia Herzegovina; Sonja Licht from the Fund for an Open Society in Yugoslavia (1991-2003) and, more recently, the Center for Political Excellence in Belgrade; Lino Veljak, a philosopher based in Zagreb, Croatia; and Stasa Zajovic of Women in Black in Serbia. Heintz also interviewed foreign journalists/observers: the book’s organization divides them into two groups, one more geographically proximate to Yugoslavia (Roger Lippman, an American anti-war activist who edits Balkan Witness and Ed Vulliamy, who has written for the Guardian and The ObserverLippman and Vulliamy interviews begin on p. 304 and 331 respectively.) and another, less proximate (Noam Chomsky and Bill WeinbergChomsky and Weinberg interviews begin on p. 25 and 78 respectively.). The former are grouped under Europe, the latter in the US.

The book works best when there are multiple perspectives brought to bear on a common theme or situation. Because the interviews are each quite short, the route to a sense of complexity is additive. This group of interviews also reveals the multiple communicative environments that comprise the “international left” as well as their effects. It is quite striking that respondents in ex-Yugoslavia are concerned with entirely different questions than are Chomsky, Lippman, and Weinberg. For the former, the central problems include the incompleteness of processes of coming to terms with what happened during the early 1990s, with the fact that crimes against humanity were committed, as well as with the radical nationalisms that motivated and/or enabled those crimes. Interviewees from the former Yugoslavia discuss ongoing struggles to construct organizations, some of which are ethnically and politically inclusive, others of which address questions of transitional justice. They are also concerned with conflicts over education, in particular over dimensions like history that can be used to transmit nationalisms. For the latter, the central questions are geopolitical, but the main subtext is Noam Chomsky and the ways in which he was wrong about humanitarian intervention at the time. In the Anglophone left, Chomsky’s status was such that his attribution of self-serving motives to NATO and the US set the terms of debate. In his interview with Heintz, Chomsky does not take a direct position on his own earlier line. Rather, he justifies it by presenting a view of the dominant media in the US in particular as so wholly captured by political and economic interests that it is nigh impossible to assemble a distanced, coherent view of anything, particularly when interests of state are involved. A hermeneutic of suspicion is therefore justified a priori, regardless of its content—even in a situation where the

particular suspicions turn out to be unfounded or wrong (though Chomsky does not say the last part). The other interviewees from the Anglosphere who address the former Yugoslavia, Weinberg and Lippman, devote nearly as much attention to Chomsky as they do to explaining the situation in ex-Yugoslavia because Chomsky mediated the Anglosphere's Kosovo debate. When one talked differently about Kosovo, when one raised problems or pointed to errors, one challenged Chomsky's authority: explicitly or not, one sought to dislodge and replace him. Both groups of interview respondents talk about the reality in which they operated at the time—but it is perverse to find addressing war crimes and jockeying for cultural power in the Anglophone metropole operating on the same level, and even more so that no-one seems to notice.

Rojava

In the interviews about Rojava/Jazira, the issue is not the effects of the cultural power attributed to speaker X or Y on discussion of a political matter, but rather the process of selecting and attributing importance to a topic or situation. Selection and valuation involve the assignment of attributes or predicates: in this case the result is the fashioning of Rojava/Jazira among the anarchists.

Heintz interviews people closely involved with the Kurdish struggle and several US-based anarcho-syndicalists who have been politically engaged by the territory they refer to as Rojava.The former include Hawzhin Azeez (pp. 238ff) and Houzahn Mahmoud (pp. 270ff), both of whom operate in

NGO-space and are particularly concerned with questions of gender equality. The latter include Bill Weinberg, Meredith Tax (pp. 69ff), Janet Biehl (242 ff). The anarchists appear to be fascinated by Rojava in part because the PYD is said to have abandoned its earlier Leninist organizational principles and "fully embraced democratic confederalism." Their interest might flow from the way the PYD trajectory contradicts Lenin's various statements concerning the evolutionary direction of revolutionary organization, which could be taken as a kind of victory over Lenin delivered by history. But the main interest lay in the association of "democratic confederalism" with the writings of the late US-based eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin.6/15/2018, Debbie Bookchin "How my father's writing helped the Kurds create a new democracy" in NY Review of Books, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/06/15/how-my-fathers-ideas-helped-the-kurds-create-a-new-democracy/?fbclid=IwAR28eVAKdLlNOVXuhAgb1qAqgD2Db5QBFUiBsu9VpPkj0Y77K0Scv45dqnc Heintz mirrors the central importance accorded this association when he includes an interview with Janet Biehl, Bookchin's former partner. For the anarchists interviewed in the book, the view of Rojava as an experiment in Murray Bookchin precedes and conditions other predicates, like relative gender equality (women as fighters) which in turn contributes to a romantic image of the PYD fighters that connects them to Barcelona in 1937.

Rojava is a brand for anarchists. It is positioned as an extension of the history of anarchism and legitimated by reference to a prominent contemporary theorist of direct democratic self-organization. The power of the brand overrides certain contradictions. Echoing my friend Joe Ruffell, the PYD is a military structure: the central feature of

Leninist party organization is its military structure; it follows that the idea that a Leninist organization “has become an anarchist one (whatever that is) without dismantling its military structure is beyond the widest credulity.” Brand power also elides the paradox of this use of Murray Bookchin’s work, which runs counter to his extensive writing on autonomous self-organization by saying, in effect, that what is interesting about the political actions of people in Rojava is that they enact and confirm the work of Murray Bookchin. Rojava’s brand-status is reflected in statements that characterize it as “the most exciting political adventure to emerge from the Syrian conflict” See for example 2/22/2019, Rosa Burç and Fouad Oveisy, “Rojava is under existential threat” in Jacobin,https://jacobinmag.com/2019/02/rojava-united-states-withdrawal-syria-erdogan?fbclid=IwAR0X_CYtE6dBxXtnzndhmc8_XUT1AhZ85usNE8FAe1WhPYH9O6kPEVXvA2w as well as a solidarity rooted in identification, visible in the interview with Meredith Tax when she dismisses or trivializes criticisms of Kurdish actions on the ground in Syria. This is evident in an excerpt from an interview with Heintz by the UK-based Workers’ Liberty:

> Several of your interviewees, particularly Bill Weinberg and Meredith Tax, are prominent supporters of what is going on in Rojava (the “canton” controlled by the PYD in Northern Syria). Through your questions you provided a relatively nuanced position, recognising both

> the rights of Kurds to self-determination while remaining critical of some of the conduct of the forces on the ground. In Britain we often get an uncritical championing of the project based on ideas that the PYD have fully embraced the so-called “democratic confederalism” of Murray Bookchin, or that they deserve uncritical support as a continuation of the guerilla tactics of the PKK.From Workers’ Liberty interview with Heintz, linked above. In DIL, Bookchin’s partner Janet Biehl makes an appearance, seemingly to provide a benediction to the YPG and PKK.

This Rojava is not what the respondents who work in Kurdish Syria via NGO-space talk about.

The Syrian revolution: Exclusion and learned passivity

The cultural power to distinguish appearance from reality, to name and legitimate, is also the power to exclude. Exclusion can happen by commission or omission. When it happens by omission, when there is no explicit act of “exclusion,” there is no one whom one might challenge or to whom one might appeal. What is excluded is weightless and that weightlessness is exceedingly difficult to change.

The weightlessness of exclusions-by-omission perpetuates a learned passivity from previous times. In part, this passivity was historically rooted in the scarcity of cultural resources and/or difficulty of access. The mediating functions of academics or critics acquired outsized power in such situations. For example, if you had wanted to see films by Guy Debord thirty years ago, you would have had to screen one of the (very) few extant celluloid copies at an Amsterdam museum. Some who had managed to see them published accounts that told readers what was in Debord's films, why they were important and what they meant aesthetically and politically—while at the same time establishing their own position as mediator. To know about the films, one knew about such accounts: the range of such accounts of experimental film was the universe of such films: scarcity was such that only rarely could one venture beyond the limits of that universe. These days you can see Debord's films on YouTube, but neither old-style mediators nor the learned passivity of a piece with them have disappeared—which means that learned passivity cannot only be an effect of disappeared scarcity of cultural resources. It must reflect broader relations to information that are visible if you look for them through the ways in which they are continuously reinforced. One need only watch a US baseball game. Televised baseball games are narrated by announcers who act like they are still on radio. The announcers tell you what you are looking at; they tell you what matters and, by exclusion, what does not. You don't have to decide a thing.

In much of the Anglosphere the Syrian revolution did not involve interests of other states nor those of the corporate media that echo interests of state. It is to Heintz's credit that he does not recapitulate this in his book.Heintz

includes interviews with two subjects engaged with the revolution, Robin Yassin-Kassab and Yassin al-Haj Saleh. Heintz appears to have been persuaded personally by Yassin-Kassab and Saleh on the relations that obtain between the Syrian and Kurdish situations, but the book leaves to the reader the work required for an independent interpretation. See 8/17/2018 James Snell, “Rojava Reconquista” in Al-Jumhuriya https://www.aljumhuriya.net/en/content/rojava-reconquista. There was no one to tell you what you were looking at when you saw footage of demonstrations, or photographs of banners from Kafranbel, or citizen journalist clips of the effects of barrel bombs, or the evidence that the Russian air force has been targeting civilian hospitals and medical workers. Where there is no such voice most people do not venture, and information, no matter its quality or what it shows or relays or reveals or discusses, remains weightless. In an analysis of this kind of dynamic, it would be useful to contrast this characterization of the non-reception of the Syrian revolution in the Anglophone North in particular with the very different patterns of reception for fascist (neo and otherwise) videos linked one to the next by helpful algorithms on YouTube, the commercial interest of which is to maintain consumer engagement for as long as possible so they might take in more vital advertisement. I would expect the centrality of a narcissism specifically adapted to contemporary “meritocratic” authoritarianism and performing its consequences. On authoritarian “meritocracy” see for example 9/2019, David Markovitz “How Life Became an Endless, Terrible Competition” in Atlantic Monthly https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/09/meritocracys-miserable-winners/594760/ There is only the chatter of social-media-like voices emanating from a

receiver tuned to amateur radio left running in another room.

Learned passivity can be understood as an adaptation to a top-down media environment. It can be further decomposed into a reliance on authority and a (protective) lack of curiosity that reflect the dehumanizing rationality of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Because the Left has long ceased to be a counter-cultural space, it is no surprise to find that these effects repeat in leftist fields of cultural production. Here, as in the interviews about ex-Yugoslavia and Rojava as an experiment in Murray Bookchin, the blurring of field effects with aspects of the social world (access to which is for some mediated by those fields) is performed but is not thematized as the problem it is. Addressing the problem is not a matter of asking whether one should or should not have systems of cultural production, reproduction, and distribution. Rather, it is a matter of being aware of such systems, of how they work and their effects, and of deciding whether the latter are or are not acceptable—and, if they are not, what to do about it.

Conclusion, inter alia

Heintz's interviews have much to offer beyond the issues I focus on above. For example, the discussions about ex-Yugoslavia broach the theme of sectarianism (broadly understood) that runs through the whole of the book. Sonja Licht, someone who has experienced a longer historical arc than most in dealing with the problem, has quite striking

things to say about the role of the media in fomenting sectarian conflict:

> I was asked this question in different countries in the 1990s from Italy to the United States and my usual response would be the following: give me your media for a year and you'll have the Balkan wars on your territory. It's very easy to instigate hatred. You instigate it by raising the level of fear and insecurity first, then everything else follows.DIL, p. 302.

The role of sectarianism in masking corruption and/or wealth extraction is also quite clear in the responses from Licht, Veljak, and Zajovic, all of whom emphasize the instrumental uses made of neoliberal discourse in the transition to post-Soviet space, the transformation of Party figures to oligarchs, the cynical uses made of the public-private distinction, and so on. Sectarianism on the scale of the US-initiated "global war on terror" also ramifies extensively, informing discussions of politicized usages of Islam, particularly those rooted in schemata that would make of jihadist groups expressions of something about some "essence" of Islam. Many respondents address military conflicts legitimated with reference to the "global war on terror" and their consequences on global, national, regional levels: problems of refugee and migrant flows are discussed, but are not particularly central for many of the

people included in Heintz's group portrait.Sonia Licht and Yassin al-Haj Saleh are exceptions. Other interviewees mention migrant or refugee issues in specific national contexts as dimensions of the broader problems that concern them.

Problems created by neo-fascism and far-right variants of nationalism rebound throughout the interviews, but the far right is itself only really front-and-center in interviews about the former Yugoslavia. For others, concerns about right-wing nationalism play out as tactical issues: some argue that leftists might not be comfortable using the category of nation, but to abandon it is to leave an entire discursive space to neo-fascism. Contemporary neo-fascism centrally involves reassertion of one or other conception of "natural" social order rooted in patriarchy and religious identification, one in which women "have a place" and LGBTQ people are a "bad Other." Several of Heintz's respondents actively combat these retrograde tendencies.

At the same time, from other parts of the world (Latin America, in particular) come important discussions of extractive capitalism, the ideologies that subtend it, and various points of struggle to limit its damage, if not eliminate it outright.

There is much to be taken in from the portrait of the dissident international left that Heintz presents to readers.

Of course, no image can encompass everything, and this book is no exception. The interviews are often frustratingly short and drop the reader into synopses of long-term engagements with issues of considerable complexity. The biographical information that accompanies each interview

is perfunctory, which makes fashioning a sociological understanding of the dissident international left more difficult than it needs to be. Also, people working in other geographical spaces could have been included: Heintz noted in an email to me that he particularly regrets not including anyone from China.

Other omissions are more symptomatic. For example, one might expect to find in a book about the left analyses of the myriad problems caused by neoliberal capitalism and its manifest failures—while a few people mention them, they are not fundamental points of departure. The main accomplishment of neoliberal capitalism has been the transformation of the geographies of industrial production, not their elimination. But there is little talk of workers, work or praxis, about modes of hierarchy in the context of contemporary production and how they ramify through other aspects of everyday life. Weapons central to the history of the workers' movement, like various forms of strike actions, are not discussed, nor for that matter is much attention paid to questions of how the left might get, hold, and transform power.

With some exceptions (the Afrika Youth Movement, for example) political organizing is not a particular horizon for the interlocutors, even as conventional political parties and their positions are matters of extensive concern. NGO-space (for lack of a better term) is a significant exception. Many of the respondents are employed by NGOs: it is clear from their responses that not all NGOs are the same, that there are good ones (which the respondents seem to all work with) and bad ones. There are problems of funding that affect all organizations. I would have benefitted from some big-picture background on NGO-space: where it came

from, what it comprises, how these organizations do or don't interact with other multi-national organizations like the United Nations. In the US, some NGO-space goes by the name "the non-profit sector," which has been subject to intensive "professionalization" over the past decade from the migration of MBAs into organizational management (because what would be profits in a for-profit firm can be paid out as salaries in a non-profit; it can be a lucrative sector) to the intensive introduction of "performance metrics" that "benchmark" and "measure impact"—with the effect that non-profits frequently adapt what they do to making measurable impacts and meeting requisite benchmarks in order to assure donors that their money is being used to good effect, which makes the firms more self-referential and their worlds more self-confirming.This is not exclusive to US non-profits. See the Hussein Kurji's 2014 mockumentary "The Samaritans." A description of the show, an interview with Kurji and a link out to the trailer are here: https://africasacountry.com/2014/02/kenyas-first-mockumentary-takes-on-the-ngo-world/ But more basically, it seems to me that making a social problem the center of a business model provides all manner of incentives to an NGO to not solve that problem. And why would anyone look for a business to save us?

In a different register, to judge from Heintz's outline, the international left in 2019 is not much concerned by transnational financial flows, their stability or instability, the distortions they inflict on "real economies" and their centrality in driving inequality, or the problems of regulatory capture and corruption. But the financial sector—which is not one thing in any event—appears quite differently depending on where the observer is situated

geographically. A virtue of Heintz's group portrait of the dissident left in 2019 is to undercut any privilege attributed to any particular geographical location on which an observer might stand and declaim things about the nature of "the world.

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