

# A PLEA FOR RADICAL HISTORY IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Danielle Heberle Viegas a

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4299-822X E-mail: dhvigas@gmail.com

# Robert Kramm b

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2894-7023 E-mail: robert.kramm@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

<sup>a</sup> Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Centre for Global History Munich, Germany

<sup>b</sup> Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Centre for Global History Munich, Germany

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Radical History in Global Contexts/Radical History em contextos globais



Ithough radical history has been considered at times as mere political activism, the field is recently growing and empowering academically in multiple directions, including global history. One of radical history's main demands is to recognize silenced historical practice and experience, as well as alignment with libertarian movements, organizations, and social groups. And while radical history usually focuses on marginalized peoples, ideas, and actions, it also demands clear political positionality from authors and audiences. In doing so, radical history is unsettling yet engaging, and its particular strength is offering a conflagrant critique of what German radical leftists have called the "herrschende Verhältnisse" (ruling conditions)—past and present.

Radical history perspectives, we argue, emerged most prominently from post-1960s British labor history, European history workshops, the American civil rights movement, radical feminism, and avant la lettre postcolonial criticism with a demand for undogmatic Marxist and other leftist historic analysis of capitalism, inequality, and injustice—in most cases as history from below. During the 1990s and 2000s, radical history perspectives increasingly integrated analyses of racism and sexism into the earlier, predominating analyses of class and class struggles. On the one hand, this broadened radical history's scope, for instance by including cultural history and postcolonial perspectives. On the other hand, this opening demonstrates that radical history scholarship itself was not unaffected by global political and economic changes (end of the Cold War; late capitalism, etc.) that also brought about differing intellectual demands (DIRLIK, 1994; KWON, 2010). Nevertheless, radical history is a strong umbrella term for a very heterogeneous field of critical scholarship that pushes our understanding of key analytical categories, including gender, sexuality, race, class, disability, ethnicity, and class, and that also allows for intersectional and global approaches to explore discrimination, oppression, and exploitation. The main focus remains on radical politics and movements, and their histories and struggles, as publications that set the tone of the field, do not hide.1

And neither should they, as history as a discipline remains a conservative academic enterprise. Historical narrative until today — in research, teaching, public debate, and memory — remains remarkably invested in the powerful frameworks of capital, nation, and the state. Even all the decades-long debates about globalization and the myth of connections and borderless flows of people, ideas and commodities have not stopped history's main concern with (sometimes almost folkloristic) national storytelling. Even the supposedly strongest spokespersons and decision-makers for a borderless globalized world, neoliberals, actually never sought an actual free market-driven economy, but stuck to the nation-state as protector of capital, property and the modes of production (SLOBODIAN, 2018). Moreover, most established historiography and its overwhelming complicity with capital, the nation-form, and state power, is silencing and marginalizing what Frantz Fanon has called the "wretched of the earth" (FANON, 1961), but also the dispossessed, exploited, and oppressed on both sides of the colonial divide. Now, it would be a shortcoming to reduce radical history to be simply calling out all the various forms of discrimination, exploitation. and injustice. As long as these exist, it is nonetheless an important and invaluable task to do so. However, radical history's tools of analysis and its rootedness in political activism, encompassing the various forms of public engagement and embeddedness in socio-political communities, also allow for more: radical history can give voice to the colonial other, provide critical glimpses into the muddiness of workers day-to-day struggles, empower sidelined women and discriminated against people of color, and stand up for LGBTQ\* rights. But, also

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For an overview please check the prominent journal Radical History Review, published since 1975 by Duke University Press. Available on: <a href="https://read.dukeupress.edu/radical-history-review.">https://read.dukeupress.edu/radical-history-review.</a>

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with much self-criticism, it is also radical history's job to explore and name the unevenness in history and historical narrative that is structuring and overshadowing the everyday lifeworlds; and, we would add, radical history should also be offering perspectives of possibilities beyond them (HAROOTUNIAN, 2019).

Arguably one of the prime examples of radical history, and its importance and increasing popularity, is the history and memory of the Paris Commune in 1871. The Commune just had its 150th anniversary and received much scholarly and public attention. It is repeatedly stressed as a benchmark for the attraction and tragedy of radical models to build an egalitarian society, oscillating between vision and hope on the one hand, and disaster and failure on the other, but which nevertheless opens up the potential for future movements (ROSS, 2015; DELUERMOZ, 2020; CORDILLOT, 2021; EICHNER, 2022). In the US, (Black) radical history and radical politics also gained popularity through contemporary political activism such as Black Lives Matter, which is nonetheless embedded into a long history of radical black activism including the Civil Rights movement and the Black Panther Party (BOOM; MARTIN, 2013).

Places like Paris and North American metropoles, however, were also tied into radical revolutionary networks stretching beyond Europe's and America's borders. As Margaret Stevens has put it, "western metropoles such as Paris, London, Hamburg and New York City were operational hubs for Communist engagement with anti-racism and anti-colonial internationalism," but black communists navigated "between these metropoles and colonized and semi-colonized epicenters in Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, British Guiana and Mexico that contributed to the total force of the Communist International" (STEVENS, 2017). In the early twentieth century, the whole Caribbean had actually been an integral part of a transnational revolutionary network with anarchists, communists, and socialists from various social, political, and cultural backgrounds fighting capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism (SHAFFER, 2020; DE LAFORCADE *et al.*, 2015; SHAFFER, 2009).

Indeed, such a focus on networks is both a trend and an achievement in radical history; it underscores the impact and significance of global history perspectives, yet it also demonstrates what radical history has to offer in return (JAKOB; KEßLER, 2020). Maybe not as trend-setting as his earlier book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson's reconstruction of a rhizomal network of anarchists in the late nineteenth century has been nevertheless a seminal radical and global history work, through which he could demonstrate how dissidents at the margins of colonial peripheries appropriated and used the modern, accelerated but also acquirable means of traveling and publishing for their revolutionary cause. These connections of the modern world enabled anarchists "transglobal coordination" of their actions—but they also allowed Anderson to narrate a global history of anarchism, or as he has put it, "to map the gravitational force of anarchism between militant nationalisms on opposite sides of the planet" (ANDERSON, 2007). In a similar vein, also Ilham Khuri-Makdesi has shown that radical action and ideas traveled beyond borders, in her case following the routes of Egyptian, Italian, Greek, and Ottoman-Syrian intellectuals and workers crisscrossing the Mediterranean (KHURI-MAKDISI, 2013).

The cases above express that the radical historical actors, the theme of radicalism, and the radical approach ultimately undermine attempts of Eurocentric monopolizations of radical thought, ideas, and movements. They are assembled by many others. In Latin America, the field has been expanding since at least the 1970s from the demand to study the impacts of the Cuban Revolution (HENNESSY, 1972). Although in the most unequal world regions radicalness is not limited to political activism and could be easily tracked in quotidian life, the field has a special focus on politics and radical movements of the 20th century, their histories, and struggles (GONZÁLEZ-RIVERA; GONZÁLEZ-RIVERA, 2001;

MARCHESI, 2017; HARMER; ÁLVAREZ, 2021). Besides, ongoing historiography has relativized the idea of a center-periphery model that diffuses radical movements from the North to the Global South. Instead, current research, such as "El árbol de las revoluciones: Ideas y poder en América Latina" (ROJAS, 2021) offers a view of the rise of radical social movements from Argentina to Mexico independently of the European conjecture which leads us to a conceptual and not only thematic revision.

Particularly in Brazil, radical history has been focused on dispelling romantic narratives about the myth of diversity and cordiality - both landmarks of Brazilian social thought and national identity. Violence and racism, thus, are likely to be thrown into the light through the perspective of a radical history of everyday life or national utopias (VIEIRA, 2018). There are still classical publications dedicated to studying citizenship and social movements in the country, prioritizing the radicality of the struggle for land as well as the conflicts between different opposition groups against state terrorism during the civil-military dictatorship, from some sectors of the church until armed struggle (MARTINS, 2010). Many of those studies entwine radical history with cultural memory, conversing themes like leftwing melancholia, and uses oral testimonies as resources due to the destitution of official documents as some historians have pointed out (MASSERONI, 2020).

Another part of these cleavages has been minimized by points of view inspired by postcolonial studies, especially from authors who approach radicalism beyond the scholarship and, curiously, beyond history. Public intellectuals such as Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, author of "Amanhã vai ser maior" (2019), but also Marcia Tiburi (*Como Conversar com um Fascista*, 2015), and Djamila Ribeiro (Pequeno Manual Anti-Racista, 2019) have shown the inspirational power of radical history to public history and media. On the other hand, the long-term tradition which intertwined radicalism with politics often has been excluded from the lens of radicalism fighting and resistance of indigenous groups (usually credited to Anthropologists) or the radicalness of violence related to slavery (highly investigated from the English social history angle), which is still a contemporary demand.

With regard to East Asia, a region with a series of revolutions highly significant in world history, we feel it is important to distinguish established revolution histories from radical history narratives. China, but also places like Vietnam, Japan, and the Koreas, are prime examples that offer ostensible reasons to highlight the success of the communist party and socialist state-building, organizing labor, mobilizing the masses, and fighting Western imperialism—albeit success is of course still on the part of the beholder. Scholarship on these revolutions 'events fills whole libraries. Yet a radical history narrative of modern China, for instance, does rather simultaneously take a step back and zoom in—again, in a very critical-reflexive manner—to crystallize the exact revolutionary momenta and dynamics that can also help us to rethink revolution in the past, present, and future (KARL, 2020). Imperial Japan equally offers fantastic examples of radical history perspectives. Already in the 1980s. prominent scholarship has underscored the presence of discontent, dissent, and rebellion in Japan prior to and after the Meiji Restauration in 1868. An analysis of peasant uprisings as well as outcast lifeworlds, for instance, deconstructed persisting stereotypes of the allegedly obedient Japanese people (HANE, 1982; NAJITA; KOSCHMANN, 1982). At the turn of the century, Japan was the only modern non-white imperial power, and despite Japan's imperial aggression that brought fierce colonial rule and eventually total war throughout the Asia-Pacific region, it also offered opportunities for radicals and revolutionaries from all over Asia to study, work, and organize in metropoles like Tokyo and Osaka, and to maintain revolutionary networks in Asia and beyond (KAWASHIMA, 2009; KARL, 2002; HARPER, 2020). But also the Japanese themselves were highly interested and invested in revolutionary theory and praxis, and events like the Soviet Revolution had tremendous resonances in Japan (LINKHOEVA, 2020). Yet even before the Bolsheviks took •

over, Japanese and Russian anarchist intellectuals have exchanged radical ideas since the mid-nineteenth century in literature, the arts, and science, to the extent that this cooperation would constitute a historic specific revolutionary temporality—an "anarchist modernity" (KONISHI, 2013).

Thinking radical history from a non-Eurocentric point of view, however, is not possible without revising epistemologies that come essentially from Europe and/or the West, which involves not only reviewing actors and themes but also places of writing. In this sense, it became clear that extending frameworks to regions beyond Europe and being politically engaged was not enough. Under strong pressure from postcolonial studies and decolonization politics (QUIJANO, 2007), it was evident that radical history would find limits and occur on issues it would itself seek to avoid if it continued to use the same original matrix to discuss non-European actors, regions, and structures. And it did: even if the search for global connections is useful to break methodological nationalisms and trace networks across seas, the formula became worn out to the extent that it did not think of radicality beyond political actors framed in certain patterns of power and subversion to what was understood as that power (EHLERT MAIA, 2011). Thus, indigenous history, for example, was long relegated to ethnic studies or anthropology, because radicality was only associated with the disruption of certain traditional political systems. Another path, equally dangerous, was in fact to think of radicalism among these groups and their cosmovisions, but based on an automatic transposition of concepts, which has already been done a lot thinking about indigenous groups in the light of utopian socialism, for example.

Inspired by some of these and other lessons, while trying not to dissolve radical history into a history of everything, the special issue presented here, ironically, does not seek to be abruptly radical. Instead, it offers a balance on radical history that turns to the themes that refer back to the origins of the strand, while at the same time signaling the importance of the inclusion of different actors, regions, and, as said, some historiographical crossings that seek to escape the traditional bends between sources and themes. Therefore, the reader will find articles on anarchism, social movements, oppression, and insult, but also race and racism, images and anticlericalism, and yet the link between social networks and the rise of a new radicalism in the 21st century.

One of the biggest challenges of this so-called general field is to bring various stories into conversation, not only comparing differences and similarities but also ruptures, questioning why certain stories have been silenced as practices but also as narratives. So there is also a question of the place of writing, which involves authors and languages, as well as simply subjects and objects. This dossier includes papers in three languages: English, Portuguese, and Spanish, signed by researchers from several countries, such as Brazil, Germany, and Argentina. As has long been denounced, there is no point in approaching non-European actors, without knowing their languages and, therefore, without knowing sources that allow us to know their stories from their perspectives. For this, new expectations and tools correlated to global history can be useful, reflecting on the very concept of radical and inverted classical scenarios of influencers and receivers in crisis contexts, which is not only thought in the case of themes, but also of authorship.

The paper that opens the Dossier was written by two Brazilian historians who associate radicalism with the political contemporaneity of their country. Tatiana Vargas Maia and Denise Sordi, in their text called "The Radicalness of Solidarity" remind us of an established characteristic of radical history: its flirtation with militancy and its social function in the present time and, on the other hand, put into perspective the unlikely association between radicality and solidarity. In Brazil, radical history seems to be especially useful to break the stain that associates national identity with passivity. From classical topics such as integralism (BERGONHA, 2020) to the rise of Bolsonarism and the emergence of digital

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activities, the word radical has become one of the most quoted in and about the so-called cordial and pacific country, as this paper discusses.

Following in the direction of radical history as an approach, readers will find Benedikt Sepp's article "Escape to the Front: the strange radicalization of the West German Student Movement" illuminating. Although we are talking about a classical theme - and also about a well-researched region - there is no monotony here. The German historian describes the complexity of the spiraling radicalization in the student movement of 1960s West Berlin, analyzing their disintegration into terrorist groups and small ultra-authoritarian parties. In addition to Sepp's intriguing empirical findings, the article brings important theoretical insights discussing the movement not only as an object but as a concept. In this sense, Sepp argues that the "movement" can be seen as the unifying element of his theory, practice, organization, and habitus in the West German context during the Cold War, an analysis model that can certainly be useful to other researchers.

The following article has a similar time frame but takes us back to South America. In "What wanted to destroy the genocide? The history of Norwinco's workers (Tucumán, Argentina, 1975-1976)", Ana Sofia Jemio reconstructs the story of a group of metalworkers who were victims of forced disappearance. Through newspapers, court documents, state reports, and interviews, the author supports her argument that the Argentine genocide sought to destroy the conditions that made these groupings possible and that the selection of victims is not fully explained with the criteria "militancy," "activism," or "opposition."

The entwinement of radical history and global history seems to be fortuitous and the concept of disconnectivity is especially interesting: it emerges as a landmark to remind us that processes, although global, cannot immediately be compared or transplanted across different groups and spaces, enshrining once and for all the maturity of global history not as general history, nor a history only concerned with connections and networks. There are unlikely and "out of the ordinary" links and patterns. In this way - it is worth saying - that by the commonplace we do not mean any positions that actors occupy by any vocation, but that has been thus naturalized and consecrated, a pattern that historiography itself often repeats through actor-source-theme combinations. One of these patterns is to think of the history of the Atlantic world and resistance only via struggles and armed conflicts on the part of black men, or even the old narrative of abolitions made by white hands from their tiny offices and cafes. On the contrary, there are good examples that take blacks out of corporal struggles and whites out of typewriters and think about issues of radical history, such as anti-racism, through the writings of the so-called black sociology.

This Dossier has two texts that converse with each other and touch on this key topic: "Translating ideas: black sociology and antiracist intellectual mobilization between the United States and Brazil (the 1970s)" and "Rastafari, repatriation and armed conflict: an analysis of the African Reform Church activism in the terms of the afro creole culture". In the first text, the Brazilian historian Rafael Petry Trapp discusses the transnational relations between Brazilian and North American black sociology, revealing a process that helped build the radical intellectual bases of contemporary black political struggles in Brazil. The second article, authored by Ariel Mogni, addresses the Caribbean and North American Black Power movement in the late 1960s and discusses the development of the African Reform Rastafari Church in Jamaica between 1959 and 1960. The author discusses important premises of radical history when he describes that among the goals of the institution was the liberation of African descendants from colonial rule and their repatriation to Ethiopia.

As Sebastian Conrad (2016) once said, networks and actors are the food of global history, but this "institutionalized" view is quite dangerous if viewed only through processes that are given traces through written sources since radicalism often needs to deal with unofficial and immediately recognizable strategies of struggle against the powers it intends

to fight. There are codes, symbols, and illustrations - especially used in cases by subversive groups in the eyes of others. Under this inspiration, Caroline Poletto presents radical anticlerical images that circulated in newspapers from Brazil and Argentina throughout the 20th century in the article called "Radical anticlerical images: the formation and circulation of a subversive imaginary in the Argentinean and Brazilian anticlerical press in the 20th century". Although both South American countries shared military dictatorships in that period and a historical Catholic structure, there are national and regional specificities that are shown through the images analyzed. His paper is accompanied by the text authored by Vitoria Paschoal Baldin which brings images to the level of the discussion of radicalism in the digital medium. The article "The signs of pop culture in Palestinian graffiti: circulation and digital activism in perspective" fulfills the not easy mission of discussing images and the peculiarities of their circulation in a highly interactive medium: the social networks. In the text, the author analyzes graffiti as a cultural element of the Palestinian struggle for human rights, highlighting the strategic presence of signs of pop culture in those manifestations as transnational links, allowing global audiences to relate to Palestinian demands from their own aesthetic and discursive references.

Sequentially, the article by Daniela Linkevicius de Andrade entitled "Time in fragments: dystopia, temporality and historical consciousness in the digital age" discusses, from the concept of "actualism", the link between narrative, dystopias, and radicalities. It is proposed to the readers a discussion about the relationship between the dominance of digital space and the perception of fragmented time. Thus, this article, which is the final part of the Dossier, seems to signal old and new demands in radical history, remembering its importance in the construction of social justice, the social role played by history in the present time and leaves an alert for the increase of theoretical and methodological tools that allow us to think about digital activism and new radicalism in the 21st century and beyond.

Finally, it is urgent to think about what has been left out of this Special Issue. Certainly, we can draw connections between radical history and environmental history, for instance by thinking of radicality as a tool to fight for ecological agendas, radical environmentalism, and as a concept enriching our understanding of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene (TSING, 2015) — ultimately questioning the perception of human supremacy (SPRINGER et al., 2021). Moreover, and since radical is not only about human agents but also animals, plants and objects, radical history perspectives could elucidate what has been called radical cityscapes and radical utopias, always entwined with issues of social inclusion and exclusion, migration, and engaged citizenship as well as social memory and heritage studies. Intersectional humanities and radical history, in the line of argument of Donna can also provide intriguing discussions about artificial intelligence, cybertechnologies, and the performance of future technologies during democratic crises in a networked world. As such, this special issue cannot and does not claim nor intend to exhaust topics, but it merely offers a panorama that goes from consecrated subjects, such as anarchism, to the still incipient ones, such as radical activism in social networks. Nevertheless, as partial as this panorama is, we hope to increase awareness of radical history, its powerful perspectives, and its global scope.

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# **AUTHOR'S NOTES**

#### **AUTHORS DETAILS**

**Danielle Heberle Viegas**: Dr. Postdoc Researcher in "Radical Utopian Communities: Global Histories from the Margins, 1900-1950". Volkswagen Research Fellow attending the special funding program "Corona Crisis and beyond: Perspectives for Science, Scholarship and Society" at LMU München.E-mail: dhviegas@gmail.com

Robert Kramm:Dr-sc. Freigeist-Fellow of the Volkswagen-Foundation in the School of History at LMU Munich. At LMU, he is the principal investigator of the research group "Radical Utopian Communities," and a member of the Munich Centre for Global History and the Young Center of LMU's Center for Advanced Studies. E-mail: robert.kramm@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

#### **CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS**

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. School of History Gescwester-Scholl-Platz 1 80539 München Germany

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