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CONTENDER STATE CAPITALISM OR COMPETITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION?

Abstract: *The challenge posed by the BRICS bloc to Western hegemony is not primarily the aggregate economic performance. It is the development of social alternatives for a population protected by the contender state from extreme exploitation. Prior forms of contender states such as revolutionary France, post-1870 Germany and Japan, the USSR and its bloc protected their populations (mixed with repression) as a key asset in the competition with the West. The social alternatives were ultimately defeated by the liberal English-speaking West in the wars against Napoleon, the World Wars and the arms race with the Soviet bloc. For capital, humanity is an anonymous mass approached quantitatively. Today the BRICS bloc offers its population a social conservatism resonating in the West.*

Key words: *Social protection, Contender state, War, Social alternatives, Democracy.*

CAPITALISME D'ÉTAT CONCURRENTIEL OU PROTECTION SOCIALE COMPÉTITIVE ?

Résumé : Le défi que représente le bloc BRICS pour l'hégémonie occidentale ne réside pas principalement dans la performance économique globale. Il s'agit plutôt du développement d'alternatives sociales pour une population protégée de toute exploitation extrême par l'État rival. Les précédents États rivaux, tels que la France révolutionnaire, l'Allemagne et le Japon de l'après-1870, l'URSS et son bloc, ont protégé leurs populations (parfois avec la répression) comme un atout majeur dans la compétition avec l'Occident. Ces alternatives sociales ont finalement été vaincues par l'Occident libéral anglophone lors des guerres napoléoniennes, des guerres mondiales et de la course aux armements avec le bloc soviétique. Pour le capital, l'humanité est une masse anonyme appréhendée de manière quantitative. Aujourd'hui, le bloc BRICS propose à sa population un conservatisme social qui trouve un écho en Occident.

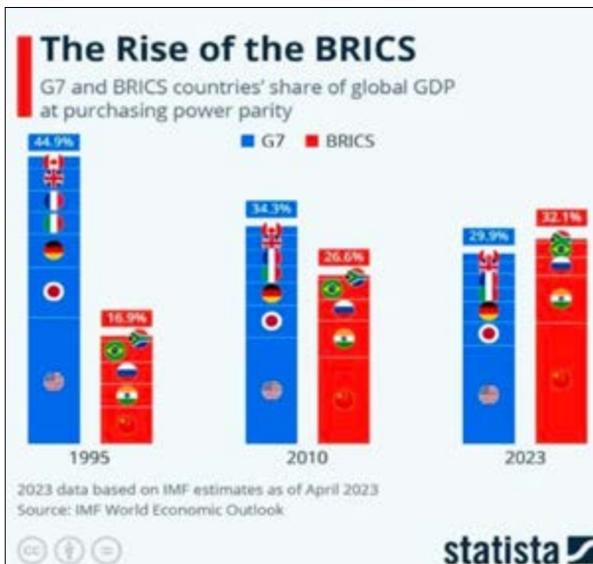
Mots-clés : Protection sociale, État concurrent / rival, Guerre, Alternatives sociales, Démocratie.

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THE BRICS PHENOMENON began as an investment banker’s gimmick regarding “emerging markets”. It has evolved into what I call a *contender bloc* drawing closer to the West (G7) in economic performance.

This competitive run can be understood as a repetition of the long 18th-century French, the post-1870s German and Japanese, and the Soviet contender experiences. In a weaker form, it was expressed in a number of secondary contender formations such as the large Latin American countries, Iran, Turkey, and others. In the late 1960s, early 70s, this culminated in the Third World / non-aligned coalition for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). All of these episodes, the strong and the weak, single states or blocs, collapsed in wars or otherwise military contests (such as arms races) terminating the contender effort before it could have drawn even with the Western heartland.

If that were all, the BRICS would represent a most successful example of a contender effort, although dark clouds of war have been gathering since the turn of the new century. Especially since the financial collapse of 2008, the BRICS economies have accelerated their growth. In purchasing power terms, they are in fact the first example ever of a contender bloc overtaking the West (as in the figure below).



There are a host of problems with this comparison (e.g. the socially integrated West compared to an aggregate of very different societies; cross-investments

between the blocs, notably Western capital in BRICS economies, etc.), but what I see as crucial is the role of the contender state population. The challenge to the liberal West is not so much the straightforward, aggregate economic contest but *the degree to which the population of a contender state succeeds in wresting concessions from its ruling (state) class* to develop a way of life of its own and advance democracy.

I begin with the origin of the contender state as a historical phenomenon.

1. Origins of the Contender State and the French Example

Both the notion of the liberal West and that of the contender state or bloc can be traced to 17th-century English history (at that time already extending to New England, Virginia etc. in North America). The English Civil War served as a laboratory of social-political development. It started as a contest between an alliance of free traders and enclosing landlords (commercial land owners privatizing the commons, the land available to the community as a whole), and the monarchy which extended a measure of social protection to its subjects on those lands². By mid-century the Commonwealth under Cromwell was the first modern state / society-complex that crystallised.

Sovereignty was now an attribute of an impersonal state, not a personal quality of the monarch. Mercantilism in its different forms and a state imposing itself on society in the spirit of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), produced the Act of Navigation restricting maritime trade with England to English ships. The 1662 Act of Settlement restricted the mobility of the subjects as a workforce³. So, the protection restored to society was primarily economic, restrictive rather than protective for the population. In other words, a closed society.

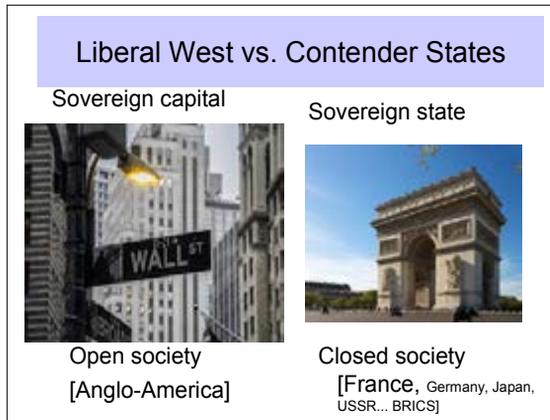
For the liberal-minded landlords and independent traders these restrictions were seen as obstacles and in the last phase of the English Civil War, a Dutch invasion under William of Orange brought about a regime change in the spirit of John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), the "Glorious Revolution". This ended the Civil War both on the British Isles and in North America. From then on, the protective restrictions mentioned were step by step removed to allow the Industrial Revolution to proceed on the basis of freely available labour power and confront the French absolutist monarchy that posed a threat to both Holland

2. Polanyi Karl, *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston, Beacon, 1957 [1944], p. 35.

3. *Ibidem.*, p. 86.

and England. However, the geopolitical contest concealed a structural difference in terms of state/society-complexes: in England and the North American colonies (the “Lockean heartland”), the state receded from active interference other than protecting private property, leaving society to self-regulation under the law; this invested sovereignty in property, in due course in *capital* as self-expanding value. France on the other hand lagged behind in this transition and still stuck in the tentacular state, first as a monarchy and after the Revolution of 1789, as an empire. It was this model that would be replicated later by Germany after unification, and the others already mentioned; ultimately, by the BRICS as well.

So, we get two types of state/society-complexes, that of the liberal capitalist heartland, and the contender type (as below).



The relation between the two (the liberal heartland and the contender state(s)) is not a straightforward contest, an *external* relation, but (also) an *internal* one. That is, the inherent historical tendency for the contender state(s) is to move towards the liberal-capitalist (“Lockean”) configuration and it is only because in Anglo-America this configuration has already established itself and enjoys the first-mover advantages and geopolitical primacy, that France and the others remain stuck in the contender configuration much longer than the thirty years separating the Lockean from the Hobbesian moment in English history.

France as the Prototypical Contender State

Let us now look at a few features of French development in this light. Before the 1789 Revolution, public administration there was already “*highly centralised, very*

powerful, prodigiously active". The Revolution replaced that with an even more tenuous state, absorbing all secondary social powers⁴. From the British perspective, which was 100 years ahead with its bourgeois revolution, the French Revolution was unacceptable. Constructing and driving forward a society *from above*, compulsively, was an aberration from liberal principles, as Edmund Burke outlined in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). The idea that everyone has a right to an equal share in the total wealth and be involved in the management of the state, he considered an aberration as well⁵. In other words, property must trump justice and equality.

Tocqueville considered the Anglophone West a natural, organic entity based on largely identical social foundations. "*The great Anglo-American family*", he predicted in 1835... , "*will preserve at least a similar social condition and will hold in common the customs and opinions to which that social condition has given birth*"⁶. Napoleon's confessor, Dufour de Pradt, saw the UK and the US as a combination capable of leading a transnational bourgeoisie. "*What has formed itself, with respect to the Continent*", he wrote after the fall of Napoleon, "*is a party of democratic opposition* [« opposition de sociabilité », in French] *of which England is the head, America the body, and all the enlightened men of Europe, the extended limbs*"⁷.

These were early articulations of the idea of an Atlantic heartland extending to Europe (at least, to its "*enlightened men*"). The nature of a quasi-family relation between the different heartland state-societies set a standard (common language, legal and political forms...) that no future contender bloc would be able to match. Not France and its alliances in Europe, or the Nazi Third Reich, the USSR and the Soviet bloc, and certainly not the BRICS.

The two (ideal) types of state/society complex also entail two profoundly different attitudes towards the population, the subjects.

4. Tocqueville Alexis (de), *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, Paris, Flammarion, 1988 [1856], [ed., intro. Françoise Mélonio], p. 89 and p. 104.

5. Burke Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France [1790]* and *Thoughts on French Affairs [1791]* (Vol. IV of the Works of Edmund Burke), Oxford, Oxford University Press and London, Humphrey Milford, 1934, p. 64.

6. Tocqueville Alexis (de), *Democracy in America*, 2 Vol., New York, Vintage, 1990 [1835, 1840], [Reeve/Bowen trans., ed. P. Bradley, intro. D. J. Boorstin], Vol. I, pp. 431-433.

7. De Pradt M. [Dominique G.F. Dufour], *L'Europe et l'Amérique en 1822 et 1823*, Vol. II, Paris, Béchét aîné, 1824, pp. 48-49.

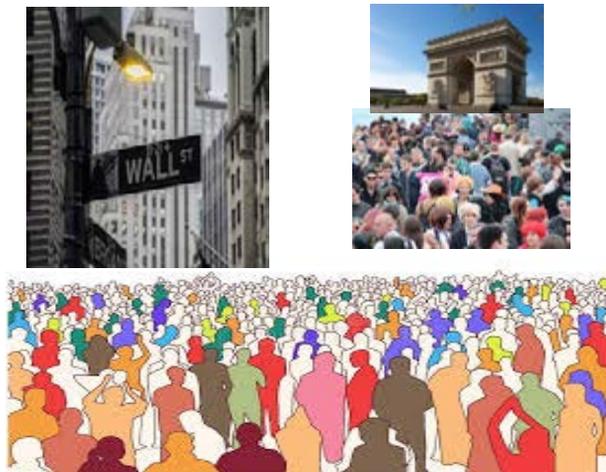
Two Perspectives on Population

I begin with the Lockean configuration of the Anglophone West. Since sovereign capital transcends the single state, the “open society” also implies that capital has a perspective on humanity that is basically indifferent towards any particular identity, it is ultimately *quantitative*. The working-age population must be available in the required quantities for capitalist exploitation, no more. For the capitalist class it makes no difference what the nationality of workers is, and neither is the degree of social cohesion a positive element—indeed, the less, the better. Workers are inherently replaceable based on relative costs. Either through foreign investment or migration. Ultimately, a population surplus larger than what is needed as a reserve army of labour to keep wages down, can also be dealt with by other means. Reducing the population overall by war, or by a medical intervention like the mRNA genetic therapies deployed against the presumed Covid-19 epidemic, is also an instance of the quantitative approach. I will come back to this later.

For the contender state, this is a different matter. As Gramsci recognized, the “*interventionist state*”, the contender state facing the liberal heartland, “*on the one hand propounds protectionism and economic nationalism; on the other hand, it takes on the ‘protection’ of the working classes against the excesses of capitalism*”⁸. The *state class* ruling a contender state considers its own population its responsibility. Not necessarily out of love for humanity, but because in the competition with the West, the home population is a key asset in every respect. Whereas for sovereign capital, the population ideally is an anonymous mass to which it is indifferent, for a contender state its population is a qualitative factor, lifted out of this anonymity, highlighting its particular identity, nationality, its cultural level, and so on (as in the figure below).

Against the faceless, anonymous mass of humanity exploited by capital irrespective of identity, national, religious, or otherwise cultural, the population of a contender state does have a recognized identity as citizenry of that particular state, as nationality (also in multinational, federative states), and in terms of its cultural and educational aspirations.

8. Gramsci Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* [trans. and ed. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith]. New York, International Publishers, 1971 [written 1929-35], p. 262.



However, the contender state (from France in the long 18th century to the BRICS of today) necessarily is a *temporary* phenomenon and all characteristics of its state/society-complex are in principle equally temporary. So the state class governing a contender state, whose power depends on its momentary control of the state apparatus, will lose that power if private forces arising with advancing capitalism (normally, with assistance from the West) encroach on its power monopoly and dispossess it. The state class cannot, so to speak, migrate to another state; it is tied hand and feet to its own particular country, hence also the specific commitment to its own population. The capitalist class on the other hand, which directs the liberal state/society-complex with the help of an auxiliary, managerial cadre subordinate to it, has no such commitment, except perhaps an atavistic affinity with its own particular civilization that it will ideally discard.

So, what about the time limit inherent in the contender role? Cromwell's state and the work of Hobbes (a monarchist then in exile!) by the time that Locke wrote, were "*forgotten*". After thirty years, so one generation. Locke polemicized against another writer (Filmer) since Hobbes was no longer deemed an important opponent from the perspective of the adherents of the Glorious Revolution. But what about the contenders whose trajectory was modulated by geopolitical rivalries? Here the particularity of the contender state population, the suspension of its anonymity, plays out *in proportion to the duration of the contender posture*.

France was a prime contender from Louis XIV (« L'État c'est moi » : "*I am the State*") to the downfall of Napoleon, so more than 150 years. During that time, a

particular culture took shape in the population at large. Because the centralized state apparatus (and its need to internally communicate its tasks) was the driver of development, the ruling state class was intellectual before it became practical. In England, the guilds were side-stepped in practice by provincial entrepreneurs, but in France, Diderot and d'Alembert made the secrets of the guilds public knowledge in the *Encyclopédie* first. “Hence the desire of the French to become intellectual, their devotion to the idealistic superstructure of society”, writes Rosenstock-Huessy⁹. This guided the mobilization of the French population by its state class, both to confront its external enemies and set about internal modernisation, eventually, by the Revolution of 1789.

The key new concept inspiring the French people was the “*nation*”. “‘Nation’ is the people restored to a truer and greater nature; it is ‘people’ minus superstitions or instincts, plus reason and speech”¹⁰. In the nation we see the population being included in the contender state project, for which it is indispensable. During the protracted incubation period granted to the contender project, this inclusion shaped the outlook of the French nation as a whole. As Napoleon put it, “The French are indifferent towards freedom; they don’t understand nor love it; pride (« vanité ») is their only passion”¹¹.

In the next round of contender states facing the capitalist heartland, Germany and Austria-Hungary (from the 1870s to 1945) also experienced such an extended formative period of a public spirit in this way. Its distinguishing characteristic was the role of the “*official*” socialist labour movement. “*Official*” in the sense that it was protected, awarded a degree of social insurance, but also directed by the state through for instance the restriction to parliamentary work via Bismarck’s Socialist Laws.

2. The Working-Class Component in the Contender Challenge of Germany and Austria-Hungary

Just as the British had organised the reactionary coalition against Napoleon, they also were the architects of an alliance to defeat the ascendant Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary. Following the unification of North Germany under Bismarck in the war with France in 1870-71, German development

9. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution. Autobiography of Western Man* [intro. H.J. Berman], Providence (Rhode Island), Berg, 1993 [1938], p. 169.

10. *Ibidem.*, p. 168, emphasis added.

11. Quoted in Stendhal, *Vie de Napoléon*, Paris, Payot, 2006 [written 1818], p. 60.

accelerated thanks to the coal and steel of newly annexed Alsace-Lorraine. Within a few decades, German civilization made great strides and became world-leading in basic science (Einstein, Planck...), on top its advances in philosophy and social science (Hegel, Marx, Weber), and the arts, especially music (Wagner, Bruckner, Mahler...). So spectacular were these advances that they inspired Nietzsche to come up with an evolutionary explanation, arguing that humanity as we know it, was only half-way between an animal and an imaginary Super-Man¹². Austria-Hungary faced a slow but unstoppable disintegration along the lines of the nationalities making up the Dual Monarchy, but Vienna too was a centre of cultural progress¹³.

All in all, the states of the Lockean heartland found themselves potentially outclassed economically and culturally. In response, the conquistador of South African mineral wealth, Cecil Rhodes, developed the vision of a world united by the liberal democratic spirit he saw inherent in Anglophone culture. The first concrete task for the secret society he set up was to draw the British Empire and the United States together again to meet the challenge of German-speaking Central Europe. Rhodes set up a secret society to plan for this Anglo-American integration and upon his death left a fortune that was entrusted to the key ruling class strategist, Lord Alfred Milner: the Rhodes Trust¹⁴.

What made the challenge posed by Germany and Austria especially acute was the element of organized labour accompanying the German-speaking ascent. For the workers in Germany during the extended contender period in which they enjoyed a measure of social protection, participated in the cultural advances made at that juncture and developed their own, unique way of life. Already in 1905, Max Weber celebrated the cultural community established by the one-million-strong German organized labour movement (always with its weaker but significant Austro-Hungarian counterpart). Summing up Weber's view, Drischler writes:

12. William F. Drischler, *Ukraine-Germany-Russia. The Weberian Alternative to Stefan Bollinger's 'The Russians are Coming'*. Self-published, 2023, p. 9; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keine*. [1883-85], in *Werke in Zwei Bänden*, [ed. I. Frenzel], München, Carl Hanser Verlag, 1967, Vol. I, p. 551.

13. Allan Janik, Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1973.

14. Carroll Quigley, *The Anglo-American Establishment. From Rhodes to Cliveden*, New York, Books in Focus, 1981 [1949 and *Tragedy and Hope. A History of the World in Our Time*, San Pedro (Cal.), GSG Books, 1998 [1966]; Kees van der Pijl, *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class* [with a new preface], London, Verso, 2012 [1984].

“Working class sports and exercise clubs, libraries and political societies... amounted to a life-long alternative milieu shielding the work force from atomistic [private life] and middle-class ideas of trying to culturally ape what was portrayed as the lifestyle of the rich and famous”¹⁵

In other words, the German workers profited from the extended contender era to escape the condition ultimately favoured by capital, that of an anonymous mass of humanity. Their identity and self-consciousness gave rise to an original human type, the social-democratic worker. Nothing comparable existed in other European countries: the English and French organized working classes were around 100,000 strong, so a mere one-tenth of the mighty German movement. In Austria-Hungary, a comparable level of organization existed in the most developed German-speaking parts. The Austrians also demonstrated that the positive identity of one’s nationality does not require the liberal equation of the nation plus its own state, which is a rarity anyway, confined mostly to north-western Europe. Socialist leaders such as Otto Bauer sought to account for multi-nationality in the spirit of socialist internationalism; even the smallest nation or national grouping was considered to have an inalienable right to self-determination. The peculiarity of Bauer’s solution to the nationality problem was that it did not rely on having one’s own national state territory, but on a passport system that left the larger state structure (i.e., Austria-Hungary) intact for economic reasons¹⁶.

A working class with its unique way of life, with nationality rights for the smallest grouping, was anathema to Anglophone Atlantic capital. The subordinate population in Britain and the United States was instead kept in a condition of persistent anomie, as an apolitical rabble—the type of worker depicted in the novels of Dickens and Disraeli’s *Sibyl*. Of course, all ruling classes across Europe feared their own socialists, but the British and later, Anglo-American, Atlantic ruling class saw in the well-fed, well-clothed and mentally/physically fit workers’ movement of Germany something different—an alternative social model.

It was against this challenge that Rhodes and his circle developed the “*English-speaking Idea*” of social-imperialist expansion, whilst the Milner Group directed the international diplomatic encirclement of the Central Powers that eventually led to World War I. The British ruling class (and its North American counterpart

15. William F. Drischler, *The Yankees did it! The Origins of World War I and the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict, 2022-2024*, Self-published, 2024, p. 56.

16. Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Wien, Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung Ignaz Brand, 1907.

rising behind it) thus assumed “systemic” responsibilities extending well beyond its own society.

The World War as a Class War

The standard explanation for World War I still today is that of innate German militarism and aggression. This imaginary was fostered by the British before and the Americans after the war. In 1961, the German historian, Fritz Fischer, revived this thesis. He based it on the (well-documented) claim that the German ruling class feared, not so much its foreign rivals, but its own socialist working class first. In this respect it shared a common anxiety with the British, French and Russian enemies, who likewise feared internal revolt—just think of the Paris Commune, or the 1905 uprising in Russia¹⁷.

In reality, for all the German militarism and the telegrams of Emperor Wilhelm II about beheading the Socialist movement and dispatching of its membership in the trenches (documented by Fischer), the German threat was economic and social, not primarily military. Here the Anglo-American ruling class with the Milner Group at the centre occupied the commanding heights of the process as a whole. The fear of their own workers by the national ruling classes of Europe in this sense was over-determined by the systemic concern in the Anglo-American ruling class about the socialist component in the German and Austria contender postures. Docherty and Macgregor analyze the decades-long British diplomatic effort to create the Entente with France and Russia, after London already skillfully directed Russia's geopolitical ambitions to the West by supporting Japan in the 1904-05 war. Belgium, the focal point of widespread indignation as the victim of German aggression, was in fact involved in military planning for the war that broke out in August 1914¹⁸.

The war and the massive carnage it entailed among the European working classes, also took down the idea of a socialist transformation where its chances had been most promising. Instead, revolution broke out in backward Russia. As Gramsci wrote in 1919, the Social-Democratic *Reich* was incorporated into the global political-economic system organized by Anglo-Saxon capitalism against

17. Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18*, abridged edition, Düsseldorf, Droste, 1984 [1961].

18. Gerry Docherty, Jim Macgregor, *Hidden History. The Secret Origins of the First World War*, Edinburgh, Mainstream Publishing, 2013.

Soviet communism¹⁹. This developed into the ascendancy of the Nazi movement, its seizure of power and anti-communist crusade—before collapsing again in 1945. The creation of “*Soviet Man*” on the foundations of a backward peasant society would never achieve what German/Central European society would have produced if its development had not been brutally interrupted by the two World Wars stoked up by Anglo-America. One can also think of the phenomenon of the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the 1960s as a doomed experiment in this sense, lacking a cultured working-class movement with a lifestyle and spirit of its own.

Such a working-class culture did exist in German-speaking Central Europe. As in France during its extended contender experience, German society under the social protection granted by Bismarck developed along its own particular route that also included a particular patriotism. This made its working-class majority resist the blanket socialist internationalism when it came to the vote for war credits. Hence Max Weber’s sympathy for the SPD vote for war in 1914, contradicting the Lenin/Luxemburg thesis of class treason²⁰.

Summing up: from the French and German-Austrian contender runs, a legacy remained in the mindset of the mass of the population reflecting their experience of *class formation under conditions of (a degree of) social protection in which the state still stands in between the global market discipline of capital and daily life*. That too is the challenge posed to the West by the BRICS of today.

3. Evolution of Capital’s Quantitative View of Humanity

Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister who launched the attack on the welfare state in 1979, famously stated that “*there is no such thing as society*”. What she meant was that there are only individuals making choices as consumers and citizens; between them and the body politic there are not supposed to be any intermediate organisations. Since the key aim of the neoliberal programme was to suspend social protection by the state, there should also not be compensatory bodies such as the church (other than preparing people for the after-life), trade unions, etc. The only remaining state task is fostering the logic of the market and private property, and back it up, internally or abroad, by force.

19. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920* [trans. J. Matthews, ed. Q. Hoare], New York, International Publishers, 1977, p. 81.

20. *Op. Cit.*, Drischler, *Ukraine-Germany-Russia...*, pp. 15-6.

The Anglophone oligarchy and the technocrats serving as its technical and administrative auxiliaries are fully aware of this. Whoever has a chance to look at the agendas of private planning bodies such as the Trilateral Commission established in the early 1970s as an offshoot of the Bilderberg Conferences of 1950s vintage, will be struck by the breadth of discussion themes besides political economy proper. Behaviour patterns, forces influencing collective consciousness in connection with issues of health and the relation to the natural environment, are prominent among them. This is one way of looking at the World Health Organization (WHO) and other United Nations agencies, the World Bank and other bodies. The World Economic Forum (WEF) is no doubt the key vector in the quest for a type of society by which Thatcher's neoliberal utopia may be eternalised as ultra-capitalism²¹.

The most obvious form of quantitative control of humanity is the fostering of mass migration. Here a leading business strategist, the Irishman, Peter Sutherland, has played a defining role. Besides key directorates such as chairman of Goldman Sachs International, BP, and other companies, Sutherland served as High Representative for Migration of the United Nations towards the end of his life. In 2012, in a series of lectures and interviews he held up the English-speaking West as an example to Europe in matters of migration. The European Union (EU) should open its borders completely, because the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand according to Sutherland also owed their prosperity to this. As structural immigration countries they much more easily assimilate further newcomers, irrespective of their different backgrounds. In contrast, "*we [as Europeans] still have a sense of our homogeneity and difference from others*", and Sutherland's urgent advice was that the European Union should do its utmost "*to undermine that*"²².

However, the Anglophone countries achieved their condition of being entirely non-homogenous (composed of immigrants only) by ethnically cleansing or even exterminating the indigenous populations. In Europe this has turned out to be more difficult, as the indigenous population is still large and capable of effective resistance.

21. Ian N. Richardson, Andrew P., Nada K. Kakabadze, *Bilderberg People. Elite power and consensus in world affairs*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2011; Stephen Gill, *American hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990. And of course, the World Economic Forum.

22. Brian Wheeler, "EU should 'undermine national homogeneity' says UN migration chief" [interview with Peter Sutherland], Londres, *BBC News*, 21 June 2012, link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-18519395> (accessed 6 January 2026).

As head of the Global Forum on Migration and Development until his death, Sutherland worked consistently to make migration a generally accepted and normal form of distribution of the population surplus across the continents. This is a key instance of the quantitative view of humanity as a resource. In December 2018, his efforts were rewarded when 164 countries in Marrakech signed the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*. On that occasion, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, called migration inevitable and necessary; the agreement declares migration a fundamental right that should be honoured with full access to public services in the countries of arrival, regardless of the status of the migrant. Incidentally, under this (non-binding) agreement, the signatures of two of the immigration countries recommended by Sutherland, the US and Australia, are missing²³. But more generally, mass immigration has encountered resistance, prompting a more aggressive propagation under the auspices of capital.

Transhumanism

The control of the workforce and the population at large has deepened in many ways, key among them the “*relocation of liberty from political to economic life*”²⁴. Politics has mutated into technocratic governance over the mass of humanity. Foucault denotes this form of rule with the term *biopolitics*. It transcends the individual state, acting (both through public and private international organizations) at the collective international level. Biopolitical power captures the sphere of life itself: It is here that (again at the international level) “*the sovereign will want to intervene if he wants to change the human species*”²⁵. This can be denoted by the term transhumanism. I would consider the Covid-19 episode the ultimate achievement of such an intervention, which had its epicentre in the liberal West and the organizations controlled by it (from the World Health Organization to the World Economic Forum). The BRICS were not united here, on the contrary: China in particular not only had its representatives participate in the preparatory conferences but also competed with the liberal West in establishing the most radical lockdowns (and participated in the laboratory work on upgrading viruses). It did

23. United Nations, *Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration*, Marrakech (Morocco) (online), 10-11 December 2018, link: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.231/3> (accessed 6 January 2026).

24. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos. Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, New York, Zone Books, 2015, p. 41.

25. Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France (1977-1978)* [ed. M. Senellart], Paris, Gallimard-Seuil, 2004, p. 24, emphasis added; Alexandre Macmillan, « La biopolitique et le dressage des populations », in *Culture & Conflit*, N° 78, 2010, pp. 39-53.

stop short of applying gene therapies to the population though, as China had its own traditional type of vaccine²⁶. The Covid-19 episode would represent a particularly dramatic instance of what the quantitative approach to humanity leads to, only surpassed by the unleashing of actual war.

Transhumanism has been in gestation across successive forms of imposing capitalist discipline but only in ultra-capitalism has it come into its own, as the pet project of the billionaire oligarchy ruling the West. The world view of the Information Technology (IT) sector here meets the technical possibilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Julian Huxley, the first director of UNESCO, the UN organisation for education, science and culture, coined the modern idea of transhumanism when in the opening sentence of his short piece (originally a book chapter) he wrote that after a billion years of evolution, the cosmos becomes self-conscious. Humanity is the medium through which this is achieved. "*It is as if man had been suddenly appointed managing director of the biggest business of all, the business of evolution*"²⁷. Huxley concluded that we live far below the level of our possibilities. Thus we have to strive for an optimum social environment and protect it from the danger of over-population, which would destroy the prospect of a better world. Here Nietzsche's *Übermensch* reappears. However, the improvement of the human species by selective breeding (eugenics), had become discredited by the crimes of the Nazi era such as the killing of the mentally handicapped.

Huxley, who also was president of the British Eugenics Society, therefore shifted the emphasis from eliminating the weak, to improving the fittest by integrating technology with people. The beings resulting from this synthesis, obtained through bio-social engineering, can be endlessly manipulated because ultimately, they have no autonomous existence any longer. Julian Huxley's brother Aldous was not optimistic about the result, because with his dystopic novel, *Brave New World*, he described how people would live in a totalitarian universe with "*Big Ford*" ruling them, in a caste structure devised in the laboratory (by selective breeding)²⁸.

26. Kees van der Pijl, *States of Emergency. Keeping the Global Population in Check*, Atlanta (Georgia), Clarity Press, 2022; French ed. *Pandémie de la peur. Projet totalitaire ou révolution ?* Strasbourg, Éd. Perspectives Libres, 2022.

27. Huxley Julian, "Transhumanism" in *Ethics in Progress*, N° 6(1), 2015 [1957], pp. 12.

28. Huxley Aldous, *Brave New World*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1932, 311 p.

Meanwhile transhumanism has become part of the concept of control of ultra-capitalism, and lost its innocence as a thought experiment. For now, it is a concrete project to exercise power on a world scale. The thinking of Jacques Attali as an organic intellectual of the neoliberal turn in capitalism is pertinent here²⁹. The anonymity, the loss of qualitatively different identities as a consequence of the quantitative approach to humanity, entails notions of endless mutability and malleability of humanity. It makes no difference who you are, where you live, and so on, because you do not have an identity entitling you to anything. Hence the paradoxical anti-discriminatory, anti-racist government propaganda, which does not change how for instance African children work in cobalt mines to produce the raw materials for batteries in the environmentally conscious middle class in the liberal West. It only serves to remind you that you represent nothing fixed, established, only an anonymous, multi-purpose being at the disposal of the ultra-capitalist oligarchy. You make no difference because difference itself has been declared invalid. Nothing is protected by privacy any longer.

Transgenderism

Popularizing the fluidity of identity has found a fruitful field in transgenderism. Advertising agencies and their art directors are prominent in propagating a fantasy world of Artificial Intelligence and erotic references to LGTB+ experiences. Thus a cinema commercial for European rail travel is built around an imaginary trip by a young woman who meets a virtual female counterpart, composed of white lines only, with whom she eventually enters a hotel, obviously enchanted with her new-found companion. It all adds to the pervasive sense that there are no fixed identities in this respect. Gender, as the lived sexual role, is merely a point on a continuum and there is nothing definite about the body in which one happens to be born. Queer Theory, a branch of feminism, has made this step possible by highlighting the mutability inherent in the notion of choice, central already to neoliberal capitalism and taken one step further by ultra-capitalism. In the words of Martine Rothblatt, “*One’s gender is merely an important subset of choosing one’s form... Freedom of form arises because twenty-first-century software makes it technologically possible to separate our minds from our*

29. Attali Jacques, Interview in Michel Salomon, ed. *L’Avenir de la vie*, Paris, Seghers, 1981, pp. 264-279 ; Accardo Alain et Corcuff Philippe, “En France, la douce trahison des clercs”, *Le Monde Diplomatique* [CD-Rom ed. 1954-2011], Mars 2001, pp. 20-21, link: <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2001/03/ACCARDO/1838> (accessed 6 January 2026).

biological bodies". Thus, sexual identity becomes an open-ended quest for gratification, "*limitless in variety and detachable from reproduction*"³⁰.

Transhumanism and transgenderism are both instances of the quantitative approach to humanity, a hallmark of the capitalist ideology. They are also knocking on the doors of the BRICS countries. However, they consider their populations not as an anonymous mass but as their particular citizens, whilst confronting the aggressive forms of driving beyond biological humanity.

4. The BRICS and Social Conservatism

Can we say that the BRICS bloc again represents an alternative social model to Atlantic liberalism? That would mean we must look at how the populations of the BRICS countries use their degree of state protection to achieve a way of life different from the anonymous mass of humanity. Here it is important to note that in the entire West, too, populations are resisting the aggressive ultra-capitalist propaganda that reduces real historical peoples to interchangeable human particles. This has reached a stage where the labelling of such resistance as "*ultra-right*" is wearing thin. Even Eastern European EU governments such as those of Slovakia and Hungary are adopting policies reminiscent of the contender state pattern, with Poland and the Czech Republic moving in the same direction. These new "*Visegrad*" countries (after the first post-Soviet bloc grouping aspiring to EU membership) are so to speak, "BRICS" countries in the context of the capitalist heartland.

As noted, the BRICS bloc lacks the social and cultural integration characterizing the liberal West, and this diversity only increases as the bloc expands. However, as contender states they have one characteristic in common and that is that state sovereignty, the state as a protective instance in between the world market movement of capital and the populations of the different societies, is still intact. Indeed, "*multi-polarity*" as a shared goal refers to this common condition. Owing to the continued state role in carving out a closed society, we can distinguish *social conservatism* as a common defence line in the BRICS contender model. This is not uncontested because the capitalist oligarchies in every BRICS country, or at least the "*Atlantic*" fractions in each, continue to strive for inclusion

30. Rothblatt Martine, "Mind is Deeper Than Matter. Transgenderism, Transhumanism, and the Freedom of Form", in More Max, Vita-More Natasha (eds), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 317-318. Emphasis deleted.

into the global ruling class, via investment in the Western economies and interlocking directorates, as members of the World Economic Forum, the Trilateral Commission, and so on. Often they already were members but the Russians for instance, men like Herman Gref of Sberbank, were kicked out of these bodies in a reprisal over the Russian military response to NATO advancement into Ukraine.

Let me briefly go over the different components of the social conservatism by which the BRICS+ contenders protect their population (the “*closed society*”). I recall my thesis that under the conditions of an extended contender run, state protection allows a population to maintain its identity and develop a way of life not (not *yet*) exposed to the world market movement of capital directly.

First, *nationality*. This is a matter of keeping the population in a condition in which it literally “*feels at home*”. Here the markers of nationality such as common language and shared history are the distinguishing factors. They determine intermarriage, common habits and a basic consensus on the nature of that commonality. The concrete social conservative aspect of nationality is the restriction of immigration, not to be confused with xenophobia (although that will inevitably feed into the resistance to mass immigration).

It is worth noting here that state sovereignty is a precondition for *popular* sovereignty, the bedrock of democracy. So however paradoxical, resistance to mass immigration to maintain the particular (national or multi-national) character of one’s society is democratic in a general sense. Of course, such resistance is under fire from the aggressive propaganda by the West to “*open up*” societies (think of George Soros’ Open Society Institute and its many offshoots) and destroy homogeneity, as Peter Sutherland demanded of Europe. Resistance to mass immigration, captured by populist parties of the right, is being declared out of bounds by the political mainstream in the West, but these parties have in most cases signed up to ultra-capitalist policies already (Ms. Meloni, the Prime Minister of Italy, is a member of the Aspen Institute, one of the most prestigious private planning networks of the transnational West; Alice Weidel, the leader of the *Alternative für Deutschland* AfD, is an ultra-capitalist ideologue herself, Geert Wilders, one of the faces of anti-Islam, anti-immigrant politics, is a militant neoliberal, and so on). Yet the nature of the democratic resistance to mass immigration and to the obliteration of the particularity of one’s own nationality in the broadest terms, the resistance to Transhumanism/Transgenderism, is not therefore invalidated. It has only been captured already by the forces of capital.

Secondly, *family*. This begins with nationality (given the rule of thumb that people intermarry with their own nationality at a rate of 90 percent). The socially conservative aspect here resides in straightforward gender definitions, men and women. This serves to maintain the reproductive functions of society through family life and the raising of children in that framework. This is not to be confused with intolerance towards sexual minorities; the social conservative attitude to those is comparable to other matters considered private and not for public display as in the West.

The issue provoking emotional responses here is the protection of children. In 2010 the WHO already issued guidelines for sex education for children beginning at the age of four. In the Netherlands, the Rutgers Foundation, a body paid by the International Planned Parenthood federation (in turn subsidized by the Gates Foundation), caused public controversy when it rolled out a programme (“*Spring Itches*”) aimed at 9-year olds, pre-puberty children. The encouragement to reconsidering whether they have landed in the right body (boy or girl), puberty blockers and sex change clinics are being discussed in school and the media. An Irish teacher who refused to go along with this ideological trend, was arrested by police at his home in full view of cameras. An EU directive outlawing parents’ guidance in children’s choices for gender change is in preparation. Meanwhile, televised reading sessions for toddlers by guest teachers dressed in sado-masochistic attire, point to a conscious strategy of sexualising little children as a first step to embracing transhumanism. There is nothing “*extreme right*” to the rejection of these practices. They are inherent to the defence of one’s own particular way of life, normative system, and thus represent an assertion of democracy, popular sovereignty under the protection of the contender state.

Thirdly, *social protection*. Here we should recognize that the state classes in the BRICS countries and their historical predecessors are equally interested in keeping the large mass of the population under control. But they cannot allow their populations to degenerate into an anonymous mass of humanity that undermines the contender posture.

Because the main BRICS (China and Russia) emerged from a socialist revolution and went through a long period of state socialism, they also experienced the specific balance of class forces that the state class in such formations had to grant to the workers. In the case of India, there was the long period of statist economy under Congress rule (Nehru) and in Brazil, experiments with a socialism “*light*” that had effects in the same direction.

The moral economy of the working classes in the USSR and the Soviet bloc countries and in China, Vietnam, and comparable societies rested on pre-existing social relations. Subverting the official top-down planned economy to a modest extent by private arrangements strictly speaking illegal, workers used the grey economy to survive and in that sense these practices (effectively, barter, exchange economy) were closely related to social reproduction³¹. This set a minimum level to downward pressure on wages and working conditions.

The revolution from above that ended the state socialist experience (itself an aspect of the contender experience from 1917-1949, also clashed with the moral economy of the working class by inserting the political economy of capitalism. After periods of “*savage*” capitalism (Russia under Yeltsin, China...) and the attendant degradations of the quality of life, the rise of the BRICS and their increasing economic performance also entailed a (variable) return to the moral economy of the working classes.

The capitalist ideology and practice that displaced the moral economy by which the working population kept itself alive (physically, not politically), also undermined the cohesion of the workers as a social stratum, reducing their ability to survive by barter and exchange. Lebowitz speaks of “*the degree of separation among workers*” by capitalist practices such as the introduction of machinery, mechanization³². This “*separation of workers*” is also what happens through immigration and the introduction of foreigners into the workplace.

The social conservatism of the BRICS is best understood as a strategy to maintain the reproductive functions of established gender definitions (men/women), family, and the raising of children in that framework. In addition, social cohesion by recognizing the positive value of nationality (not necessarily coupled to the state in a one-on-one situation, the nation-state, but also federation based on recognised nations, nationalities, and national groups). Plus the idea of state sovereignty, non-interference in the internal relations of others and defence against aggression.

The bottom line of my argument is that the challenge of the BRICS to the West is not so much their overtaking it in aggregate economic terms, but the development of a democratic alternative matured under state protection. That this democratic alternative assumes the form of social conservatism is paradoxical but

31. Michael A. Lebowitz, *The Contradictions of Real Socialism. The Conductor and the Conducted*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2012, p. 133.

32. *Ibidem.*, p. 146.

on reflection, logical. State sovereignty is the necessary precondition of popular sovereignty, which in turn is the bedrock of democracy in whatever form. If further and wider war to destroy the BRICS alternative can be avoided, this alternative may well have lasting consequences in world-historical development. ■

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