



April 2020

## Response to Comments

Forum: [Planetize the Movement!](#)

Valentine Moghadam

My opening [essay](#) for this forum touched on the many problems people and societies face across the globe, and attributed them to the neoliberal capitalist model of globalization, a system characterized by income and social inequalities within and across countries, including rivalries, competition, and conflict. Covid-19 is the latest symptom of such a system, but likely not the last. As I argued, replacing it will require building a powerful global left movement along two axes: a pluralistic entity, notably a revived World Social Forum, and a mass political organization analogous to the Internationals of the past but with programmatic unity rooted in a broader concept of the working class that cuts across gender, race, ethnicity, age, and occupation.<sup>1</sup> Many respondents agreed with my diagnosis, and some with my proposed pathway toward peace, human well-being, and planetary protection. We share recognition of the diversity of progressive struggles and narratives that exist across the planet.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of a broader definition of the working class resonated with some ([Ashish Kothari](#), [William Robinson](#)), as did the call for internationalism and social solidarity. Francine Mestrum notes that “our organization, our citizenship, our solidarity did not follow” the rapid growth of globalization and underscores the importance of trade unions and the women’s movement. Noha Tarek eloquently laments excessive individualism and calls for independent eco-feminist-socialist communities across the globe to help “break free from the path of hierarchical-patriarchal-capitalism.” Many agree that we need more creative approaches to cross-movement collaboration (such as those reflected in [Christopher Chase-Dunn’s “diagonal” strategy](#) and [Donatella Della Porta’s discussion](#) of how movements learn from each other, although I would

extend Della Porta's analysis back to the Third World anti-austerity protests of the 1980s), and that we must replace the capitalist system with a far more equitable one.

Some respondents agree that more effective forms of political organization are needed ([Bonn Juego](#), [William Robinson](#), [Christopher Chase-Dunn](#)), while others stressed the importance of "radical spiritualism" ([Ashish Kothari](#)) or policy interventions like a universal basic income ([Guy Standing](#)) to forge the necessary solidarity. Some claim that the language and organizational strategies of the twentieth century are outdated ([Heikki Patomäki](#)) and we need entirely new solutions specific to the twenty-first century, yet others rightly invoke language from the eighteenth century, notably human rights.

At a time of systemic crisis and uncertainty with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, our ability to build such a movement will play a determining role in how the future unfolds. Without a sufficient counterforce, the march of right-wing populism mentioned in my essay could morph into more authoritarianism, protectionism, border security, and even neofascism. Countries would look inward, international trade would decline, repression would increase, and new conflicts, hot and cold, would emerge. We have seen the beginnings of this in the misguided, dangerous policies of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Victor Orban in Hungary, Binyamin Netanyahu in Israel, and Narendra Modi in India. Alternatively, when the pandemic subsides, business as usual could reemerge. The ideological state apparatus would snap back into action, ensuring that citizens forget the health and economic crises and believe that the system is basically sound (as occurred after previous epidemics and the 2008 financial crisis).

But we need not resign ourselves to these alternatives. In my preferred scenario, concerted efforts are forged to harness people's anger and frustration over health care inadequacies and inequalities (such as the disproportionate deaths of low-income African-Americans and Hispanics in the US), to make connections with existing progressive movements and progressive demands, and to formalize the many examples of solidarity and selflessness that have been on display. Rather than revert to the status quo, politicians, backed by the force of a robust movement, would advance universal health care, free education, debt forgiveness, paid maternity and family leave, quality day care and preschool facilities, a program of nationalizations and green technologies, higher salaries for service and care workers, and higher taxes on the rich, corporations, and financial entities. A

powerful mass movement and political organization would ensure that government spending continues after the pandemic for progressive ends. Only such a counter-hegemonic entity could keep governments honest, challenge media misrepresentation, and represent the interests and needs of the masses of working people.

A movement will need a strategy and vision for the short, medium, and long term. An important medium-term institutional goal is to revitalize the UN system, currently weakened by corporate capture and bullying by powerful states, along with inconsistent adherence to international law (as [Richard Falk](#) notes). If for the foreseeable future the world capitalist system remains in place, the new International could insist that a Tobin tax on international currency transactions be implemented and a global trust fund be established, overseen by an independent department within the UN to respond quickly to crises or urgent development needs. The end goal, of course, is not to “fix” capitalism but to replace it with a truly equitable and sustainable system. To “collectively confront across borders the powers that be in the world capitalist system and their control over the means of our existence” ([William Robinson](#)), we need a global political organization.

When Dr. King condemned the American war in Vietnam, he was ahead of his time, but tragically not for long. The US war machine has continued, leaving devastation in its wake and diverting resources needed at home for the social rights of citizens and dignity of working people. If ours is an era of angry frustration, let us work to harness it in a peaceful and progressive direction through a shared vision and strategy. There is enough agreement among us to make that happen.

## Endnotes

1. See also the cogent analysis by Sahan Savas Karatasli, “The Twenty-First Century Revolutions and Internationalism: A World Historical Perspective,” *Globalizations* 16, no. 7 (2019): 985–997.

2. Elsewhere, I have written of my hope that the many new movements and campaigns could unite around a common agenda: “Feminism and the Future of Revolution,” *Socialism and Democracy* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2018): 31–53; and “What is Revolution in the 21st Century? Toward a Socialist-Feminist World Revolution,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 47 (2019).

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## About the Author



Valentine Moghadam is Professor of Sociology and International Affairs at Northeastern University, and former Director of the International Affairs Program. Her early publications examined the Left and revolution in Iran and gender politics in revolutionary Iran and in Afghanistan. Her current areas of research include globalization; transnational social movements and networks; economic citizenship; and gender, development, and women's movements in the Middle East and North Africa. She is the author of many journal articles and books, including *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, the award-winning *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks*, and *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Global Justice Movement*.

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