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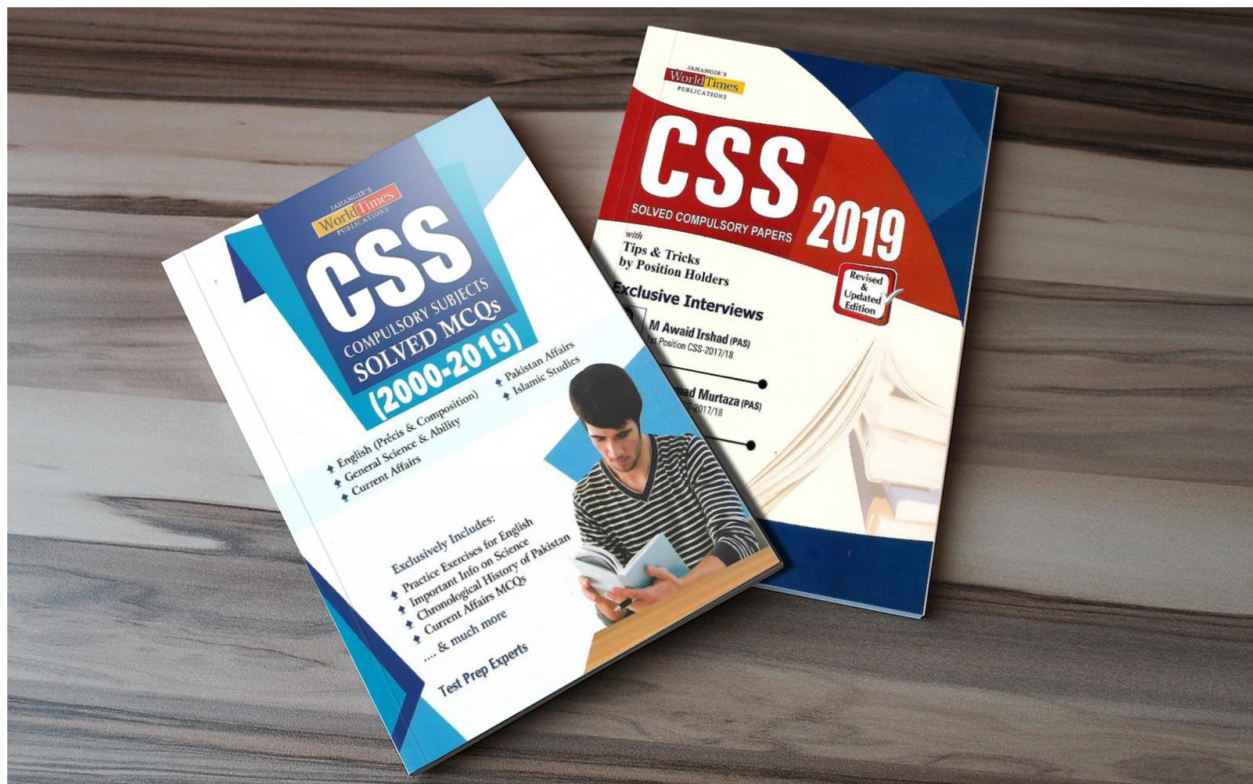
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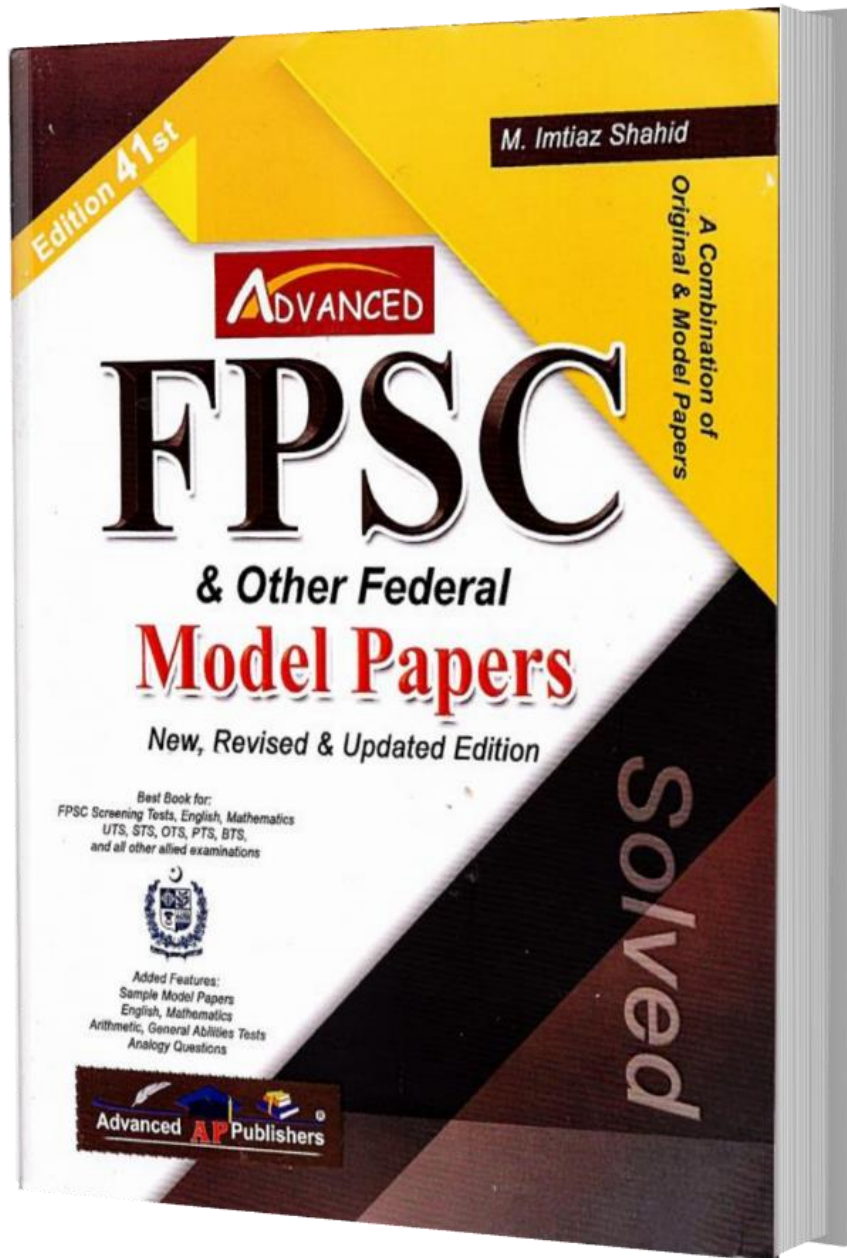
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Operation Enduring War

This September 11 marks the 18th year since hijackers seized four US airliners, plowing three into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the fourth into a field in southern Pennsylvania. The attacks killed nearly 3,000 people and

deranged our politics. In the fraught months that followed, US leaders declared one war after another, miring this country in conflicts from Central Asia to the Middle East. There is still no end in sight.

The longest of these conflicts—in fact, the longest war in US history—is the one that George W. Bush launched against the Taliban less than a month after 9/11. The mission, he claimed, was “to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.” He spoke of “freedom,” of the “generosity” America would show the Afghan people, but many of us knew what this really was: a war of vengeance, waged against an impoverished country some 7,000 miles away, with no meaningful vision for peace.

And so it has been.

Nearly two decades later, Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of 9/11, is dead, but the war goes on. The illusory promises of building democracy and liberating women have been abandoned, yet the war goes on. Thousands upon thousands of people have died—at least 139,000 Afghans and some 2,400 US service members—and still the body count rises. Operation Enduring Freedom, indeed.

Presidents in both parties had promised to end the war, but to no effect. In September, Donald Trump torpedoed months of negotiations with the Taliban to withdraw some 5,000 US troops by early next year. But even that failed agreement called only for reducing US forces to their level when he assumed office. His campaign promise to end “stupid wars” has simply been abandoned.

The evidence of this broken promise is strewn across the globe. Since Trump took office, US drone attacks in several nations have escalated. Our forces continue to spread out across Africa in endless pursuit of would-be terrorists. Most egregious of all, he detonated the landmark Iran nuclear deal, pushing the US to the verge of war with that nation

while talking up regime change in Venezuela.

And in the Middle East? Vast swaths of the region continue to reel from the bloody fallout of the US war on Iraq, its aftereffects visible in the flood of refugees that has shaken European democracies. Our War on Terrorism has succeeded, largely, in generating more terrorists and more instability.

Wars without end expand the prerogatives of the president and the budgets of the national security state. Presidents from both parties have repeatedly invoked the post-9/11 Authorization for Use of Military Force to dispatch troops across the globe. In today’s dollars, the Pentagon’s budget now exceeds its levels at the height of the Cold War.

Forever war is an affront to our Constitution. The founders, worried that the executive had an inherent propensity for war, gave the power to declare it to Congress, believing that this decision should be made only by the people’s representatives after debate and deliberation. Now, war is our permanent condition, and Congress has essentially abandoned its constitutional responsibilities.

Polls show that strong majorities of the public, including veterans, have turned against our endless wars. Both Trump and Barack Obama won elections promising to bring those wars to an end. Instead, they’ve succeeded only in making them less visible, relying more on airpower and drones, with fewer US casualties.

Trump has argued that “great nations do not fight endless wars.” Yet when he blew up the negotiations with the Taliban, he asked, “How many more decades are they willing to fight?”

The Taliban and the Afghan government are fighting over the future of their country. The real question is how many decades are we willing to fight in a foreign land on the other side of the globe in a war of no purpose other than to avoid losing? ■



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BY THE NUMBERS

4

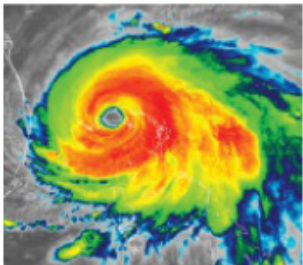
Consecutive years with at least one Category 5 hurricane in the Atlantic—a record set this year

2017

Year when three of the five costliest US hurricanes occurred: Harvey, Maria, and Irma

\$1.7T

Total cost of the 250 weather and climate disasters



with damages of at least \$1 billion that the US endured since 1980

185 mph

Hurricane Dorian's wind speed at landfall—tied for an Atlantic record with the Labor Day hurricane of 1935

76K

Number of people left homeless on Grand Bahama and the Abaco Islands as a result of Dorian

Number of news segments (out of 216) on ABC, CBS, and NBC from August 28 to September 5 that linked climate change to hurricanes like Dorian, according to Media Matters

—Teddy Ostrow

Think the Green New Deal Is Pricey?

The costs of climate inaction are even greater.

Recently, the Democratic National Committee rejected calls for a presidential primary debate dedicated to climate change. DNC chair Tom Perez argued that focusing on climate change alone would be unfair to those whose campaigns are more focused on other issues—which might be a compelling argument if experts said those matters had the potential to lead to civilizational collapse.

This was a missed opportunity to demand that the candidates who have not authored or signed on to an ambitious proposal to transform our economy and energy infrastructure over a relatively short time frame—like the Green New Deal—explain how they would pay for their more moderate approaches.

“How will we pay for it?” is rarely asked in discussions of the military budget or trillion-dollar corporate tax cuts. But the media consistently demands that Democratic candidates offer detailed explanations of how they would finance Medicare for All or solutions to the student loan crisis, and it’s the same with climate change. When Bernie Sanders released his climate proposal, *The New York Times* described it as a “\$16 Trillion Climate Plan” and noted that it was the “most expensive proposal from the field of Democratic presidential candidates aimed at reining in planet-warming greenhouse gases” in the very first sentence of the story. *Newsweek* ran a piece headlined “Here’s How Andrew Yang’s Nearly \$5 Trillion Climate Plan Stacks Up Against His Opponents.” And many outlets promulgated a scary but utterly bogus estimate, apparently just invented by Republicans, that Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s plan for a Green New Deal would cost taxpayers \$93 trillion.

If we’re to have any hope of mobilizing the effort that scientists tell us is necessary, we have to turn this question around. Because the reality is that even if we set aside the human and biospheric costs of climate change—premature deaths from extreme weather and encroaching diseases, refugee crises, habitat loss, and mass extinctions—the economic costs of allowing the average global temperature to rise even a couple of degrees past the Paris Agreement’s limit of 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels are simply staggering.

According to some estimates, over the coming decades those costs would dwarf the price tag associated with even the most ambitious proposals to tackle the problem—and that’s not even factoring in the new economic opportunities that transitioning away from fossil fuels would confer on countries that take the lead in that process. Although the estimates vary, there is almost as much agreement on

this broad point among economists who have studied the potential effects as there is within the scientific community that human activities are warming the planet.

In 2015 the Economist Intelligence Unit compiled a peer-reviewed report warning that “the asset management industry—and thus the wider community of investors of all sizes—is facing the prospect of significant losses from the effects of climate change.” Using the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s current warming models, it projected that investors would lose \$4.2 trillion in assets by the end of the century, “roughly on a par with the total value of all the world’s listed oil and gas companies or Japan’s entire GDP.” The researchers added, “The average losses to be expected are not the only source of concern; on the contrary, the outliers, the particularly extreme scenarios, may matter most of all.” In the worst-case scenario they considered, 10 percent of the world’s assets would be wiped out.

That’s just the losses to investors. The report says that “while the value of future losses from the private sector is substantial, this is dwarfed by the forecast harms when considered from a government point of view.”

Last year two EPA scientists, working independently of their agency, published a pessimistic study in *Nature Climate Change*. They compared the potential economic effects of two scenarios. In the first, humanity misses the Paris Agreement’s target by 0.8 degrees Celsius. In the second, we would overshoot that by 2.5 degrees. Looking at how warming would affect 22 sectors of the US economy by 2090, they estimated that we would face additional losses of \$224 billion per year in the hotter scenario. But the researchers cautioned that

because “only a small portion of the impacts of climate change are estimated” in their analysis, it “captures just a fraction of the potential risks and damages.”

A new working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research estimates that if we continue to emit greenhouse gases at our current pace, it will reduce real global economic output by 7.2 percent by the end of the century. If we meet the goals set forth in the Paris Agreement, that figure will drop by only 1.1 percent. The difference between those two figures would far outstrip the costs of transitioning to a clean economy now.

There’s broad agreement in the scientific community that the effects of climate change aren’t being distributed evenly, and the study’s authors write that Americans will be especially hard hit. Coauthor Kamiar Mohaddes, an economist at the University of Cambridge, told *The Washington Post* that while “climate change is costly for all countries under the business as usual scenario (no matter whether they are hot or cold, rich or poor), the United States will be one of the countries that will suffer the most.” He and his colleagues estimate that we could face a 10.5 percent fall in GDP per capita if the earth warms only 2.5 degrees Celsius above the limit set in Paris.

While these studies model the effects to the end of this century, businesses’ bottom lines are already being hit, and researchers say that’s likely to get worse soon.

(continued on page 8)

We must turn the “How will we pay for it?” question around.

COMMENT

Q&A ADY BARKAN

Three years ago, Ady Barkan, then 32, had a flourishing career as a progressive activist; a wife, Rachael, who'd just landed a dream job as a professor; and

a chubby baby boy named Carl. The two had just bought a beautiful house and were picturing the decades they would spend there together. They were, Ady writes in his new memoir, *Eyes to the Wind*, "the happiest and luckiest people we knew." Then in the fall of 2016, after Ady felt some weakness in his left hand, a neurologist gave him a death sentence: a diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS.

Since then, Ady Barkan has become arguably the most influential activist in America. Many people first heard about him when he happened to be on the same plane as Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ) in December 2017. In what became a viral video, Barkan challenged Flake to oppose Donald Trump's tax plan and prevent cuts to Medicare and Medicaid. Barkan has now been arrested at the Capitol in Washington more than half a dozen times, showing by example how to fight injustice. He writes, "Precisely because my days were numbered, people drew inspiration from my decision to spend them in the resistance. Precisely because I faced such obstacles, my comrades were moved by my message that struggle is never futile." Barkan has already inspired a generation of activists, and with his new book, he is set to inspire generations to come.

—Christopher Shay

CS: Given the progression of your ALS, how are you answering these questions?

AB: I'm using a Tobii EyeMobile Plus, which tracks the location of my pupil, allowing me to type on a Microsoft tablet that is attached to my wheelchair.

CS: The title of your memoir, *Eyes to the Wind*, is the name of a song from the band War on Drugs, and your heart-rending first chapter ends with you listening to one of the band's albums. Why did you choose this song as the title of your book?

AB: It is a gorgeous song that I first heard right around the time of my diagnosis and because to me the phrase connotes bravery and perseverance in the face of adversity.

CS: You write a lot about the people caring for you—your wife, family, friends, professional caregivers. What have you learned about the care industry in the United States?

AB: It's filled with incredible human beings doing deeply human work. And it's gendered and racist and classist. Capitalism is a bad way to run it.

CS: You engaged in civil disobedience for the first time in 2017 and have since been arrested multiple times. What

role do you see for disruptive protest techniques? When is civil disobedience most effective?

AB: Disruptive protest is about demanding that the status quo not continue unchallenged. It seeks to clarify the moral stakes of a political struggle and center the experience of individuals rather than the policy arguments of professionals.

CS: You learned the word "kismet," or destiny, on the plane right before your viral confrontation with Senator Jeff Flake over Trump's tax bill. How did kismet figure in that video, and how should kismet interact with the hard work of organizing?

AB: It's about being in the right place at the right time—and being prepared for it.

CS: You write that if you had 10 more years, you would help try to rebuild the labor movement. Why do you see this as the most important fight for the progressive movement, going forward?

AB: I think we need to polit-

I want to be remembered for having done my part to improve people's lives and bring them into political struggle.

icize a lot more people and get them to take radical, disruptive action in their own self-interest. Labor organizing is the best way we've done that, historically.

CS: You say in your book that you wanted to leave some strategies behind. What do you see as the most important lessons of *Eyes to the Wind*?

AB: Probably something like dream big, fight hard.

CS: You write that you were in search of a legacy. What do you want that legacy to be? How can we fight with you now and then onward after you're gone?

AB: I want to be remembered for having done my part to improve people's lives and bring them into political struggle. As long as you're in the fight, you're doing right, in my book. ■



INDIA

Kashmir Under Siege

The Modi administration's blockade is a war against civilians.

I arrived in Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian-controlled Kashmir, on August 1, and the next day, the government ordered tourists, nonresident students, and Hindu pilgrims to leave immediately. While the state's governor warned Kashmiris not to engage in "rumormongering," residents knew something big was coming. In just a few hours, families spent all they could spare on fuel, rice, cooking gas, flour, and other essentials.

When Kashmir's 8 million residents awoke on August 5, they found themselves without cell phone, landline, Internet, or cable television services. About 12 hours after the blackout, Narendra Modi's administration revoked Article 370 of India's Constitution, wiping out the region's autonomy.

Srinagar immediately became a razor wire city. Paramilitary and militarized police appeared at every intersection, blocking crossings, roads, bridges, and highways with coils of concertina wire.

Indian government officials describe the siege as necessary to

maintain peace and ensure law and order. Yet communication and information blackouts and indefinite curfews are strategies not of peace but of what's called infrastructural war. This type of fighting targets civilians, not insurgents, by reaching into the crevices of everyday life and obstructing communication, information sharing, and travel.

India's blockade is designed to extinguish resistance, to leave Kashmiris with a choice—acquiesce or rebel. I'm reminded of a conversation I had during the last uprising, in 2016, with a doctor who told me, "It might not be a good decision for a few hundred people to stand up to 400,000 troops. It might be a very bad decision. But sometimes, you have no choice but to make a bad decision." Kashmiris find themselves, yet again, on the precipice of a bad decision. SAIBA VARMA

Saiba Varma is an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of California, San Diego. She wrote a longer essay on Kashmir at TheNation.com.



India's blockade is designed to extinguish resistance, to leave Kashmiris with a choice—acquiesce or rebel.

Razor wire city: Security forces have turned Srinagar into an ever-evolving labyrinth of checkpoints. Blockades appear and disappear within a span of hours.



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DEREGULATION

EPA Rule Rollbacks

Since Donald Trump took office, his administration has worked tirelessly to make it easier for businesses to destroy the environment and taint our food. A recent *New York Times* analysis found that his White House has killed, stymied, or targeted 84 environmental rules. Among the regulations the administration has set its sights on are those regarding chlorpyrifos, a toxic pesticide linked to neurological damage in children.

Chlorpyrifos was once widely sprayed on crops. But after a series of studies confirmed its ill effects, the Environmental Protection Agency banned the substance from homes, schools, and day cares in 2000. Yet the agency allowed farmers to keep using chlorpyrifos on crops as long as it was sharply limited on staples of children's food, such as grapes, apples, and tomatoes. A wave of lawsuits finally forced the EPA in 2015 to propose that the pesticide be barred from use on all foods by March 2017.

And then Trump took office. In March 2017, shortly after meeting with the CEO of Dow Chemical, the leading manufacturer of chlorpyrifos, then-EPA administrator Scott Pruitt rejected the prohibition. In July, despite a court order, the EPA again refused to implement a ban. Last year, at least 5 million pounds of chlorpyrifos was applied to US cropland.

Miriam Rotkin-Ellman, a senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, "The EPA knows this stuff is toxic—its own scientists have been sounding the alarm for years now. But this administration is shameless in its push to keep it on the market."

—Molly Minta

(continued from page 4)

According to Reuters, an analysis of corporate survey data by CDP, formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project, found that "more than 200 of the world's largest listed companies forecast that climate change could cost them a combined total of almost \$1 trillion, with much of the pain due in the next five years." The author of that study, Nicolette Bartlett, also cautioned that it may understate the problem. "Most companies still have a long way to go in terms of properly assessing climate risk," she told Reuters.

All of these studies offer similar warnings. The IPCC, which a number of leading climate scientists think is overly conservative in its estimates, is working on an updated report about potential economic effects to be released in 2021. But its 2014 report notes that while "estimates completed over the past 20 years vary...and depend on a large number of assumptions, many of which are disputable...many estimates do not account for catastrophic changes, tipping points, and many other factors," so that "losses are more likely than not to be greater, rather than smaller," than the models suggest.

On the other side of the ledger, there is a big potential payoff for saving our environment.

A 2016 report by the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate estimates that \$90 trillion will have to be spent on infrastructure worldwide through 2030, and while transitioning to a carbon-neutral economy would require more up-front capital, the total wouldn't be significantly more over that time. In their 2018 report, the researchers write that those investments "could deliver a direct economic gain of US\$26 trillion through to 2030 compared to business-as-usual."

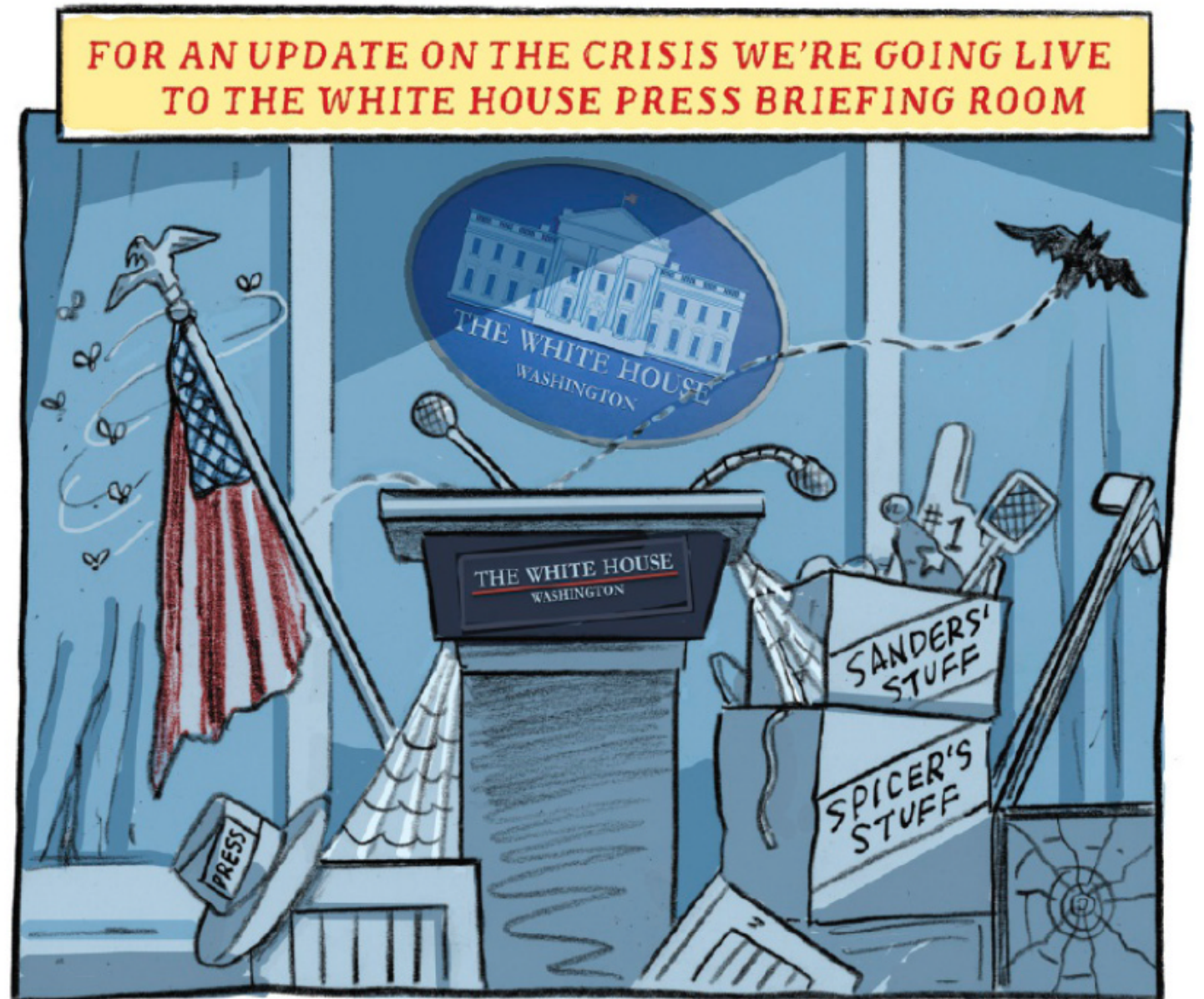
It is, of course, morally perverse to frame this debate in cold economic terms. The World Health Organization estimated in 2014 that heat stress, malaria, malnutrition, and other conditions that will occur if we don't tackle the problem could lead to 250,000 excess deaths each year from 2030 to 2050. A study published this year in *The New England Journal of Medicine* concluded that the WHO's estimate was much too conservative and projected that twice as many people would perish.

We shouldn't focus solely on the economics. But if we want to spare future generations, we should turn the "How will we pay for it?" question around on those who aren't calling for a Green New Deal to fight climate change.

JOSHUA HOLLAND

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			1	2	3	4
			New Year's Day Last day of Kwanzaa	Booth Day		
5	6	7		9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Martin Luther King Jr. Day			1973 In <i>Roe v. Wade</i> , the Supreme Court legalizes abortion nationwide			Lunar New Year
26	27	28	29	30	31	
				1948 Mahatma Gandhi is assassinated		

DECEMBER 2019	JANUARY 2020
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
8 9 10 11 12 13 14	9 10 11 12 13 14 15
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NATION NEWS

Finding the Signal

Over the first week of September, while much of the media's focus on President Trump concerned whether he Sharpie-adulterated a map detailing Hurricane Dorian's likely trajectory, his administration was on a wrecking-ball tear, introducing shocking attacks on environmental regulations and further corroding the rights of immigrants.

Twice a week, in my new on-line column "Signal:Noise," I'll be separating the important stuff from the omnipresent distractions of Trumpland, the wheat from the chaff.

Oftentimes, of course, the significant developments are covered by major news organizations, but too briefly, getting speedily drowned out by the surrounding noise, the fluff, the entertaining diversions.



Other times, important changes largely escape public scrutiny; instead they

get buried in the *Federal Register*, appear in obscure policy briefs, or are reported only by local news outlets.

I shall, of course, need your help in this venture. Please follow me on Twitter (@AbramskySasha) and send me your thoughts on important goings-on—be they regulatory proposals, Department of Justice investigations, judicial nominations, hirings and firings, executive actions, or anything else that you are intrigued or horrified by and believe might merit attention in this new column.

—Sasha Abramsky

Our Best Shot

Congressional races will determine the future of gun control in America.

Four days before the shooting, my husband asked me whether I'd ordered guns online. This story takes place in the United States, which means I need to be more specific about the shooting. As a matter of fact, there were two that week—one in Gilroy, California, and one in El Paso, Texas. We had this conversation after Gilroy but before El Paso. "What are you talking about?" I asked, a chuckle forming in my throat at the absurdity of the question. My husband was looking at his phone, squinting as he tried to decipher an e-mail alert about a package from a gun dealer. "It says here that your delivery was redirected. It's waiting for you at the UPS facility in downtown Los Angeles."

Someone was shipping me guns? What a sinister joke, I thought. But try as I might, I couldn't figure out who might do this. The UPS delivery alert listed the sender as a gun shop in Arkansas, so I looked up its phone number and called. The customer service rep, a young man with a lilting accent, pulled up the order for me. "Yup," he said. "I have it all right here." Then he rattled off a list of gun attachments and accessories, totaling \$1,304.63. I told him that my credit card number must have been stolen, because I hadn't placed the order. "Oh." He sounded annoyed. "Well, I need to get off the phone and try to get this shipment back before it's picked up, or else we're going to lose money."

California, where I live, has some of the strictest gun laws in the nation. It bans assault weapons and large-capacity magazines, has a 10-day waiting period for firearms sales and transfers, and doesn't recognize concealed-carry permits issued elsewhere. But gun manufacturers have found ingenious ways to circumvent such state restrictions: They've modified gun designs to allow for tactical attachments. As my story shows, it's not terribly difficult for someone to turn a gun purchased legally in California into an assault weapon by buying modification kits and accessories from out of state. And with stolen credit card information, the purchase is not even traceable to the person who made it.

Out of caution, I called my local police department. I was curious whether the officers would be able to do anything about what was clearly a suspicious purchase. I was fearful, too,

because I happen to be Muslim, and I worried that someone might go on a shooting rampage under my name. The officer I spoke with let out a bitter laugh. "That kind of fraud is rampant," she said.

I tried to imagine the man—for it is usually a man and usually a white one—who did this. Did he have something in common with other mass shooters? Was he, perhaps, a white supremacist intent on starting a race war? An anti-Semite who blamed Jews for hosting immigrant invaders? A xenophobe who feared that Hispanics would take control of the local and state governments? Was

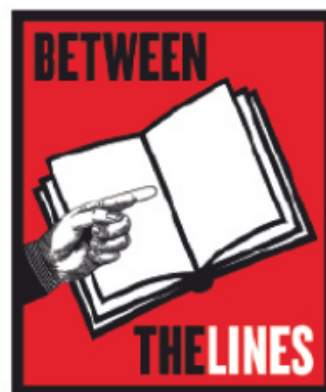
he consumed with hatred for women, as so many of these men are? Did he have grudges against his neighbors? Or was he an aimless man like the one in Thousand Oaks, California, who murdered 12 innocent people because, as the shooter posted on social media, "Life is boring so why not?"

Whatever the motivation or lack thereof, a simple fact connects these atrocities: The ease with which it

is possible for anyone in this country to own a weapon. There are 393 million firearms in the United States, a statistic so staggering that it is necessary to render it in simpler terms. For every 100 Americans—regardless of age, criminal history, mental health, or physical ability—there are 120 weapons. Last year nearly 40,000 people died in gun-related violence, two-thirds of them from suicide. So far in 2019, there have been at least 38 shootings with three or more deaths.

The script that follows each act of public gun violence is hackneyed: sorrow and anger from the citizenry, thoughts and prayers from lawmakers. Year after year, even modest and widely supported reforms stall somewhere in the Capitol. At the moment, the people who are leading the fight to bring sanity to gun legislation are to be found in grassroots organizations. For example, Moms Demand Action, which has 6 million supporters, pushed 20 states

Laila Lalami



An entire generation of children is as familiar with the ritual of active-shooter drills as it is with the Pledge of Allegiance.

to tighten their gun laws and successfully lobbied major retailers and restaurant chains to ban open carry.

Every move is being met with a countermove by the gun lobby. Gun manufacturers have shown a remarkable ability to adapt their deadly products to changing state laws. Gun fanatics who live in states with strict legislation can procure their weapons from nearby states with looser laws. (That is what Santino Legan, the mass shooter in Gilroy, did when he traveled from California to Nevada to buy an AK-47-style assault rifle.) In the meantime, the violence continues at such a pace that an entire generation of children is as familiar with the ritual of active-shooter drills as it is with the Pledge of Allegiance.

It's time to bring federal resources to the fight against gun violence. There is no shortage of ideas—an assault weapons ban, a national gun buyback program, firearm licenses and registry, univer-

sal background checks, liability insurance, limits on ammunition purchases. But there is a shortage of political will, thanks to the influence of the National Rifle Association on some lawmakers. As the presidential race consumes massive amounts of money, energy, and attention, it's important to remember that Senate and House races will determine whether we will finally have some leadership on gun control.

After I phoned my credit card company to report the theft, I got a call from the gun dealer in Arkansas. This time, the customer service rep sounded relieved; he'd managed to get the package intercepted before it was picked up. "That's good," I said, still baffled by the fact that weapon parts could be sold online with little oversight; I hadn't received so much as a phone call to verify the purchase. "Yeah," he replied. "You never know who might have gotten it."

Exactly. ■

Calvin Trillin Deadline Poet

HIS TRUSTY SHARPIE PEN

Mistaken on the path the storm might take,
Unable to acknowledge a mistake,
He got a map of Dorian, and then
He fixed it with his trusty Sharpie pen.

So, soon will he show pictures of his wall,
Which stretches now not many miles at all,
And, using this same strategy again,
Extend it with his trusty Sharpie pen?

Will he—for Kim, to whom he's been attracted—
Show photos that have missiles all redacted?
With ink will he display Afghanistan
As if we've disappeared the Taliban?

Will he, this most duplicitous of men,
Now weaponize his trusty Sharpie pen?

SNAPSHOT / CRAIG RUTTLE

Backpack Graves

UNICEF laid out 3,758 backpacks on the United Nations' North Lawn in New York City on September 8. Each blue bag represents a child killed in a conflict zone last year, and the rows are meant to resemble a cemetery.





A Second Assault

Abortion for rape survivors is legal in Mexico—but too many people in power are trying to keep it out of reach.

**AMY LITTLEFIELD
and LAURA GOTTESDIENER**

W

HEN PATRICIA DISCOVERED SHE WAS PREGNANT, SHE TRIED INDUCING AN ABORTION WITH REMEDIES SHE READ ABOUT on the Internet: rue tea, aloe, and unsalted bean soup. None of them worked.

Weeks earlier, the 16-year-old was raped by a taxi driver rumored to control the marijuana trade in her neighborhood on the outskirts of Guadalajara, a bustling city in the state of Jalisco, in Mexico's conservative heartland. Finally Patricia, who asked us not to use her real name, told her mother, Alma. Years earlier, Alma's mother ignored her daughter's reports of sexual abuse, and Alma resolved not to make the same mistake. Alma sat her daughter down, and as they talked, Alma took notes. She stressed that whatever happened next was Patricia's choice, writing "your decision" in a loopy scrawl and circling it. When Patricia said she wanted an abortion, Alma jotted down how they wanted the procedure performed: "Safe—with trained providers. Under the law." It was January 2016, and Jalisco's penal code has permitted abortion in cases of rape since 1933. But health department records show that before 2016, no one in the state had obtained a legal abortion under the rape exception.

Patricia and her family live in Tlajomulco de Zúñiga, a poor neighborhood racked by drug-related violence. She was an outgoing teenager who volunteered with the local Green Party, taking classes in urban gardening and helping campaign for the party's candidates. She loved cooking, and she marveled at how the food reflected her emotions, how her *chile de molcajete* grew mouthwateringly spicy when she was happy. But after the rape, Patricia withdrew.

She was furious one moment, sobbing the next. The smallest sounds startled her. Her rice burned. "I was in shock," she recalled when we spoke in the fall of 2018, in the studio where her mother works as a beautician. "It was as if my life had been paused and someone had told me, 'Stay quiet and don't move.'" She was terrified that if she reported the rape to authorities, her attacker would come after her. But at the time, Jalisco required rape survivors to report the assault in order to obtain authorization from a public prosecutor's office or a judge for an abortion.

Patricia could have made the 13-hour round-trip journey from their home to Mexico City, where abortion is legal in the first trimester and with no time limit in cases of rape. But that journey can be expensive and logistically complicated, and Alma was a single working mother with other children. Plus, she knew her daughter had the right to abortion in her state. "And if we don't make those rights worth something, then what are we here for?" she thought.

On January 28, 2016, Patricia and Alma reported the rape to prosecutors, initiating a series of medical and psychological exams, during which they expressed their intention to obtain an abortion for Patricia. None of the officials they encountered gave them a clear answer about how to access an abortion. Finally, on February 10, a psychologist from the attorney general's office accompanied Alma and Patricia to the state health department. In hand, they had a letter from the prosecutor's office directing the department to carry out Patricia's abortion. The following day, they met with the department's legal director, and on February 12, he called them back to his office. He gave them misoprostol, an ulcer medication that is also used to induce abortions, along with typewritten instructions that read, "one each 8 hours orally; one each 8 hours vaginally" and a phone number for

When Patricia said she wanted an abortion, Alma jotted down how they wanted it performed: "Safe—with trained providers. Under the law."

"Your decision": Patricia, left, and her mother, Alma, spent more than three weeks fighting for Patricia, a rape survivor, to obtain a legal abortion.

an ob-gyn at the public Hospital General de Occidente. The lawyer gave them the 14-pill foil packet without the box and told them not to tell anyone, not even the prosecutor, according to Patricia and her mother. (In testimony to the Jalisco Human Rights Commission, the legal director denied Alma's account of these events.)

By the time they returned home, it was dark. The two sat in the living room. "How are we going to do this?" Patricia recalled thinking. "I was very scared, because we didn't know what would happen." Around 9 PM, she took one pill orally and inserted the second into her vagina. By the following morning, she was so weak that she couldn't walk to the bathroom. It pained her mother to have to continue inserting the pills even as her daughter's vagina grew inflamed. "I told her, 'Be patient, *mi hija*. Be patient,'" Alma recalled. "She was crying, and it was maddening to see her because, apart from her despair, you know that you don't really know what you're doing."

On Sunday morning, nearly 36 hours after Patricia began taking misoprostol, Alma texted the ob-gyn photos of Patricia's bleeding and concerns about her pain. The ob-gyn agreed to meet them at the hospital, where, according to both women, he abruptly performed a vaginal exam as Patricia wept from the pain. An ultrasound confirmed that she was still pregnant. The instructions the lawyer provided did not match the World Health Organization's protocol for abortion beyond 12 weeks



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ILLUSTRATION BY HANNA BARCZYK

of pregnancy, which recommends administering the pills every three hours instead of eight. According to Alma and Patricia, the doctor then told Patricia to go home and take more misoprostol, removing the label from the bottle and telling Alma to be careful because, if the police caught them with it, they could be arrested—even though Patricia was seeking a legal abortion from a public hospital. On average from 2007 through 2016 across Mexico, one person was reported to the authorities every day on suspicion of abortion. (The doctor denied this account of the day, testifying to the Jalisco Human Rights Commission that Patricia’s medical care was administered “with quality and warmth and with due information.”)

Patricia began to doubt her decision. “I looked at my mom, and I thought, ‘What am I doing? What is happening?’” she said. “I was resigned to the fact that I was going to have a child.”

Still, the two persisted. Rather than begin a new round of misoprostol, as the ob-gyn suggested, Patricia and her mother met with a lawyer, Angela García Reyes, who told them she would file a legal stay alleging that the state was subjecting Patricia to cruel, degrading, and inhumane treatment by denying her an abortion. The day before that stay was filed, the doctor wrote to Alma saying a judge had authorized the abortion. (According to García, the letter from the public prosecutor’s office should have been sufficient authorization. She speculated that the secretary of health may have been waiting for a judge’s authorization for extra cover in case there was public controversy over the case.) He instructed them to return to the hospital the next morning. But when they arrived, he warned them that the hospital didn’t have *molidas de bebés*—Spanish for “baby grinders,” his term for the equipment necessary to carry out a surgical abortion. Instead, Patricia would be administered more medication to end the pregnancy.

The following morning, Patricia was admitted for what staff members described as their first abortion case. (State records show there was one abortion in the month before hers in the same hospital, but local lawyers and activists said they have no memory of such a case.) The medical staff placed her in a bed in a corner of the maternity ward echoing with the sound of women in labor, and they barred her mother from entering the room. At one point, Patricia recalled a gaggle of about 15 medical students clustering around her. She was told to open her legs, and someone painfully inserted a speculum. According to medical records, the medical staff administered mifepristone and misoprostol with the aim of inducing labor. She said the doctors subjected her to more than a dozen vaginal exams. Nurses drifted by her bed, chiding her, “You do know that the babies aren’t to blame?” Hours later, she was injected with oxytocin, a hormone used to induce labor, and her contractions grew so painful that she cried out for help. A medical worker moved to inject her with a pain medication, but a doctor intervened. “We’re not going to give you anything for the pain,” Patricia remembered her saying. (According to the medical records, during this phase of the abortion, Patricia was given an anti-inflammatory medicine known as *keterolac*, which has some analgesic properties, and another medicine used to treat cramping. The hospital did not respond to requests for comment.) Finally, more than 12 hours after she was admitted, Patricia felt a sensation similar to defecating, and the room grew blurry. She was wheeled into the surgical ward. Doctors performed a curettage to remove the remains of the pregnancy.

It had been 22 days since Patricia first reported the rape.

Alma sees her daughter’s ordeal as a form of punishment for their decision to pursue a legal abortion in a conservative region of Mexico. “It was like they were telling her, ‘You chose this, right? Well, then this is what’s going to happen.’”

IN MEXICO’S GROUNDBREAKING NATIONAL ELECTIONS in 2000, the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) ousted the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), at the time the longest-ruling party in the world. Abortion rights activists feared that members of the conservative government would seek to further restrict abortion in Mexico, which at the time was legal only for rape survivors and, in some states, in other instances, such as if the pregnant woman’s life was in danger or for serious fetal anomalies. Indeed, the month after the elections, lawmakers in the president-elect’s home state of Guanajuato moved to ban abortion in cases of rape in that state. The effort sparked such massive street protests that the state’s interim governor was forced to veto the measure. Although the law failed, abortion was nearly impossible for rape survivors to obtain. According to a 2006 Human Rights Watch report, “actual access to safe abortion procedures is made virtually impossible by a maze of administrative hurdles as well as—most pointedly—by official negligence and obstruction.” In Jalisco, one social worker boasted to Human Rights Watch about having persuaded a child who had been raped by her brother not to end the pregnancy, saying, “She came here wanting to have an abortion, but we worked with her psychologically, and in the end she kept her baby. Her little child-sibling.”

Mexican feminists scored an extraordinary victory in 2007, when Mexico City legalized all abortions in the first trimester. But in the ensuing years, more than half of Mexico’s states passed constitutional amendments to define life as beginning at conception, joining Chihuahua, which reformed its Constitution in 1994. While not enforceable, these measures contributed to a sense of uncertainty around access to legal abortion. Meanwhile, the US-backed drug war, which began in 2006, fueled soaring levels of violence across the country, including rape and femicide. Women activists and victims’ families mobilized to bring attention to this crisis and demand protections, including abortion access for rape survivors. In 2012, with more than 100,000 people killed and 25,000 more disappeared in the previous six years, lawmakers passed a General Law of Victims. Among other things, it affirmed the right of rape survivors to access legal abortions in public hospitals. Advocates then successfully pushed federal authorities to reform a rule, known as Norm 046, to say that rape survivors could obtain an abortion without authorization from a judge or other authority and that those age 12 or older could do so without a parent’s permission. The reform took effect in 2016—a month after Patricia had her abortion—and the Supreme Court upheld it this August. The same year, activists pressured Jalisco to declare an alert over gender violence, activating a legal mechanism that feminists have used to push authorities to improve access to abortion in cases of rape.

Despite these reforms, in prosecutors’ offices and



“We have a beautiful legal framework in Mexico. The problem is that the authorities are not interested in implementing it.”

—Esmeralda Lecxiur Ferreira, Mexfam

public hospitals across the country, procedural barriers remain deeply entrenched. In a report tracking cases from 2012, the year before the General Law of Victims took effect, to 2018, two years after the reform of Norm 046, the reproductive rights organization Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida (GIRE) said it supported 38 rape survivors, the majority of whom were under 18, who were denied abortions or faced serious hurdles. In 2015 in Tabasco, the public prosecutor's office attempted to reclassify a 10-year-old's rape as pedophilia in order to disqualify her from accessing an abortion. (She ultimately obtained the procedure.) In 2016 an 18-year-old farmworker was denied an abortion in Baja California Sur because, according to local authorities, "abortion is a crime because it is an attack against a child." In 2018 a 15-year-old reported to authorities in Puebla that she had been raped by her uncle and needed an abortion, but local authorities told her that abortion there was illegal, making her fear that she would be arrested for obtaining one. She and the farmworker had their abortions in Mexico City.

Before the General Law of Victims took effect, one woman was even imprisoned. In 2012 a 26-year-old in Durango obtained an abortion after being kidnapped, raped, and impregnated by her ex-boyfriend, who later threatened to kill her unless she dropped the charges against him. When she complied with his demands, local authorities charged her with making false statements and the crime of having an abortion. She went to prison.

Data collected by GIRE suggests that, despite the prevalence of sexual violence in Mexico, few abortions have been provided in cases of rape, even in the years since the reforms. GIRE found that from December 2012 to October 2017, public health care institutions reported performing 137 abortions in cases of rape, an average of 27 each year nationwide, even though thousands of rapes are reported each year.

Abortion provision "has to be in the health centers, it has to be done via the state, because if the state is doing it, then how can the state criminalize it?"

—Verónica Marín,
Jalisco activist

The green tide:

Young feminists, including Daniela Zaizar, right, push for legal abortion in Mexico last September 28, International Safe Abortion Day.

MEXICAN ACTIVISTS CREDIT SURVIVORS LIKE Patricia, who have asserted their legal rights within a hostile system, with spurring limited improvements in recent years. "It was these women, these girls, who came forward and said, 'Yes, I'm going to do it,'" said Verónica Marín, an activist who helps rape survivors in Jalisco. "We accompanied them, but it was their bodies that endured that torment."

For more than a decade, Marín and other activists have supported women and girls in Jalisco who traveled to Mexico City to end their pregnancies. From 2009 to 2016, when there were 111,413 rapes reported to federal and local attorneys general, public health authorities reported performing only 63 abortions in cases of rape. About two-thirds of these were reported by Mexico City. According to government statistics, just over 600 people from Jalisco have traveled to Mexico City for legal abortions over the last 12 years. Countless more have chosen to self-induce using misoprostol pills, which are available in street markets and over the counter in pharmacies. Grassroots feminist groups have sprung up across Mexico to help people safely take this medication. Self-managed abortion is legal in cases of rape, but rape victims who pursue that option and experience complications that require follow-up care risk being reported to authorities if providers don't believe they were raped. Government records show that nationwide, authorities prosecuted 157 women for having an abortion from 2014 to 2017. In Jalisco illegal abortion carries a sentence of up to two years in prison, and other states impose sentences of up to six years for patients and 10 years for providers. Women who self-abort or suffer miscarriages or stillbirths have faced murder and infanticide charges. People in rural areas, including indigenous women, may lack access to safe methods of abortion and are more likely to resort to dangerous methods. Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal death in Mexico.



Several years before Patricia's case, Marín and other activists began helping rape survivors demand that public hospitals provide abortions. They wanted to force the hospitals and the Mexican state to make good on their legal rights, but they also wanted to pave the way for decriminalizing abortion by compelling doctors, who are authority figures in Mexican society, to perform the procedure. Marín said that having doctors provide abortion in public hospitals, as opposed to women secretly taking pills at home, would help destigmatize the procedure. "It has to be in the health centers. It has to be done via the state," said Marín, a vibrant woman with blue-streaked hair, "because if the state is doing it, then how can the state criminalize it?"

When Marín and others started trying to help rape victims access abortions in Jalisco, there was no clear protocol, and the authorities simply refused. Time after time, the activists helped victims travel to Mexico City. Even after some public hospitals began to perform the procedure around the time of Patricia's case, Marín said, hospital authorities continued to treat both patients and activists with hostility. Sometimes staffers called security to oust the activists. When providers failed to give victims pain medications, the advocates would smuggle pills to them hidden inside their clothing. "When we began," Marín said, "it seemed impossible that one day a hospital would practice abortions and that the whole world would know it was happening there."

TODAY, THOUGH THE NATIONAL LAW SAYS RAPE survivors in any Mexican state can go to a public hospital and get an abortion without reporting the crime to authorities first, 11 states still have laws on the books that require victims to file a report. Though the national law nullifies such requirements, "the lack of compliance of some penal codes with the national legislation concerning care of victims disadvantages women in certain states, who face higher barriers to access abortion services depending on their geographic location," GIRE concluded last year. Twelve states impose some form of time limit on abortion for rape survivors, mostly confining it to the first trimester of pregnancy. The patchwork of state-level abortion laws in Mexico parallels that of the United States, where access also depends largely on a person's location and ability to afford to travel to the nearest clinic. Interest in self-induced abortion has spiked in the United States after the confirmation of two Supreme Court justices nominated by President Donald Trump, which has raised the prospect that the court will overturn *Roe v. Wade* and allow some states to ban abortion outright. Some emboldened Republicans have dropped rape exceptions from their increasingly extreme efforts to ban the procedure. But many, including Trump, still support these exceptions as a way to temper opposition among an American public that overwhelmingly supports abortion access for rape survivors. In Mexico, such exceptions have yet to fulfill their promise of protecting these victims.

Since Patricia's case in 2016, public hospitals in Jalisco have performed at least 20 abortions for rape survivors, according to records provided by officials in October 2018. Otilia Bibiana Domínguez Barbosa, the coordinator of the gender-based-violence program at the Jalisco Health Department, said in an interview that since Patricia's case, the state has implemented a protocol for rape survivors and is conducting trainings for providers.

García, the attorney who represented Patricia, said she has seen improve-

A Jalisco health official knew of only 28 doctors in 2018 who were not registered objectors refusing to provide abortion on religious grounds.



ments in the legal system in Jalisco but not as much among health care providers. "I think that the laws, the judges are slowly understanding that this is a right that we have as women. But the health sector is still behind. The health sector is the barrier we are pushing up against," she observed. Across the country, activists said that one of the biggest remaining hurdles is not the law itself but rather the doctors, nurses, hospital administrators, and other public officials who fail to understand it or refuse to carry it out.

Many of these providers claim a religious opposition to abortion. In an interview last October, Domínguez said she knew of only 28 doctors in the entire state who were not registered as conscientious objectors to abortion—up from nine the year before. This year, a young rape victim was forced to file a lawsuit after authorities in the state of Aguascalientes denied her a legal abortion, claiming that there were no people who were not conscientious objectors available to carry out the procedure. (A federal judge then ordered Aguascalientes to provide her an abortion within 10 days.) "We have a beautiful legal framework in Mexico," said Esmeralda Lecxiur Ferreira, a legal adviser with the reproductive health services group Mexfam. "The problem is that the authorities are not interested in implementing it."

Indeed, in two cases in 2017 and 2018, rape survivors continued to confront obstacles to accessing legal abortion in Jalisco—including at the same hospital where Patricia went. In September 2017 a 16-year-old named Juana (who asked to use a pseudonym) sought a legal abortion after being raped by two men while she was walking to school in her rural town in the interior of Jalisco. She and her father traveled hours to Guadalajara to obtain the procedure. But from the moment they arrived at the hospital, Juana said, she felt that the doctors didn't want to take care of her. According to Yazmín Cano, an activist who accompanied Juana, the doctor in charge of the legal abortion program initially refused to treat her because she didn't have documents showing she reported the crime to authorities, even though the reform of Norm 046 made it clear that rape survivors could obtain an abortion without authorization. Cano said the doctor then tried to intimidate Juana, warning that the abortion could perforate her uterus, leaving her infertile or even killing her. (The hospital did not respond to requests for comment.) After insisting that she wanted an abortion, Juana was given medication and, like Patricia, found herself sequestered in the labor and delivery room. "They left me pretty much alone, dying of pain," she recalled. "To this day, I close my eyes, and I still see the women who were giving birth. It was very traumatic."

The activists got observers from the state's human rights commission to go and witness Juana's treatment. Finally, Cano said, the doctors ended her pregnancy surgically. "I think that the doctors didn't want to participate in the curettage because for them and for many people, this is a crime—abortion is a crime," Juana said. The next morning, as she was recovering from the surgery, a police officer arrived and interrogated her and her father separately about the rape, even though she had

not reported it. She said she felt her rights were violated in the hospital but, despite the trauma, she doesn't regret seeking an abortion. She's now attending nursing school and is passionate about her studies. "Even though the whole world criticizes you, you have to keep living, for yourself most of all," she said.

A year after Juana's case, García accompanied a rape victim to another public hospital in Guadalajara, where the staff had undergone training by an abortion rights organization. The victim didn't face any legal barriers, but according to García, the hospital prevented the patient from meeting with her and called the patient's family to disclose the rape and the abortion, even though García had expressly told the hospital that the patient didn't want her family to know and the law allows victims age 12 or older to get an abortion without a parent's permission. "It's a daily, daily, fight with the health care institutions," García said.

Recent Supreme Court rulings in favor of rape survivors' accessing abortion have given legal advocates more ammunition. The rulings granted damages to victims and ordered improvements by health care authorities. "We as civil-society organizations are disseminating the information and saying to the hospital authorities, 'Look, you can be held responsible for denying services,'" said Fernanda Díaz de León, a senior policy adviser at Ipas, an international reproductive health organization. Still, the rulings don't subject individual providers to penalties.

Another issue is the lack of education among not just officials but also the public, including rape survivors themselves. Patricia Ortega, a Jalisco activist who works with Marín, said that before 2016, though the rape exception was in the penal code, no one—including the most sympathetic public officials—knew how to make it a reality. "Now there is a clear procedure, and when victims have that information, they can arrive [at the hospital] and argue this is in the official norm," Ortega said. "What is lacking now is public awareness."

Many people still think that abortion is a crime in all cases, she added—leading GIRE to conclude that "while abortion is considered a crime instead of a health care service, women will keep confronting violations of their reproductive rights, including when they seek abortions under circumstances allowed by law."

MANY ADVOCATES SAY THAT JUSTICE FOR RAPE survivors will not be fully realized in Mexico until abortion is both decriminalized and more widely accepted within the country's conservative culture. Two years after Patricia fought to obtain her legal abortion, a "green tide" of pro-choice activism began to sweep across Latin America, with hundreds of thousands of

Making rights real: Verónica Marín, left, and Patricia Ortega have trained medical personnel in Jalisco on their legal obligation to provide abortions to rape survivors.



"While abortion is considered a crime... women will keep confronting violations of their reproductive rights, including when they seek abortions... allowed by law."

—GIRE

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people pouring into the streets to demand the legalization of abortion across the region. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have some of the world's most restrictive abortion laws, with several banning abortion outright. A few allow it without a specific reason in the first trimester, and the rest ban it with various exceptions, including to save the woman's life or in cases of rape. In 2014 at least 10 percent of maternal deaths in the region resulted from unsafe abortion, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive health research organization. The green tide began in Argentina, where a grassroots feminist movement brought a million people to the streets to support a historic vote to legalize abortion. Although the bill they supported ultimately failed, the effort galvanized the abortion rights movement across the region.

Mexican activists have been emboldened. "When we saw everything that happened in Argentina, that gave us a breath of fresh air and renewed our energies here in Mexico," said Daniela Zaizar, a 24-year-old activist. Pressured by the green tide, members of the left-wing Morena party of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador have sent some hopeful signals. Interior Minister Olga Sánchez Cordero has said she supports decriminalizing abortion up to 12 weeks and releasing all women currently incarcerated for abortion-related crimes.

On September 28, thousands of people are expected to fill the streets of cities across Mexico for the annual International Safe Abortion Day. Last year, hundreds of women wearing green handkerchiefs and T-shirts poured into the streets of Guadalajara to demand the decriminalization and acceptance of a procedure undergone by countless women in Mexico. Some of the protesters said they were inspired to march after their experiences with extralegal abortions. Patricia said she hoped to attend the march, but it was too far from home for her to travel alone, and her mother was at work. Instead, she shared information about the event on social media. Posting publicly about the march made her nervous, given how critical she knew people could be about abortion. But she decided to do it anyway. Much to her surprise, some of her friends liked her post. One male friend who worked in a public hospital replied simply, "I support you." ■



The Neo-Nazi Murder Haunting Germany

The
assassination
of a local
politician is
waking up the
country to the
threat of the
radical right.

JORDAN STANCIL



NO ONE HAD PLANNED TO HOUSE REFUGEES IN KASSEL DISTRICT IN western Germany. But then, no one had seen this many refugees arrive all at once, either—at least not since the aftermath of World War II.

“Essentially, we were told we needed to find housing for a thousand people from one day to the next,” Hermann-Josef Klüber, the vice president of the Kassel district government, told me. “All of a sudden, the buses started arriving every hour.”

It was the late summer of 2015, and Chancellor Angela Merkel had made the decision not to close the border to asylum seekers but rather to process their applications in Germany, helping to relieve a desperate situation in countries to the south and east. The choice was made in Berlin, but the work of taking care of the refugees would be carried out at the local level, by city and district officials supported by armies of volunteers.

“Our goal was: No one here will be homeless,” Klüber said when I spoke







tion of a politician in Germany by the far right since the end of World War II, and it has shaken the country profoundly. The suspected killer (who gave a confession to police but retracted it, possibly for tactical reasons, when he changed lawyers) turned out to be a well-known neo-Nazi. He has a long record of criminal convictions for racist violence and a file with the domestic intelligence agency that is supposed to track extremists, leading to questions about whether the structures Germany put in place after 1945 to protect its democracy are ready to deal with the now-resurgent far right.

On paper and by reputation, Germany appears well equipped to stamp out any return of radical-right politics.

with him in July. “And winter was not that far away.”

Over 100 employees of the Kassel district government suddenly found themselves pulled away from their normal jobs, drafted into a humanitarian assistance mission that no one had planned for and that required organizing the provision of everything from toothbrushes to interpreters. The effort was joined by 3,500 local volunteers.

The district eventually set up more than 20 refugee centers, with room for more than 14,000 people. At the head of this mission stood an avuncular bear of a man with shaggy gray hair and a mustache. His name was Walter Lübcke.

He was born and raised in the area and was serving as president of the Kassel district government. As the first refugees arrived, he told the local press, “Our common life is based on Christian values. And that’s connected to concern and responsibility and help for people in need.”

Like Merkel, Lübcke was a member of the mainstream conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party. “He was certainly no leftist,” said Renate Mueller, a retired trade unionist who helped organize the volunteer effort. “But I think he stood for basic values, based on Christian conviction. And he acted on what he stood for.”

“He was the kind of guy who would light up a cigarette and stand around smoking with the workers outside the building,” said Kurt Heldmann, a photographer who worked for the district government. “It didn’t matter whether you were the doorman or a government minister. Lübcke was a guy who treated everyone exactly the same.”

Lübcke’s enthusiastic leadership of the local mission to help refugees and his stubborn insistence that they be treated humanely earned him hundreds of death threats and sparked an online campaign by Germany’s extreme right to vilify him—an effort that continued even after he was shot in the head and killed outside his home.

Lübcke’s murder, on June 2, was the first assassina-

Begrüßung! A man greets refugees as they arrive at the train station in Saalfeld, Germany, in 2015.

Walter Lübcke’s leadership of the local mission to help refugees earned him hundreds of death threats.



Angela Merkel allowed more asylum seekers into Germany.

For example, it’s illegal to display Nazi symbols, and the state can ban political parties that are deemed to threaten the “free democratic basic order” guaranteed by the postwar Constitution. A special domestic intelligence agency called the Federal Office of Constitutional Protection is tasked with monitoring extremist activity and can spy on and infiltrate groups it decides are dangerous.

These structures are part of what Germans call militant democracy, a term that political scientist Karl Loewenstein coined in the 1930s. Loewenstein, who fled the Nazis and taught in the United States, argued that fascists would claim the protection of democratic rights and freedoms, passing themselves off as normal political actors even though their real aim was the destruction of democracy. To have any chance of surviving such manipulation, he said, a democracy needs to be willing to act undemocratically in special circumstances, to take away basic rights from those who would abuse them. A democracy that could do so would be a “militant democracy.”

The phrase feels unfamiliar in English, but since 1945, it has had a long and illustrious career in Germany, rendered in Loewenstein’s native language as *streitbare Demokratie* or *wehrhafte Demokratie* and used widely in the press and in political discussion to express the idea that democracies can’t just let their enemies operate freely.

The precise implications of the term seem overshadowed today by the way Germans use it. “Militant democracy” is one of those political phrases that nearly everybody thinks is a good thing. When you bring it up with Germans, they tend to start nodding in agreement before you can even finish getting the words out of your mouth, as if to say, “You’re damn right this is a democracy—and it always will be, too!” But besides the prohibitions in the criminal code on the use of explicitly Nazi symbols and the Nazi salute, it isn’t clear that the German state is really using all the tools of militant democracy to monitor and stop extremist violence.

THE MAN ACCUSED OF KILLING LÜBCKE is 45-year-old Stephan Ernst. He had been part of the neo-Nazi scene around Kassel for approximately two decades, according to German media. He stabbed a foreigner nearly to death in a train station bathroom in 1992 and set fire to a home for asylum seekers with a pipe bomb in 1993. A regular participant in extremist street marches, he was convicted in 2003 for taking weapons to a demonstration and in 2009 for participating in an attack by about 400 neo-Nazis on a trade unionist rally. If Germany's militant democracy can't stop someone like this, one wonders, who can it stop?

For the past 10 years or so, Ernst lived a seemingly quiet life, with a job, a wife, and two kids. But it appears he took his extremist activity online. The Office of Constitutional Protection had a file on him, but after the most recent reports on someone are five years old, data privacy rules prevent officials from accessing the information. In this case, those rules might have proved fatal for Lübcke.

Whatever we eventually learn as the investigation of Ernst proceeds, experts on right-wing extremism have long suspected that the Office of Constitutional Protection isn't living up to its name. Most notoriously, the office and the country's other security services failed to stop a series of murders of immigrants from 2000 to 2007 by a terrorist cell called the National Socialist Underground. "There's been a tendency to underestimate the potential for right-wing terror for a long time," said Kai Arzheimer, a professor of politics at the University of Mainz who studies right-wing parties.

There has also been a disturbing wave of violence against local officials. There was Henriette Reker, who was seriously wounded in a knife attack during her successful 2015 campaign for mayor of Cologne. There was a small-town mayor in eastern Germany, Markus Nierth, who resigned in 2015 after a neo-Nazi demonstration outside his house. "Papa, I'm afraid of the Nazis," his young son told him. There was a Social Democratic leader in the town of Bocholt, Thomas Purwin, who stepped down in December 2016 after threats to his family. There was another small-town mayor, Andreas Hollstein, who was stabbed in November 2017 by a man shouting about refugees.

This list could continue: The Association of German Cities says 40 percent of city council members and 20 percent of mayors in Germany reported having received threats. In 2018 more than 1,200 crimes were recorded against local officials.

Not all of these crimes were rooted in right-wing ideology, but Burkhard Jung, the mayor of Leipzig, identified the danger this violence poses to the functioning of the state, asking in *Der Tagesspiegel*, "What if nobody



"Lübcke stood for basic values, based on Christian conviction. And he acted on what he stood for."

—Renate Mueller, retired trade unionist

Suspect in custody: German special police escort Stephan Ernst after a hearing at the federal court in Karlsruhe in 2019.

runs for these positions anymore?" Another mayor, referring to local government employees, said, "My people are afraid every time the door opens."

The potential also exists for large-scale right-wing terrorist attacks in Germany. The public learned this summer that a terrorist group called Nordkreuz compiled a list of about 25,000 people—mainly left-leaning politicians and officials—with a focus on anyone who expressed support for refugees.

There was some debate about whether the list should be characterized as a death list. Since one draft included the heading "we'll get you all" and Nordkreuz members had been stockpiling ammunition and ordered body bags and quicklime (which accelerates the decomposition of bodies), the label doesn't seem an exaggeration.

Perhaps most troubling is that the list was created by police officers, some of whom are suspected of stealing weapons and ammunition from official caches for Nordkreuz to use. It appears that at least some of the addresses and personal information on the list were not publicly available and could have come only from police files. So far, four officers have been arrested in connection with Nordkreuz. In a separate case, 38 members of the police in Hesse state, where Lübcke was killed, were under investigation for involvement in extreme-right activity.

ALL OF THIS NEWS IS BAD, BUT IT GETS WORSE, BECAUSE for the first time since 1945, there is now a strong right-wing party in German politics, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). It has the third-largest caucus in the federal Bundestag and is represented in all 16 state parliaments. And in recent state elections in eastern Germany, it made further inroads. The AfD thus achieved something that its postwar extremist precursors never did: It has brought the far right back into everyday political life.

To be sure, the AfD officially condemns violence and rejects the extremist label, and its members and officeholders have sometimes been the target of violence



Henriette Reker was stabbed during her mayoral campaign.



themselves. In fact, according to a count by the Interior Ministry, there have been more cases of vandalism and assault against the AfD this year than against any other party.

But there is a zone where the furthest right elements of the AfD mesh with parts of the neo-Nazi scene. This year the party's youth organization as well as a far-right faction known as Der Flügel, or the Wing, were placed under observation by the Office of Constitutional Protection. The party's routine professions of loyalty to Germany's democracy seem less than credible when viewed in the context of its radical rhetoric, like that of a state-level leader who said the AfD's goal is to "cause the regime to collapse." And in an appalling example of what some in the AfD think about the Lübcke assassination, one of the party's members in the Bavarian parliament refused to observe a moment of silence for Lübcke.

"There is not a direct connection where the AfD is telling people to commit attacks," said Matthias Quent, a sociologist who studies the radical right. "But they very consciously engage in a form of incitement by promoting the idea of catastrophic scenarios that require a drastic response." In other words, Lübcke was a traitor (a *Volksverräter*) for defending refugees and received the punishment traitors deserve.

"Not everyone in the AfD is in favor of violence, but some are, and all of them are willing to take the possibility of violence into the bargain," said Quent. As Volker Bouffier, the premier of the state of Hesse, put it, "The AfD creates a climate that makes violence as a solution thinkable."

The debate over the AfD's role exploded after Lübcke's assassination. Peter Tauber, a former CDU general secretary, and Michael Brand, a CDU Bundestag member, accused the AfD of complicity in the murder. The AfD's leadership angrily rejected the claim. In a statement, the party condemned "the repulsive murder of Walter Lübcke" as well as "extremist violence in whatever form." But important figures in or near the AfD had participated in the online incitement against Lübcke.

One prominent example was Erika Steinbach, for years a leading politician on the right wing of the CDU who now directs an AfD-linked think tank. She twice shared a video from 2015 that showed Lübcke telling neo-Nazi hecklers at a town hall meeting that if they didn't respect the values of democratic debate, they were free to leave the country.

The encounter between Lübcke and the hecklers



"There is not a direct connection where the AfD is telling people to commit attacks. But they very consciously engage in a form of incitement."

—Matthias Quent

In memoriam:

An honor guard consisting of police and military officers flanks Lübcke's coffin in Kassel in June 2019.

was provoked by an extremist group in Kassel that sent its members to the meeting to disrupt it, according to several people who were there. The neo-Nazis then edited the video to make it appear that Lübcke was haranguing the entire crowd, telling anyone who didn't agree with the refugee policy to get out of the country.

Since the murder investigation hasn't been completed, it's impossible to say for sure what role the video had in Lübcke's killing. But it was undoubtedly a key piece of the incitement campaign. Neo-Nazis created the propaganda and deployed it to provoke violence against an official of the German state. Parts of the country's political mainstream then shared it—an apparent endorsement.

Right now in Germany, there's no shortage of people willing to commit that violence. "There are thousands of people like Stephan Ernst," Quent said. In a 2018 report, the Office of Constitutional Protection said it classifies over 24,000 people in the country as right-wing extremists, 12,000 of whom it considers "violence-oriented."

But Germany is also a nation where the most popular party in some national polls this summer was the Greens. It is a country where 55 percent of the population participated, in one way or another, in a wave of volunteerism to help refugees. At that town hall meeting where the anti-Lübcke video was made, there were about a dozen neo-Nazis. But local officials said that 220 people signed up that night to help refugees.

Loewenstein argued that fascism could come to power if a violent, opportunistic minority was permitted to "systematically discredit the democratic order and make it unworkable by paralyzing its functions until chaos reigns." One can imagine how a series of targeted political killings and thousands of acts of violence against local officials could have just that effect. The theory of militant democracy that underpins Germany's Constitution assumes that the state's police powers must be deployed to crush this threat, even if it means sacrificing the basic rights of those under suspicion.

But the vast majority of local officials, including those who survived brutal knife attacks, are staying on the job. And when a group of neo-Nazis held a provocative march in Kassel in July, their numbers were dwarfed by thousands of citizens who came out to say, "No, not here."

Those examples and many others like them are encouraging. But ultimately, the situation leaves an observer of Germany feeling unsettled. The many visible acts of pro-democracy engagement by civil society, in addition to the cool competence and even courage of the majority of the country's officials, are impressive and admirable.

At the same time, one senses not a coming storm but the possibility of one. With all the bad actors already prepared to take the stage, how would Germany respond to an upheaval more drastic than the arrival of a million refugees—to a massive terrorist attack or a series of high-level political assassinations or a major economic crisis? Would the much-heralded militant democracy, such as it is, withstand the storm? ■

Jordan Stancil is a former US diplomat writing about European affairs.





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BERNIE'S SECRET CLIMATE WEAPON

Only a **global** Green New Deal can succeed.

TOM ATHANASIOU



A new way forward: Bernie Sanders greets the crowd at the final event of the Road to the Green New Deal tour.

BERNIE SANDERS'S GREEN NEW DEAL IS NOTHING SHORT OF REMARKABLE. It faces the climate challenge more honestly and comprehensively than any other proposal yet. It calls for government action on a heroic scale—committing the United States to do its fair share to cut global greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030, in line with the findings of the landmark scientific report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) last October—and outlines a set of bold policies to achieve that extremely ambitious goal. The plan's 10-year, \$16.3 trillion price tag raised eyebrows among the usual inside-the-Beltway suspects, but the Democratic presidential candidate isn't backing down. "The fundamental question is do we respond to the degree that the scientific community tells us we must, or do we not?" Sanders told *Mother Jones*. "And from a moral perspective, I think we have no choice but to act."

Unveiled on August 22, when his presidential campaign visited Paradise, California, the once-idyllic town incinerated by last summer's record wildfires, Sanders's Green New Deal envisions "a ten-year, nationwide mobilization centered around justice and equity." It promises to "end unemployment" by creating 20 million "good paying, union jobs with strong benefits." It would prohibit the import and export of fossil fuels, ban fracking and mountaintop-removal coal mining, and end emissions from the US transportation sector by 2030. It would establish a "just transition" program so that workers in the fossil fuel industry don't suffer from the shift to a greener economy, and it would create a separate fund to help communities of color meet the climate impacts to come. Give Sanders his due: This is what a serious climate plan looks like in 2019.

But the true genius of Sanders's Green New Deal—its secret weapon for achieving the massive emissions cuts he promises—has gone unnoticed by mainstream news organizations and even most climate activists. He clearly recognizes that eliminating greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, as the Sunrise Movement and other climate activists have demanded, is all but impossible in an economy as enormous and energy intensive as the United States'—at least without paralyzing transportation systems, endangering food supplies, and otherwise triggering a social backlash. But rather than just endorse the 2030 deadline anyway, as some activists insist, or pretend that the science is negotiable, as most politicians do, Sanders has found a credible way around the dilemma.

His Green New Deal includes a pledge to help the world's poorer countries move rapidly away from fossil fuel use, reducing their greenhouse gas emissions as part of a transition as deep and comprehensive as the one that would simultaneously unfold in the United States. Specifically, he proposes that the US provide \$200 billion to the UN's Green Climate Fund, a program that helps poor countries leave coal, oil, and gas behind in favor of solar and other renewable energy sources. This, he says, would "reduce emissions among less industrialized nations by 36 percent by 2030." Combine that reduction with the 71 percent drop in US emissions by 2030 that Sanders projects under his Green New Deal, and the net effect, he estimates, would be equivalent to cutting US emissions by 161 percent—far more than the 100 percent that the climate emergency movement is demanding.

This really could work. There is a vast potential for rap-

Tom Athanasiou, the director of EcoEquity, is the author of the forthcoming No Easy Way: Climate Emergency, Internationalism, and the New Age of Inequality.

Rich nations must not only decarbonize their own economies but also provide financial support for emissions reductions in developing countries.

id emissions cuts around the world. But these cuts will not be made in time unless the rich nations not only decarbonize their own economies but also provide financial and technological support to developing countries that have the desire but not the means to slash their emissions while, it must be said, continuing their development. Analysts may question whether Sanders's figures pencil out—more on that below—but it remains true that a dollar invested in green energy often goes further in a developing country than it does in the United States. Given that massive emissions cuts must be made very quickly, this matters.

Some American activists do understand the game-changing nature of the Sanders plan's international focus. "By calling for US support for a 36 percent reduction in emissions by poorer countries by 2030, as well as \$200 billion for the Green Climate Fund to make this concrete, the Sanders plan recognizes that unprecedented international cooperation will be needed—with the US doing its fair share—if we're to have any hope of solving the climate crisis," said Brandon Wu, the policy and campaigns director of ActionAid USA, speaking to *The Nation*. "As a rich country, we have a huge responsibility to solve the problem we've made. But this has been missing from most discussions about the Green New Deal or about US climate action in general."

Sanders's plan has the side benefit of offering climate activists a way out of the corner they've backed themselves into with their demand of zero US emissions by 2030. In last year's IPCC special report, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, climate scientists declared that limiting the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial average required cutting global emissions by 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030 on the way to net zero by 2050. Since rich countries pollute much more than average, climate activists argued, they have to shoulder a much greater burden in this effort. In the United States, the Sunrise Movement has repeatedly called for zero emissions by 2030, and in the United Kingdom, Extinction Rebellion has called for zero emissions by 2025. Such demands evoke the scale of action necessary and are simple to communicate. Unfortunately, they are also seen as unrealistic and impossible to meet, even by many climate hawks. This may be why the Sunrise Movement sometimes seems eager to leave them behind. When *The Nation* recently asked Varshini Prakash, the



Surveying devastation: Sanders tours a Paradise, California, mobile home park destroyed by wildfire.

group's executive director, about the call for zero emissions by 2030, she demurred, saying, "We don't believe that. People make a lot of assumptions." The Sanders plan enables climate emergency activists to pivot back on the offensive and demand that other candidates match the ambition of his Green New Deal.

What makes the Sanders plan special is that he accepts the hard scientific truth that steep emissions cuts are essential but he makes such cuts feasible by refusing to limit his vision on how to achieve them. Rather, he adds another hard truth: If humanity is to stabilize the global climate system, rich nations must do their fair share by going beyond domestic action and providing support for emissions reductions in poorer countries. Sanders is the first major American political figure to face the reality and scale of this necessity. His Green New Deal would be a defining act of international solidarity. It would reanimate the Paris Agreement, which is struggling, and cue up a second breakthrough, the flow of financial aid to poor countries that is necessary to ward off climate catastrophe.



DEFINING A GIVEN NATION'S FAIR SHARE OF EMISSIONS reductions is not a trivial enterprise, and while Sanders's 161 percent number is not definitive, political and ethical judgments inform it. I know this because the figure is based on an analysis by the Civil Society Equity Coalition, which is supported by the modeling of the Climate Equity Reference Project, which I help to coordinate (though I played no role in designing Sanders's plan). His 2030 domestic reduction target of 71 percent is based on the work of many experts in many fields, including engineering, economics, and policy. Neither number is beyond criticism, but both are in the right ballpark. And when it's time to review the details, the climate nerds from the Sanders team will, I'm sure, be happy to show their work. Transparency, after all, is a part of the job here. The future in which we all actually have a future will involve plenty of debate, and there's no room for hidden assumptions.

Which brings us to the 10-year, \$16.3 trillion price tag for his Green New Deal. One way to think about this is that it amounts to \$1.63 trillion per year, roughly twice what the US spends annually on defense. But, Sanders points out, much of the Green New Deal's cost would not be paid by directly taxing ordinary Americans; it would come from "making the fossil fuel industry pay for their pollution, through litigation, fees, and taxes, and eliminating federal fossil fuel subsidies." Moreover, much of that \$16.3 trillion is more properly considered an investment rather than a deadweight cost. He promises "massive investments" in energy storage, sustainable plastics, and other green technologies, along with ambitious programs to shift US agriculture away from today's industrial model toward regenerative farming, which builds healthy soil that improves resilience to drought and other climate impacts while slowing global warming by sequestering carbon. Finally, he argues, we must weigh the cost of action against the cost of inaction, which would be very great—far, far higher than \$16.3 trillion.

Bernie Sanders's Green New Deal is a potential breakthrough in climate politics. It would reinvigorate the Paris Agreement to limit temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, a goal that the agreement's signatories (195 nations have signed on) will revisit at a UN climate summit on September 23. Indeed, the Sanders plan and the Paris Agreement go together very well, for they meld the twin imperatives of domestic and international climate justice. Combine the two and you get a Global Green New Deal, an idea that *The Nation* advanced 20 years ago and that today is needed more urgently than ever. ■

The Nation.

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Books & the Arts



IN THE AGE OF QANON

Have Americans become more conspiratorial?

by SOPHIA ROSENFELD

As it dragged on over nearly two years, the Mueller investigation laid bare the inherent difficulties in thinking about or even identifying conspiracy thinking. Representatives of both sides—those who fervently wished the official inquiry would yield evidence of Donald Trump’s criminality and those who just as fervently hoped it would amount to nothing—charged their opponents with adopting a dangerously conspiratorial mind-set. This is also where the common ground ended. Trump’s antagonists insisted there was enough evidence to suspect a plot to

collude with a foreign power during the 2016 election campaign or to obstruct justice afterward or both. The president’s allies, by contrast, fixed on the idea of a secret, albeit thwarted, scheme by the deep state or alternatively the Democrats to stage a coup and illegally reverse the mandate of the American people. The public, buffeted by these warring claims, was left to guess who (if anyone) was on the right track and who was simply spinning elaborate tales for political gain.

Mueller’s long-awaited report could have made a difference. Many people expected that it would clarify what happened and offer some answers about how to differentiate between fantastical speculations and sound explanations going forward. Alas, this proved to be more wishful thinking. Even after the redacted

version of the report was finally released this past spring, it still seemed the truth was—as is often the case with charges of conspiracy—in the eye of the beholder. (The Jeffrey Epstein jailhouse suicide is only the latest such example.)

In their new book *A Lot of People Are Saying*, veteran political scientists Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum declare themselves here to help. On the subject of the Mueller inquiry, they are unequivocal. They insist the probe was a legitimate investigation by a team of legal fact finders backed by an official knowledge-gathering institution of just the sort that helps protect democracies from the dangers of conspiracy thinking as well as conspiracies themselves. It is exclusively the cynical cries of “witch hunt” and “hoax” by the president and

Sophia Rosenfeld teaches history at the University of Pennsylvania and is the author, most recently, of Democracy and Truth: A Short History.

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM ROBINSON

his supporters, they continue, that should worry us.

But Muirhead and Rosenblum have a considerably more ambitious agenda than just setting that record straight. *A Lot of People Are Saying* is intended to be a reasonable person's primer on conspiracy thinking in and for our time. The authors not only attempt to spell out how conspiracy-mindedness differs from the healthy skepticism and commitment to exposing abuses of power that democracy requires—a task that runs its own risks, they admit, since sometimes conspiracies turn out to be real. They also lay out a quasi-historical argument. As of late, they argue, traditional or “classic” conspiracy thinking has been replaced in the United States by a new form of what they call “conspiracism,” and this conspiracism, defined by its detachment from big arguments or concrete forms of evidence, is undermining our democracy in novel and alarming ways.

No doubt Muirhead and Rosenblum are right to be frightened. (Who isn't?) Their brief if repetitive book offers us a very readable account of the identifying features and effects that distinguish older, healthier forms of conspiracy thinking from this newer, more dangerous, and for now, as they see it, largely American brand. What the reasonable reader might be left wondering, however, is twofold: How neatly can these lines ever be drawn? And how much are we misconstruing the present—not to mention the past—when we take the thinking of the Trump era to be historically *sui generis*? In the end, framing the book around such stark contrasts and ignoring evidence that might complicate this picture obscure the real and complex forces driving today's boom in conspiracy-mindedness. It largely hides the fact that nothing about conspiracies or conspiracymongering—or, for that matter, conspiracy suppression—ever turns out to be as clear-cut as anyone, on any side, might wish.

Muirhead and Rosenblum pursue their prey primarily as theorists, and they remind us at the start that conspiracy claims, always and everywhere, are designed to draw attention to the nefarious actions of ill-intentioned people. According to conspiracy framers and believers alike, “malignant forces”—which our authors describe as typically synonymous with a powerful elite, but sometimes including more marginal groups in a society, such as recent immigrants and members of minority religious

A Lot of People Are Saying

The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy

By Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum

Princeton University Press. 232 pp. \$26.95

communities—spend their time trying to harm the well-being of the rest of us. Importantly, they do so in secret, from behind the scenes. Thus, for the conspiracy-minded, exposing these forces before they can do more harm becomes an urgent task.

And who can dispute that this is a recognizable pattern of thought? Muirhead and Rosenblum follow the lead of historians in showing how such arguments about ominous beneath-the-surface doings have been used on the right and the left with varying effects, including forging social bonds among those in the know and generating novel political movements. The authors open their first chapter with the old saw that the American republic was born in 1776 out of a largely legitimate conspiracy theory about British tyranny developed by rebellious colonists to justify a war of independence. The authors sign on, in passing, to the notion that this “paranoid style,” as historian Richard Hofstadter named it in 1964, has had an important, if not dominant, role in US political culture ever since. Occasional references to conspiracy claims punctuating American history, from the muckraking of the Progressives in the late 19th century to early 21st century underground efforts to determine what *really* happened on 9/11, are intended to help make that point.

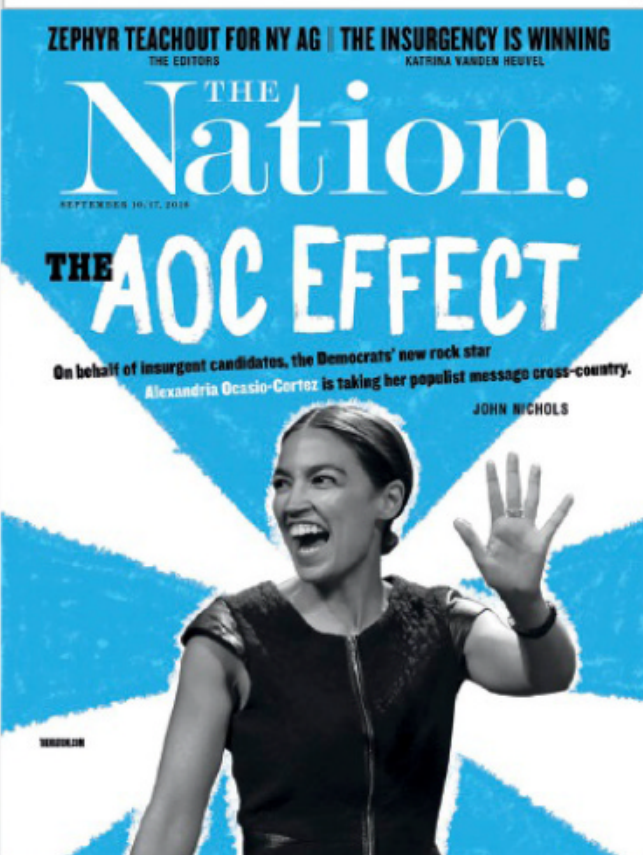
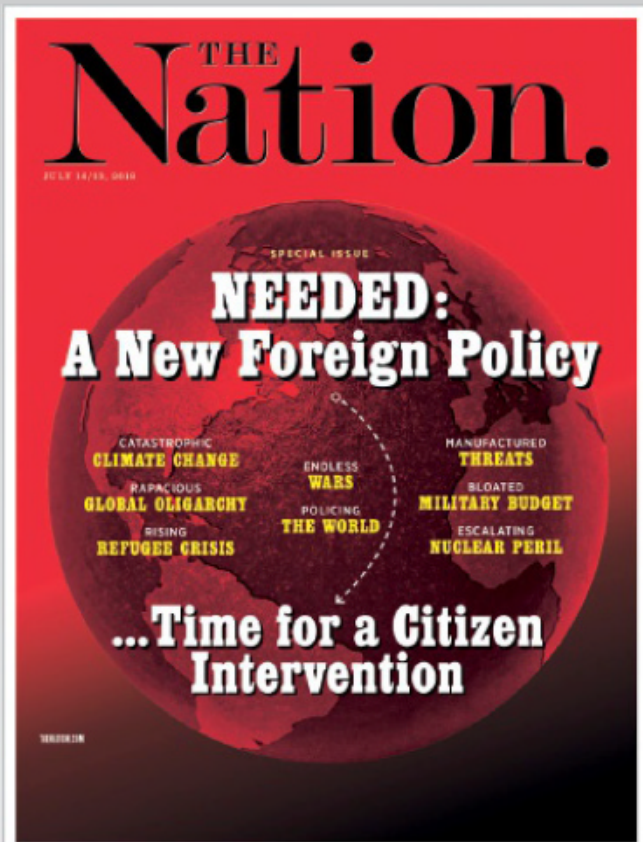
Muirhead and Rosenblum's real interest, however, is not in identifying universal patterns or recovering the American past. What they are primarily concerned with is the peculiar nature of conspiracy claims right now, in the age of the Mueller report. In their telling, the nature of these claims has over the last several years, at least in the United States, changed substantially and for the worse—a trend they blame rather generically on conservatives' hostility to government, a rising antipathy to elites and other social resentments, political tribalism in our identity politics era, changes in technology, and not least, the current occupant of the White House. Their goal is to catalog what differentiates the exceptional and troubling “new conspiracism” of the Trump moment from the conspiracy theories ginned up in the wake of 9/11, not to mention in the distant past.

One significant change, they argue, has to do with standards of proof. Whereas

in the past, conspiracy claims relied for support on grand theories and elaborate explanatory mechanisms, today they function largely without either. Similarly, while “classic” conspiracy thinking often rested on a hodgepodge of evidence, forensically chronicled as if by professional detectives, these days backing up such claims with data seems beside the point. Contemporary conspiracism, Muirhead and Rosenblum announce, depends almost entirely on simple assertions of wrongdoing: “Fake news!” or “Rigged!” or the titular “A lot of people are saying...,” endlessly repeated.

Muirhead and Rosenblum also argue that, in contrast to the past, conspiracy theories today do not exist in support of any readily identifiable ideology. Whereas the Progressives, for example, once pushed conspiracy theories about corporate monopolies and party bosses in an effort to strengthen participatory democracy, that kind of purpose has become obsolete. Charges of conspiracy are now purely negative or, in the authors' words, “politically sterile” and are intended to lead nowhere in particular except down (though it is unclear why anti-governmentalism could not be called a political agenda of sorts). But this is not to say that such charges are embraced by people who have not taken a side. On the contrary, Muirhead and Rosenblum insist these new-style conspiracy claims have a strong and distinctive “partisan penumbra.” They are, at the moment, the exclusive province of the right, where antipathy to government and the political establishment is rife and, distinctively, have no precise counterpart on the left of the political spectrum.

Then there are the effects of the current conspiracism, which Muirhead and Rosenblum consider unprecedented and unprecedentedly threatening to the life of our democracy. We make a mistake, the authors warn, to see far-fetched conspiracy theories like Pizzagate and QAnon—not to mention charges of rigged elections, deep-state actors, and presidents without US birth certificates—as marginal nuisances. Not only are they now coming at us from the top, thanks to Trump; they are also fast undermining popular confidence in democracy by breeding a deep distrust in the efficacy and even basic goals of its critical institutions. This is especially the case when it comes to those institutions in the business of knowledge production, such as universities, the free press, and for that matter, the Office of Special Counsel in the Justice Department. Many citizens now see them as sources less of factual information than



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of yet more manipulation and spin. It is also the case when it comes to those institutions that help keep alive the key democratic principle of legitimate, loyal opposition. Muirhead and Rosenblum pay special attention to political parties, the study of which is their shared academic specialty, and the acute danger of parties losing their status in the American imagination in the wake of the new conspiracymongering.

And that's not all. Muirhead and Rosenblum declare that today's conspiracism threatens to eat away at our shared sense of the world—another vital ingredient of a healthy democracy. Conspiracy propagators blithely blur good and bad information, confusing the rest of us to the point that we don't know what to believe anymore. As a result, we give up on what we hold in common, which the authors label “common sense,” and we retreat further and further into political tribalism and what they term “epistemic closure” but could be called closed-mindedness too. The content of this common sense, which Muirhead and Rosenblum argue has been “defied,” “betrayed,” and “insulted” as of late, is never fully spelled out; one wonders at times if it isn't more a term of persuasion than of substance, much like “conspiracism.” Surely, though, Muirhead and Rosenblum are right that this kind of epistemic closure, or turning away from any shared factual understanding of the world, can undermine our commitment to peaceable forms of disagreement and open the way to violence. We need only recall the denouement of the Pizzagate fable: the man who showed up at the Comet Ping Pong pizza place in Washington, DC, in 2016 looking to “self-investigate” a child-sex ring supposedly operated by Hillary Clinton and the Democrats out of the basement and fired three shots with an assault rifle in the process.

Yet how much of this is really new? *A Lot of People Are Saying* aims to convince us of the novelty of the present. The book's big argument is that we are dealing with a rather sudden departure from the kind of conspiracy thinking that has always been a part of American political life and we urgently need to identify the break in the pattern before we can start to dismantle it. However, once we get into the weeds, the authors' Classic Coke-

versus-New Coke model doesn't really hold up all that well.

Take the recent resurgence of anti-Semitism not just in the United States but around the world. Muirhead and Rosenblum mention the scapegoating of Jews, but only in passing. Yet the newish obsession with one man, George Soros, that now situates him behind every scary twist in global politics, from an assault on Christian European culture in Hungary to the arrival of caravans of the dispossessed at the southern border of the United States—an idea floated from Twitter to the House of Representatives—is really just a twist on one of the oldest conspiracy theories around. Insofar as the new Soros-obsessed propaganda reinforces the idea of wealthy, cosmopolitan Jews as puppet masters secretly plotting to dominate the world through its key institutions, it is hard to see much that is innovative here. Anti-Semitism has always served as a locus for misdirected feelings of anger and alienation and been largely immune to facts or logic. Here in 2019, that still seems to be very much the case.

But looking back at the supposed “classic” tradition of American conspiracy theories that Muirhead and Rosenblum sketch based on the now slightly dated scholarship of Bernard Bailyn, David Brion Davis, and Gordon Wood, one cannot help noticing that a lot of what passed for politics in the early American republic was hardly the high-minded conspiracism of the authors of the Declaration of Independence, either. Late 18th century American newspapers, as partisan and commercially motivated as any Fox News show, were rife with invective and naked assertion along the lines of “Rigged!” and regularly eschewed evidence-based arguments. Open any page of, say, a Philadelphia newspaper of the 1790s and what do you get? The doctor turned political leader Benjamin Rush is a murderer, determined to kill yellow-fever victims with his bloodletting methods. The so-called New England Illuminati are, with their secret papal loyalties, attempting to undermine religious and political freedom and bring back absolutism of the clerical and monarchical variety. At the turn of the century, John Adams accused the entire opposition press of being nothing but a bunch of “foreign liars.” Even Tom Paine was a purveyor as much of conspiracy theories as he was of anything like “common sense.”

Only the alleged conspirators seem to change, encompassing at different historical moments Mormons, anarchists, Catholics, Wall Street tycoons, and yes, government agents and political figures.

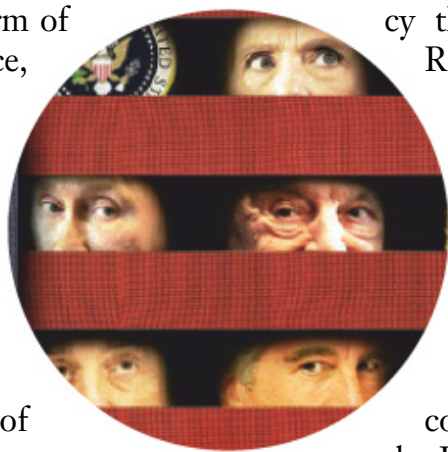
As for the claim that today's conspiracism doesn't stand for anything beyond negativity, isn't MAGA itself a racial and class fantasy about a lost American golden age that can be restored only by draining an ill-defined “swamp”? That is more than just anti-government nihilism. And even if no one is organizing a nationwide citizen army under its banner, isn't all the talk about potential violence just that—a call to action, when needed, in defense of this vision of the United States?

Muirhead and Rosenblum offer us some keen insights into the nature of conspiracy claims today, but their lines of demarcation—including the ones between conspiracy thinking and acceptable skepticism and between conspiracy thinking and common sense, not to mention between the “classic” and “new” varieties—seem not nearly as self-evident in practice as they are in theory. Nor do they seem as resolutely American, given the role that conspiracism is playing in mainstream politics right now all over the globe, from the United Kingdom to India to Brazil.

Perhaps what's really different at the moment, then, is not so much the form that conspiracy theories take as simply the extent of their reach in the age of the Internet and Silicon Valley—and consequently how fully they have managed to infiltrate our entertainment and information culture, blurring where politics begins and ends.

We learn something about how this happens in *A Lot of People Are Saying*. Using the example of QAnon, a hoax that started with a single anonymous online poster called Q, Muirhead and Rosenblum helpfully demonstrate how conspiracy theories travel across the Web and beyond. They describe this particularly nutty story migrating and morphing from 4chan and 8chan message boards, where the conspiracy-minded collect and interpret clues as a leisure-time activity (which seems to work against the idea that all is now done with innuendo and assertion), to viral YouTube videos to celebrity endorsements and national press coverage, sweeping up new believers and, one suspects, those just looking to be entertained as well.

Yet Muirhead and Rosenblum pay almost no attention to the often invisible structural



support systems that enable such preposterous tales to go viral. There is little in *A Lot of People Are Saying* about the technologies that make the Internet, especially its message boards and social media platforms, such a fertile home for conspiracy theories in the first place. We learn almost nothing, for example, about how many of their basic design features—authorial anonymity, the algorithms that control what audiences see and when, and a seeming ability to transcend time and space—aid in the transmission and influence of so-called conspiracism, as opposed to verifiable truths, today.

Muirhead and Rosenblum say even less about the economics of conspiracy theory, in which false narratives can be big business, whether for individual YouTube stars peddling hoaxes or the major Silicon Valley companies themselves, or about the national and international legal frameworks that make possible this state of affairs. The authors might well counter that their interest is more definitional, that they are in the business of delineating types of conspiracism, not exploring its causes. But the substance of today's claims may be the least innovative part of the phenomenon. New technologies, along with the financial systems and the laws that sustain them, are what really allow recurrent, even atavistic rumors and conspiracy theories, like those about child abductors or corrupt political operatives, to spread today with a speed, scale, and impact that would have been impossible in an earlier era.

And in the end, *A Lot of People Are Saying* offers scant empirical research of any kind to support its core arguments. Yes, Muirhead and Rosenblum bring up a few real-world cases of conspiracy thinking widely reported in the mainstream press and provide the occasional historical example or footnoted quote. Nevertheless, they come close at times to relying on the kinds of assertions, unencumbered by evidence, that they reject in theory. Or to put it another way, readers would likely have benefited from a little more traditional conspiracy-minded thinking, in the sense of deep detective work and connecting the dots, on the part of the authors.

Muirhead and Rosenblum differentiate, for example, between the phony climate-science information pushed by corporations like Exxon and their Republican defenders, on the one hand, and the full-on, Internet-fueled denials of climate science as a hoax, on the other. The latter, they say, are more insidious and harder to refute. But what they don't tell us is that the sources for

these two strategies turn out in some cases to be financially and institutionally linked, as enterprising journalists have started to show. The same with the Soros memes all over the globe that seem to come from the bottom up but can be traced back to DC political consultancies and Rupert Murdoch's Fox News. Such findings make it much more difficult to offer answers as to who is engaging in what kinds of conspiracism and toward what ends. The authors remind us that we don't want to take much at face value, especially now. We need to know what is happening behind the curtain, because the world is, in fact, rigged by the powerful in all sorts of ways.

This disinclination to stray much below the surface carries over when, finally, we get to solutions. The authors' arguments for how to combat the new conspiracism, which take up the last third of the book, are fine as far as they go. They are liberal staples. Speak truth in the face of conspiracymongering even if it will frequently backfire, as the authors admit it will. Shore up democratic institutions, including political parties, so they can once again organize our political lives. Encourage political leaders, even when there is little professional incentive for them to do so, to step at least temporarily outside the "partisan penumbra" to dispute obvious falsehoods and far-fetched tales.

By themselves, though, these suggestions amount to pretty weak tea. Muirhead and Rosenblum say nothing about serious institutional reforms or economic approaches or regulatory measures that might be useful to their goal of sending conspiracy theories back to their "natural habitat at the political fringe." They barely venture into the treacherous waters of free-speech debates, including questions like whether media companies that end up pushing dangerous conspiracy theories should be held legally liable when some people endanger others using those companies' platforms.

The authors of *A Lot of People Are Saying* seem most comfortable with calls for self-regulation, chiding Facebook, for example, for being "slow to recognize its civic responsibility" rather than chastising the US government for not making this behemoth company do so. And this might be because, in the end, it is hard for any of us—scholars, citizens, even the government—to ever be entirely sure about what is conspiracy-mindedness and what is just an effort to be inquisitive in the democratic spirit after all. ■

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—Hosted by **Jon Wiener**



ACADEMIC SCORERS

Sally Rooney's modern love story

by HANNAH GOLD

Sally Rooney's *Normal People*, which spans four years and migrates from a Catholic high school in Carricklea, Ireland, to Trinity College Dublin, opens with the announcement of test results. It is a book that sets itself up as a campus novel, but almost as soon as *Normal People* begins, it veers from far from the excess of language and avenging disillusionment that has come to typify the genre. In recent works (Tony Tulathimutte's *Private Citizens*, Elif Batuman's *The Idiot*, Lucy Ives's *Loudermilk*), laminated library editions, chemically altered states, and grassy quadrangles may persist, but not in so

few words. These are narratives that feed off competition and classification, heady academic flexing and fidgeting. If these books mock the established order, it's in the service of building a stronger, sexier, more elaborate one. Their characters are melodramatic, not types exactly (because they are well written) but still familiar enough. They often satirize themselves, and they monologue constantly.

Except for the novel's e-mail exchanges and Twitter jokes, *Normal People* moves in a very different direction. Rooney's second novel—following her much-praised debut, *Conversations With Friends*—is quite unburdened, almost light, the obverse of the embellished brooding so characteristic of campus novels. When it begins, in the

winter of 2011, the atmosphere is thin, and all the heat and heartache of life are primed to claim the scene.

Connell Waldron and Marianne Sheridan, the best academic scorers in their class, are in the final stretch of their high school years but on opposite social footing. Connell is handsome, popular, the center forward on the football team, sensitive but feeling the pressure not to show himself as such in school. Between the accolades and the alienating hookups, he's experiencing the beginnings of class consciousness. Connell is the only child of a doting, delightful single mother, Lorraine, who works part-time cleaning the home of Marianne's family. Connell sometimes picks

Hannah Gold blogs for New York magazine from her apartment.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOE CIARDIELLO

his mother up or drops her off from her job at the Sheridan house, and it's through these circumstances of labor and birth that he and Marianne find themselves discussing their exam results in the refuge of domestic privacy. Their conversation is disarming and stimulating to them both, and Connell starts coming by more often. He recommends that Marianne read *The Communist Manifesto* and offers to write down the name of the book for her. She replies with faint mockery, according to his needs.

There is little other opportunity for such intimacies: At school, Marianne is the subject of gossip for her defiant friendlessness. Her classmates fear and ridicule her, while she privately scoffs at the “ladder” of scholastic ascension upon which “everyone has to pretend not to notice that their social lives are arranged hierarchically.” But there's no relief from the ladder to be found at home, either, where Marianne's mother and older brother openly resent her for reasons similar to her peers'—the implication being that she's too smart, spirited, and uncompromising to fit in with those who chiefly desire to practice their authority upon her.

Power is so transparent in high school, and everyone so young and dependent, that any refusal to accept the established hierarchy leads to social death. Meanwhile, Marianne's encounters with Connell at her house quickly lead to sex and friendship, both of which, at his cowardly request, remain secret, at least for a while. The two tell each other that they've fallen in love.

Normal People's plot structure and themes, can, at times, be almost archetypal. A fourth of the way through the novel, after they graduate from high school, Marianne and Connell arrive at Trinity, and the power disparity between them changes drastically: For a time, it's Marianne who gets noticed and thrives. In college, she finds that the intellectual signaling that's legible to the upper class helps her navigate the campus's social dynamics. It also is a form of capital. As the pages turn easily, a novel about love emerges that, unlike most stories of jocks and nerds or professors and their jobs, is not infatuated with romantic destiny. But it is very serious about what it would mean to be “normal.”

This search for normalness finds its expression in Marianne's and Connell's interest in how one's personality is constituted by others. It's a question that will permeate *Normal People* and that they arrive at only

Normal People

A Novel

By Sally Rooney

Hogarth. 288 pp. \$26

once they've come together. Connell, from the top rungs of the ladder: “If anything, his personality seemed like something external to himself, managed by the opinions of others, rather than anything he individually did or produced.” Marianne, from the vantage point of social exclusion: “She usually felt confined inside one single personality, which was always the same regardless of what she did or said.... If she was different with Connell, the difference was not happening inside herself, in her personhood, but in between them, in the dynamic.”

The story unfolds as a test of the limits between two lovers who cannot stay apart. Over the course of the novel, their relationship is intermittently sexual, and sometimes they lose themselves in talk. They talk about whether they've changed; they question subtext, authority, and authenticity (“are they agreeing not to find each other attractive anymore?”); they discuss the injustices of capitalism. Sometimes their respective contributions to the dialogue seem interchangeable, sometimes not. The talking, fucking, e-mailing, recollecting, and observing perishes the boundaries between the two, effecting changes in both. For instance, the conversations that follow sex are described in an early college scene as:

gratifying for Connell, often taking unexpected turns and prompting him to express ideas he had never consciously formulated before.... She tosses herself gracefully into the air, and each time, without knowing how he's going to do it, he catches her. Knowing that they'll probably have sex again before they sleep probably makes the talking more pleasurable, and he suspects that the intimacy of their discussions, often moving back and forth from the conceptual to the personal, also makes the sex feel better.

This passage is indicative of Rooney's prose style, which is elegant and clipped. She writes of psychological pressures with gentle precision and leaves her sentences largely unadorned. A combination of simple plotting from above plus subversive attachment from below (both in terms of the protagonists' breaking of social rank and the private intensities of their relationship) holds the reader close. I especially love

Rooney's conjurings of inclement weather. (“Outside her breath rises in a fine mist and the snow keeps falling, like a ceaseless repetition of the same infinitesimally small mistake.”) *Normal People* is full of gray matter shaded with rain, snow, air, and the momentary despair of gelid youth.

Several critics have rightly pointed out that *Normal People* bears some resemblance to the great 19th century romantic novel of manners, especially those of Jane Austen, whom Rooney has cited as an influence. “Think *Pride and Prejudice* with hangovers and finals thrown in,” raves *The Guardian*, and British *Vogue* calls it “a classic coming-of-age love story; a highly relatable, highly literary ‘will they won't they’ tale.” A 2018 profile of Rooney, also in *The Guardian*, opines, “If Jane Austen could construct worlds on ‘two inches of ivory’ Rooney has built them on a wafer of silicon.” The observation is correct, but Rooney fills the form with her own ideas. As with any great novel of manners, *Normal People's* politics—which emphasizes relationships as the site of interpersonal transformation rather than the individual's capacity to change society or themselves by their own will—manifests itself in the building of characters, not the rhetorical proving wrought through individual conversations. This social jockeying tells us about political desire, but not literally, and it isn't as compelling or direct as the moments in which the characters are speaking in a more abstract and self-consciously personal vein.

The novel always returns to how normal the characters feel and what this feeling, in its idealized and imperfectly realized form, could be. In Rooney's fiction, though, normality is a way of saying that something very personal is actually being experienced among us (or among her characters). Our capacity to grasp and act on these intuitions depends on one another. “I don't know why I can't be like normal people,” Marianne tells Connell in a moment of personal anguish. “I don't know why I can't make people love me. I think there was something wrong with me when I was born.” Here “normal” is associated with her desire to be cared for and an impossible plea not to be existentially alone or to imagine herself as such. That so many of us feel this way is the least trivial thing about this feeling. But in her fiction, as in her own life, Rooney has been coy about what is to be done with it.

Last year, three months after Irish voters repealed—by an overwhelming margin—the national abortion ban that had been in place since the early 1980s, Rooney, then

27, was asked to comment on the historic measure. Her reaction was buoyant. “I felt incredibly happy to feel normal.... It was like, ‘Oh, this is amazing. I feel so at home, walking down the street, seeing people who probably agree with my opinion,’” she told *The New York Times*.

Rooney’s political commitments likely began at an early age: She was born in Castlebar and was raised by a pair of Marxists. While she was growing up, her mom worked as a math and science teacher and her dad as a technician for the state-owned telecom company. Like the protagonists of *Normal People*, she attended Trinity College Dublin, and in her second year she earned a scholarship that allowed her to pursue a master’s degree in American studies.

Rooney’s novels are conditioned by thinking about conformity and care in academic settings, material that hews closely to her experience at Trinity. Upon her induction into the college’s debating society, she later recalled, she was exposed to a “kind of social landscape [that] was different from anything [she’d] encountered before.” Its rules and principles were inseparable from the process of deliberating on and handing

out prizes for performing excellence, she noted, and its “structure was very clear. Popularity was not a mysterious arrangement of personal loyalties within a social code I didn’t understand: it was essentially just the same thing as success. Successful people were popular.”

The ancillary characters in *Normal People* tend to fall into the categories of oppressors and rebels. Marianne’s fakest college girlfriend, Peggy, bullies her without ever realizing it and in this way resembles Marianne’s distant mother, as well as Rachel, a mean girl in high school who crushes on Connell. They are distinct but contain notes of one another, family resemblances that express themselves as relations of power—the kind that manufacture lots of ex-boyfriends.

After her romance with Connell, Marianne becomes involved with a series of unhappy men, each fascistic in his own way. They act as a steadily tightening belt upon her sensorium, narrowing pleasure and self-esteem at once. Her first college boyfriend, Gareth, is a charismatic lunkhead from the debate team. Connell jokes that he has the politics

of a “white moderate.” Then there’s Jamie, “somehow both boring and hostile at the same time.” The two experiment with inflicting pain during sex, all of it directed at Marianne. Later, she studies in Sweden and finds herself a graduated asshole, Lukas. He’s a photographer, and “sometimes when Marianne mentions a film she has recently watched, he waves his hands and says: it fails for me.” The control he exercises over her psyche and body is even more complete. His last desperate bid at getting Marianne to stay with him is to tell her in his permanently self-serious manner, “I think you are a very gifted writer.”

It’s an empty gesture, rendered even more so because the novel’s machinations have anointed Connell as the blossoming writer, a passion Marianne sees early on and wheedles out of him. So Connell and Marianne’s relationship is defined by power too, but theirs can give as well as take. Not only are they receptive and open to each other, but they are attentive; they remember. This interdependency doesn’t restore balance or prevent abuses from occurring, but it operates as an accountability model, or mantra, stitched throughout so many scenes. “It

The Grimké Sisters at Work on Theodore Dwight Weld’s *American Slavery as It Is* (1838)

Somebody had to be the first
to amass the proof from slaveholders’ mouths:
twenty thousand newspapers from the South,
the unthinking testimony parsed,
scissored carefully into strips. Lips pursed,
the sisters cut out words as if words were cloth
for dresses, their fingers dark with the newsprint’s truth,
though it was not half the truth, or the worst.
“I burnt her with a hot iron.” “Has one ear slit.”
“Ran away—has two or three scars made by a knife.”
“Has no toes on his left foot.” “Has buckshot in his calf.”
The scissors lipping, *I have seen it. I have seen it.*
Their path from Charleston the path the scissors traversed—
Let it be accursed. Let it be accursed.

MELISSA RANGE

was in Connell's power to make her happy," Rooney writes. "It was something he could just give to her, like money or sex. With other people she seemed so independent and remote, but with Connell she was different, a different person." And later, of Marianne: "She feels a certain power over him, a dangerous power."

If the novel were a bit less convinced of its own dialectical materialism, I'd read these passages as oblique nods to conversations that Rooney had with herself during the writing process. But she omits herself from the equations that her characters toil to resolve.

What's rare about *Normal People* is that it has something to say about literary ambition: that it might quietly instruct us in how to care for others. Even rarer is that it announces this earnestly. Take a scene in which Connell, lonely upon his arrival at college, seeks solace in the library. Rooney notes his strong reaction to Austen's *Emma*, which leads to the observation that "the feeling provoked in Connell when Mr. Knightley kisses Emma's hand is not completely asexual, though its relation to sexuality is indirect. It suggests to Connell that the

same imagination he uses as a reader is necessary to understand real people also, and to be intimate with them." Obviously, reading doesn't necessarily make people nicer or generally more empathetic; the act of reading takes us away from others, and many read obsessively only to seek out themselves in the text until the novel becomes another ladder, a means of distinguishing oneself. By contrast, the idealized reading experience Rooney casts for her young writer is a magnetic mingling of literary minds that sharpens an intelligence capable not merely of imagining others but of imagining how to be close to them, even how to live with the responsibility of their happiness and dreams. How a writer pulls off such a feat is a mysterious arrangement between herself and each reader. Some novels are like suitors trying to dance with every person at a ball, while others condense the night to a single peak of rhythm.

Connell's ecstatic literary encounter fits like a guileless shadow upon Vivian Gornick's 1997 essay "The End of the Novel of Love," in which she observes, "In great novels we always feel that the writer, at the time of the writing, knows as much as any-

one around can know, and is struggling to make sense of what is perceived somewhere in the nerve endings if not yet in clarified consciousness.... To get to those nerve endings a metaphor must be exact, not approximate." Gornick asserts that self-definition and discovery through love as metaphor used to reach such nerve endings 100 or even 50 years ago but no longer; a new form is required. For the power vested in the novel of love is "wholly dependent on the static quality of the world against which its characters are struggling." Marriage, family, individuating romantic love—these don't have the honey and stick they once did, but people still crave stories.

Rooney's novel offers us a document from this changed world. But it still is a love story. It's just that her version of it assists the reader in feeling the relief of being normal. Not in the sense of accepting conformity but in arousing a desire that transgresses against self-interest, is centered on others. It's not a new idea, but in reading *Normal People* you find yourself recognizing, even wanting, a love that if fulfilled would change the world for each and every one of us. What could be more normal than that? ■

The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society Starts Its Third Annual Petition Drive for the Abolition of the Interstate Slave Trade and Slavery in Washington, DC, and the Territories (1836)

Letters and pamphlets are good. Petitions, better:

Ye who have pens, prepare to use them now.

We're going to need all of you to go house to house to collect signatures.

We've been called *impertinent intermeddlers*, *incarnate devils*—and that is how we know

our petitions are at work. No names are too few.

A name is a truth: *sometimes like a hammer*, *sometimes like a fire*. A name is a voice.

We must do with our might what our hands find for our sisters' deliverance. We are bound

with them; remember their bonds. It's not a choice.

Now, who is ready to knock on her first door?

Who is ready to be Christ's agitator, Christ's martyr?

MELISSA RANGE



THE VOICE OF CASABLANCA

The making of Moroccan funk

by **MARCUS J. MOORE**

Abdelakabir Faradjallah was destined to become an artist. Born in Casablanca's Benjdia neighborhood in 1942, he was still a child when a battle was fought in the city between Vichy French forces and Anglo-American troops; at one point, a rocket exploded near his home. He remembers massive food shortages, including once when his mother had to hide the sweets she'd purchased for his younger brother, fearing that some desperate person would steal them. Amid this strife, he began singing as a child, first with his mother and sisters during weddings. His first real gigs came

Marcus J. Moore is a New York-based music journalist and author whose forthcoming biography of Kendrick Lamar will be released by Atria Books.

as a youth in the 1950s, when he was booked as a singer at parties. Faradjallah enrolled in the Casablanca School of Fine Arts in 1958, where he exhibited all the traits of a budding polymath, studying architecture and sculpture, ceramics and silk-screen printing. Four years later, he joined the city's music conservatory, then cofounded the Association of Moroccan Filmmakers—intended to cultivate the country's next generation of movie directors—with friends from the fine arts school.

By 1967, he had quietly started writing his own songs. The first was "L'Gnawi," a vehicle for introducing people to the Gnawa music he grew up around. It's one of the biggest musical genres in Morocco, pairing ritual poetry with music created on

three-stringed lutes, three-stringed basses, large iron castanets, and massive drums. A year later, he put together a band, Attarazat Addahabia, to bring the music of his childhood to the masses. The 14-member group spent the next five years playing small shows here and there, hoping to make an impact. In the end, it managed to do just that, eventually playing on TV shows and in football stadiums.

Over its course, from the late '60s to the 1990s, Attarazat Addahabia was made up of three generations from one Casablancon family, with Faradjallah at the helm. In 1972 the group convened in the studio of the Boussiphone record label to record an 11-track album titled *Al Hadaoui*, though Boussiphone, for whatever reason, decided not to release it. A

year later, the band rerecorded the album at RTM studios in Casablanca and released it independently. The second iteration of *Al Hadaoui* was recorded under duress, with fewer instruments and fewer players. As a result, the album that people heard was more scaled back than originally intended. But now Habibi Funk Records, a Berlin-based label that reissues Arabic funk and jazz from the 1970s and '80s, has obtained and released the original Boussiphone version. As Habibi Funk says in the album's liner notes, "We knew nothing about the band. We just had the reel with the music but very little information. What we knew was that the music was incredible and very unique."

Over the past two years alone, Habibi Funk has issued a masterly compilation of Arabic psych-funk and two forgotten albums by the Sudanese funk maestro Kamal Keila and the jazz group the Scorpions and Saif Abu Bakr. With its dedication to finding obscure recordings from the Middle East and North Africa, Habibi Funk has become one of the foremost excavators of a buried musical culture. Without a label like this, a wider audience would never have heard *Al Hadaoui* in its full majesty or the voice of Abdelakabir Faradjallah.

A *l Hadaoui* is a captivating record that pairs the grit of '70s American funk with the festive sound of Gnawa. That culture is fully represented on *Al Hadaoui*, down to the call and response between Faradjallah and the background singers, who prod him throughout the album. The result is a dense, shape-shifting blend of US pop traditions and traditional Moroccan music, drawing a through line to the tightly coiled funk of James Brown. Faradjallah unpacks weighty themes over upbeat grooves designed to make listeners dance. So while he sings of spiritual guidance, romance, and what we now call cultural appropriation, his words are meant to sound good over the melodies compiled by him and the band. His songs "are all about poetry and stylistic exercise, translation in English is somehow impoverishing," says Sabrina Kamili, a translator who worked on the record with Habibi Funk, in an e-mail.

This kind of forward-looking experimentation is present on the title track, in which Faradjallah tells the story of a wandering hippie who has just returned to Morocco. Here, he uses the figure of the hippie to make a critical point about cultural appropriation that wouldn't be

out of place in contemporary conversations about the politics of cross-cultural exchange. "In the eyes of Faradjallah," Kamili writes, "young Moroccan people appropriate the Western codes of the hippie countercultural movement without understanding its cultural foundations. He is not against the movement but [argues] that there should be a movement with an Arabic cultural anchor."

But the album isn't all serious; on "Kaddaba," Faradjallah uses breezy percussion to leaven the story of his wife leaving him, walking listeners through it with a wink and a shrug. "We swore an oath to live our lives together," he sings in Arabic. "Everything we had imagined has evaporated." *Al Hadaoui* presents a wide-ranging view of Gnawa culture and the people who live it, from the Moroccan wanderer to, on the song "Taali," the women Faradjallah loved and lost along the way. "Albaki," my favorite track on the album, begins with a desolate blues intro that leads into a rapid mix of stacked percussion and drifting guitar chords. "Albaki" is the most hypnotic song on the album; look beneath the layers and you'll find another story of romantic pain, yet this time, the protagonist wants to shield his grief from his peers.

In its entirety, *Al Hadaoui* offers a multifaceted glimpse into a musical subgenre that's gone largely unnoticed in the United States. When American listeners think of African music, they almost invariably think of Afrobeat, the percussive hybrid of funk and soul godfathered by Fela Kuti in Nigeria. They might also think of South Africa and its synthesized blend of disco, which, in the mid-'70s, became the soundtrack for young people rebelling against the tyranny of apartheid. The music of North Africa has never received the same attention, and *Al Hadaoui* is a great place to start. Though Faradjallah was clearly influenced by American music, he kept his own culture at the fore. The result is a riveting funk-rock hybrid, steeped in Gnawa, that fans of Santana and Can (among others) will appreciate for its polyrhythmic melodies and cultural chants.

In 1973, Faradjallah and Attarazat Addahabia got their first big break when they played the Municipal Theatre of Casablanca. From there, they started performing in swanky hotels and on local television and gained a sizable following throughout Morocco. They even built their own venue to perform in—a monumental feat for any band, let alone one that

never achieved the international success of, say, the Rolling Stones. Bands are beholden to promoters and their venues; to have your own theater is a flex. Attarazat Addahabia released another album in 1982 and then went back on the road, where the group became known for marathon shows that sometimes lasted 12 hours. In the '80s, the band stopped performing while the drummer, Zaki, recovered from a serious illness. Four years later, he and the rest of the group returned to the stage and picked up where they had left off.

Yet by the mid-1990s, Faradjallah was losing steam and decided to stop playing music altogether. It was time for a new generation to take up the band's legacy and for him to lead a quiet, more regular life. Ever the artist, he still paints—in 2018 he did calligraphy work for a Habibi Funk artists' showcase in Dubai—and he runs a TV repair shop in the Belvédère-Aïn Sebaâ district of Casablanca.

For a period in the 1970s and '80s, Faradjallah and his band were a beacon of light for other Moroccan groups to follow. *Al Hadaoui* captures the moment when that light shone brightest; 47 years later, it remains a luminous example of Moroccan funk. ■



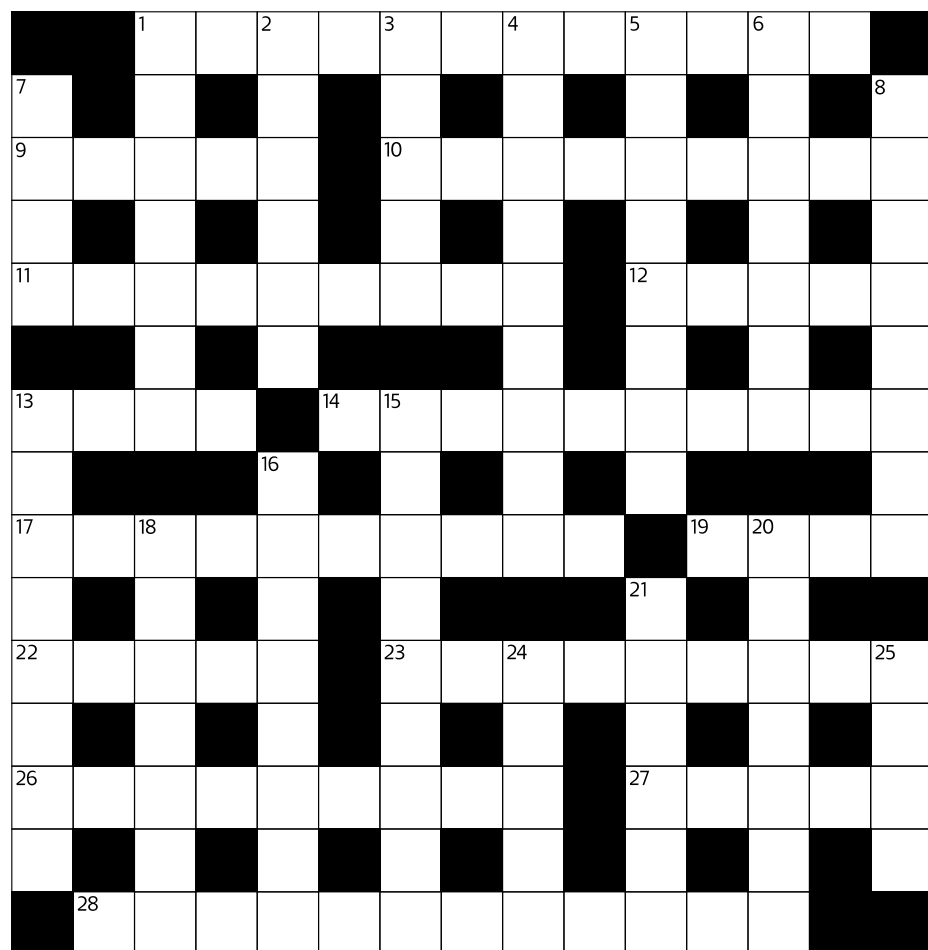
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Puzzle No. 3509

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

- 1 Parts of article used and reused in parallel (6,6)
 9 Senior Department of Justice figure in the Obama administration loses face (5)
 10 Sound happy about bank customer (9)
 11 That Italian in pretentious gym is a classic example (9)
 12 In the company of a little bearded man, largely in withdrawal (5)
 13 Yes, a stew is like pie (4)
 14 Not fully grown, Bob interrupts upward movement (10)
 17 Where a shoemaker might vacation if all else fails? (4,6)
 19 Lying back, sleeps for a stretch (4)
 22 Beg to start a trick after pass (5)
 23 Absence of content as *Times* pens medley (9)
 26 Goal: Put one in operation after camping? (9)

- 27 Texas city's 15th-best option? (5)
 28 For nothing, like old batteries? (4,2,6)

DOWN

- 1 Seizes muscle vessels (7)
 2 When you should be home with the dog: three or four (6)
 3 Insinuate, as a demon might? (5)
 4 Someone with a lot of heart, perhaps: doctor abandoning hospital (3,6)
 5 Practice concerning coffin carrier (8)
 6 50 is an unspecified number (it is flexible) (7)
 7 For the most part, refrigerated a soft drink (4)
 8 Illuminate Jerry's partner outside? Correct (8)
 13 Relative supports the Spanish insolence... (8)
 15 Lack of 16 edibles, if scrambled (9)
 16 Faith raised 7 to Paradise and the Christian Era (8)
 18 Lieutenant protected in total sanctuary (7)
 20 Get ready to bring up time with criminal (7)
 21 Baby's need avenged in return (6)
 24 Painfully squeeze rear of instep (part of a foot) (5)
 25 Arrest marijuana smoker at first setback (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3508

ACROSS 1 R{EGRET} + TABLE
 7 & 28 CA(PG + U)N 9 SO(L)AR
 10 FRA (rev.) + {TERN}AL[I]
 11 ETHAN{HAWK}E 12 "Juneau"
 13 LA + GO ON 15 BO(T){SWAN}A
 18 H{IBIS}CUS (rev.) 19 2 defs.
 21 TOT + O 22 CONT{RAVEN}E (anag.)
 26 [c]{OVE}{RHEA}TS 27 DEA + LT
 29 anag.

DOWN 1 RO (rev.) + SWELL 2 initial letters
 3 ERRO[I] + NEOUS (anag.) 4 hidden
 5 B + LACK + BOX 6 "T'd" 7 C + ONJU
 (anag.) + GATE 8 PA + LOOK + A
 14 GO(BE)TWEEN (*we get on anag.*)
 16 S{[hoo]KED}ADDLE 17 pun
 18 anag. 20 TR(EET)OP (rev.)
 23 T(VS)ET 24 hidden 25 C(HE)F





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Sixteen states, including South Dakota, now encourage or require the posting of the motto “In God We Trust” in all public schools. A captive audience of children are being targeted by the Christian Nationalist Project Blitz — an assault to flood state legislatures with theocratic proposals. “In God We Trust,” belatedly adopted by Congress at the height of the Cold War, falsely equates patriotism with piety. It turns the 24 percent of U.S. citizens who don’t “trust” in a god into outsiders in our own country. This godly motto divides, while the original motto, *E Pluribus Unum* [out of many, come one] *unites*.

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