

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

GARY KLINE

In the pages of this issue of the *Journal of Global South Studies*, readers will find engaging essays on South–South relations and case studies drawn from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. As usual, I am heavily indebted to the very competent and professional associate editors and the editorial assistant I work with. Without them, this journal simply would not be. I receive a steady stream of papers submitted by scholars from around the world. It goes without saying that they provide the research and hard work that culminates in the fine articles we publish. So I also wish to thank them for their cooperation through multiple drafts until we are all satisfied with the end products.

Likewise, I want to thank our publisher, the University of Florida Press, for their excellent production work. Particularly, I wish to commend journals manager Lauren Phillips, who is not only a tremendous help but also a delight to work with. We are relieved and glad to note that she and her family “weathered” Hurricane Irma in good condition.

Further, I would be remiss if I were to fail to gratefully acknowledge the financial backing the journal receives from the institution from which we emerged, Georgia Southwestern State University. We are very indebted to them and to the GSW Foundation for their material and spiritual support over many years.

I have been a teacher and academic for more years than I care to admit, but I do not recall living in such “interesting times” as we are today. The number of truly menacing issues we face globally is staggering to the point of being almost overwhelming. As climate change inflicts ever more severe weather events on people, simultaneously eroding coastal areas and threatening human settlements, crops, biodiversity, health, and livelihoods globally, the US continues to dither. However, the strong consensus of scientists who have studied the problem is that urgent actions are necessary.

A growing number of countries in the Global South have recognized the critical need to transition to cleaner, renewable sources of energy and have begun the process. China, India, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Morocco, Tunisia, Costa Rica, and other countries have initiated projects to develop solar, wind, and geothermal sources of power to meet their needs, while the US is actually trying to resuscitate the nineteenth-century solution—coal. Clearly, the US could learn important lessons from studying countries in the Global South.

In the meantime, more than 65 million people have become refugees due to violent conflicts, genocidal policies, famine, poverty, and natural disasters. This flood of desperate humanity has sparked acts of both remarkable magnanimity and fearful retrenchment. The Trump administration, which represents the world's richest and most powerful country, has recently lowered the quota for refugees to a mere 45,000 for the year, a miniscule fraction of those in dire need. Moreover, the administration has withdrawn from the UN Migrant and Refugee Pact. A country settled and built by immigrants is now surprisingly conflicted or even panicked about admitting them, and many people appear to want to literally wall off the country from the outside world—another woefully ineffectual and atavistic solution (think of China's Great Wall).

Wars and conflicts rage globally. Talk of new wars is further fueled by angry speeches in the United Nations, a body that was specifically created to bring together countries to resolve disputes peacefully. To make matters worse, defense budgets grow while budgets for diplomatic efforts, for education, and for other social purposes are slashed. The world is bristling with weaponry from the lucrative trade in armaments. Ironically, this brisk market in weapons is routinely cited as the reason we must spend ever more on the military: because we live in a dangerous world.

All of these problems, I would argue, are exacerbated (if not directly caused by) the obscene growth of inequality between and within countries, which has dramatically concentrated wealth and power worldwide. A mere handful of families now control most of the privately held wealth on Earth. In 2010, it took only 388 of the world's top billionaires to equal the wealth of the bottom half of humanity, about 3.5 billion people. Today, amazingly, a mere eight individuals possess as much wealth as the poorest 3.7 billion people.

Meanwhile, the average person must struggle daily for the basics of life: sufficient nutrition, potable water, decent shelter, physical security, opportunities to work and earn a living wage, health care, education, and basic human rights.

That is, the costs and benefits of globalization over the past few decades have been wildly maldistributed, leaving many millions of people behind. These factors are clearly taking a toll on societies and on the physical, social, and emotional-psychological well-being of many millions of people. They are just as obviously fostering global instability and threatening the future of our children and of generations to come. The poor and those of modest means, who typically lack significant power to effect positive changes in their societies, are invariably the first jeopardized and the most stressed.

This fraught global climate is noticeably eventuating in an alarming proliferation of groups that manifest some combination of scapegoating, xenophobia, racism, sexism, nationalism, religious bigotry, and assorted other forms of political extremism and intolerance.

One expression of this social pathology is, I would maintain, the accession of a highly unconventional president in the United States. Early on, President Trump threatened both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the North American Free Trade Agreement. He has pulled the US out of the Paris Climate Accord, UNESCO, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the UN Global Migrant and Refugee Pact, thus signaling a withdrawal of the US from collaborative efforts to address entrenched and menacing global problems.

Yet no coherent policy alternatives have emerged from the Trump administration to fill the vacuum. Actions with respect to flash points such as Syria, Israel, Palestine, and North Korea appear to be untethered from any overarching strategies. Instead, we find the US pursuing merely inward-looking or narrowly self-interested “impulses”—reflecting the impulsive character of the occupant in the White House—that break sharply with the post-World War II policies of previous presidents. How any US retreat from its global role might affect countries of the Global South is a serious question.

In ways that the president may not understand, the patterns and relations between the US and other countries and consequently between countries in different regions of the world are being redrawn and redefined. China and Russia, for example, might reasonably believe this time of flux to be an opportunity for them to reposition themselves more strategically on the world stage. China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative may be the single most noteworthy expression of this trend.

Given the daunting problems we face and the range of forces in transition, it is challenging to try to predict the outcomes over either the short or the long

term. Globalization, much studied and discussed in recent years, is constantly changing. Is it changing fundamentally now? The question might be stated as follows: Is globalization “shapeshifting” in the current context?

Here I wish to encourage our readers and scholars everywhere to address the sorts of issues we are contending with today and to consider how these challenges are transforming globalization, our societies, and ourselves. In the near future, I would like to see us publish an issue focused on these questions. As always, I will need help from many contributors to this journal, those of you who can offer us solid research, profound reflections and critical thought, and good, innovative ideas. Our journal aspires to be a forum for exactly such works.