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Citation: Sundaram, S. & Parmar, I. (2026). Towards Critical Multiplexity in International Relations. *International Affairs*, 102(2), pp. 435-454. doi: 10.1093/ia/iiaf276

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Dear editors and reviewers,

Thank you for the constructive and positive feedback and the opportunity to revise our manuscript. We have revised the manuscript in line with the reviewer's comments. We believe these insights have significantly fine-tuned our contribution.

Please find the point-by-point response to how we have addressed the reviewers and editorial comments:

1. - Sometimes, causal claims are still made somewhat hastily. Take p. 2 for instance, where the authors argue that "Consequently," multiplexity were based in liberal assumptions. This cannot directly be followed from the previous statement on cooptation. There needs to be a better bridge that explains why the empirical phenomenon of elite cooptation is related to the theoretical concept of multiplexity being liberal.
We have addressed the hasty causal claims and revised the paragraph to show how the empirical phenomenon of elite co-optation is related to the theoretical concept of multiplexity being liberal.
2. some minor language issues should be remedied, ideally by a professional language editor. E.g. page 3 "Multiplex world optimistically sees their emergence" – It should be "the" Multiplex world order or "The/A theory of" rather than just "Multiplex world order" (the order itself does not "see" anything btw).
We have carefully remedied all areas in the article to focus on the concept of multiplexity.
3. the authors still at times struggle to differentiate between the empirical phenomenon and the theory of it. E.g. page 3: "a multiplex order without its critical component only adds to the infrastructures of American power". What is this related to? The order or its theory? It is not clear. I encourage to consistently use "the theory of", "Acharya's concept of..." or the like to always highlight the distinction.
We now consistently use the phrase the "concept of" or "theory of multiplexity" and we have clarified the places where we discuss the empirical fact of the multiplex world.
4. p. 4 I don't fully understand the sentence starting with "Whilst populists offer a rhetorical force..." I'd recommend to get rid of this and formulate in positive words the own vision. It is complicated enough to distinguish multiplexity theory from critical multiplexity theory.
We deleted this sentence and formulated in positive words to focus on justice and equality.
5. the section "on democratizing power relations" is great, but it might be better titled "the liberal foundations of multiplexity theory"

Thank you. Title changed.
6. p. 14 “Nevertheless, our theoretical critique holds.” Isn’t this for others to judge?
Agreed and removed.
7. I am not quite sure I understand how exactly the critical multiplexity research would go about. This could be strengthened. E.g. on page 19, the authors argue that “instead of merely noting the proliferation of “consequential actors” who represent the multiplex world, conceptually it is necessary to distinguish between actors who genuinely focus on justice and act and think about it and those who become consequential by virtue of increased entanglements and interactions in world politics”. How can the authors distinguish those who “genuinely” focus on justice from those who don’t? This is not a trivial methodological question (as many other studies on cooptation have found). More broadly, the authors should give us some (or at least one) proper example for how their research agenda would look like in practice. This last section is still a little vague. They do mention specific struggles, but I would like to see a clear methodological distinction for which struggles the authors find worthy of study and which ones they do not. Is it their ideological orientation (progressive vs. conservative), their means (movements vs. states?) or their situation (peripheral actors only?). Some words on the selection criteria would help a lot. Particularly because all the examples they mention have also been accused of cooptation (as it tends to happen in movements).
We have focused on the conceptual articulation of the concept of multiplexity and suggested a reconceptualization towards critical multiplexity. In line with the reviewer’s suggestions, we offer preliminary methodological intervention to distinguish actors who genuinely focus on justice from those who don’t. Here, in line with the reviewer’s comments we focus on ideological orientation as well as their means as one of methodological ways to capture this critical multiplexity. We have also strengthened the discussion on specific struggles to focus on the selection criteria. Due to word limits, we are unable to dedicate a whole section on the methodological aspects of critical multiplexity. This is an important area of our research and the core focus of our next paper.

We hope the result of our revisions will be to the satisfaction of the editors and reviewers.

Sincerely,
The authors

Towards Critical Multiplexity in International Relations

Word count (excluding abstract): [8936]

Introduction

Amitav Acharya's 'multiplexity' is an important concept in International Relations (IR), to describe, analyze, and evaluate the emerging world order. The coming end of U.S.-led hegemony, tensions in American global alliances, fraying foundations of liberal order, growing influence of non-Western states, and dense interdependences and interconnections heralds "multiple, crosscutting international orders," the logic of a multiplex world.

Multiplex world theory is distinguished by a proliferation of consequential actors—including global great powers, regional bodies, corporations, people, and social movements. There is growing interdependence and a more pluralized system of global governance. The multiplex world comes with cultural, ideological, and political diversity inherent in the views of new actors. As Acharya puts it, "And while elements of the old liberal order will survive, they will have to accommodate new actors and approaches that do not bend to America's commands and preferences."¹

Acharya's concept of multiplexity promises to address the limitations of traditional concepts to study world order such as international polarity based on material capabilities of states and US-led liberal hegemonic order based on free trade and multilateralism. The concept of polarity draws from historical experiences of the nineteenth-century multipolar era or of ancient Greek city-states, which fail to adequately capture the complex interconnectedness and interdependence of our transitioning world. Similarly, traditional notions of US-led liberal hegemony and principles of liberal internationalism have "been stagnating and decaying for some time," and US President Donald Trump is hastening their decline. Furthermore, liberal internationalism is West-centric, relegating the Global South, failing to capture the

¹ Amitav Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order," *Ethics & International Affairs* 31, no. 3 (2017): 277, 272, 276. Also see, Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2018).

crosscutting international orders and globalisms led by non-Western actors. Thus, Acharya's multiplexity offers an alternative that overcomes the weakness of these two dominant existing concepts. As he argues, the West has "to negotiate accommodation" with the non-Western world "to salvage aspects of the liberal order" and this interplay is driving us towards multiplexity.²

The concept of multiplexity enriches the ongoing debate on pluralism in IR. Although it is not an overt theory, the concept is underpinned by theoretical and ideological assumptions meriting thorough examination. This article interrogates these assumptions with particular attention to the workings of elite/class-based power politics. Far from being neutral, the concept of multiplexity encompasses a liberal world of crosscutting elites. While Acharya's concept of multiplexity views interconnections, interdependence, and crosscutting links in the world as avenues to democratize power, we contend that this assertion is problematic due to the phenomenon of elite cooptation. Cooptation refers to the process whereby new elites are (*often willingly*) integrated into existing institutional networks, ultimately enhancing their own status while maintaining existing hierarchies. We contend that this is what happens in Acharya's view of the multiplex world. In other words, multiplexity as a concept works with an implicit liberal-reformist understanding of the importance of diverse voices and layers of cross-cutting relations and falls short of its promise to *democratize power*.³

To substantiate our argument, we examine the post-Cold War co-optation of groups such as the BRICS and the G20, paradigmatic examples of multiplex international-institutional groupings. There are several important histories on their workings.⁴

² Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony", 272, 276

³ Emerging powers' elites rarely support rather than repress mass movements for justice and rights, including economic rights, within their societies, even as mass resistance rises. See for example the Modi government's responses to the Indian workers' general strike of 2019, strike upsurges in the US and across Europe over the past decade, student protests against western support for Israel's war on Gaza, indigenous peoples' struggles against the effects of climate change, mass movements against racism and police violence..

⁴ Andrew Cooper, "The G20 as an Improvised Crisis Committee and/or a Contested 'Steering Committee' for the World," *International Affairs* 86, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 741–57; Niall Duggan, "BRICS and the Evolution of a New Agenda Within Global Governance," in *The European Union and the BRICS*, ed. Marek Rewizorski (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 11–25; Peter I. Hajnal, *The G20: Evolution, Interrelationships, Documentation* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016); Andrew Hurrell, "Beyond the BRICS: Power, Pluralism, and the Future of Global Order," *Ethics & International Affairs* 32, no. 1 (ed 2018): 89–101.

Acharya's multiplexity concept optimistically sees the emergence (G-Plus) as a challenge to, if not a transformation of, inherently Western-centric order. However, we argue that these new actors and the periphery-based elites who represent them are very much co-opted into the (liberal) international order, perpetuating rather than transforming prevailing power structures. For example, we consider below the 'pre-history' of the BRICS and, by extension, the G20, in the failed project of the 'New International Economic Order' (NIEO) of the 1970s. Our analysis reveals that the optimism of the concept of multiplexity to democratize power elides the susceptibility of actors and elites of relatively marginal states to co-optation.

Furthermore, we are currently witnessing a massive exercise of American power in the mobilization of ideational and material resources in conflicts as diverse as Russia-Ukraine, Israel's war on Gaza and President Trump's weaponization of raw American power.⁵ The US remains the world's pivotal state in terms of the power of the dollar, its economy, and full-spectrum military predominance.⁶ The theoretical construction of multiplexity based on Acharya's view that the "United States is no longer in a position to create the rules and dominate the institutions of global governance and world order in the manner it had for much of the post-World War II period" requires major qualifications. Despite polarized and periodic debates on American decline, American primacy and domination without hegemony is here to stay. From "deep engagement" of the past, the world is now witnessing "the American beast" in managing world order.⁷ In this reassertion of raw American power where leaders are increasingly relegating hegemony in search of dominance the concept and practice of multiplexity without a critical analysis and component only adds to the infrastructures of American power.

In response to these shortcomings, we call for critical multiplexity. We propose an explicitly critical and ideological articulation of the concept of multiplexity and thus reorienting power away from co-optation by focusing on popular struggles. We offer a

⁵ Jeffrey Friedman, "Is US grand strategy dead? The political foundations of deep engagement after Donald Trump" *International Affairs*, 98(4), 2022: 1289-1305; Stacie Goddard, "The Rise and Fall of Great-Power Competition." *Foreign Affairs*, 104, 3 (May/June) 2025: 8-23.

⁶ Inderjeet Parmar, "Poly Crisis or Organic Crisis? The crisis of the United States and the US-led world order," *Economic and Political Weekly* 58 (34), August 2023; <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/31415/>.

⁷ Jill Lepore, *The American Beast* (New York: John Murray, 2023); On deep engagement and continuity see Patrick Porter, "Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment," *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Spring 2018), pp. 9-46

neo-Gramscian approach. Contrary to Acharya's view of multiplexity, which offers a view of an end of global hegemony, our neo-Gramscian perspective recognizes the persistence and staying power of hegemonic elite forces and structures, in continuous struggle for position within different elite networks as well as between elites and the broad mass of people.⁸ Drawing from the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Kautsky, we show that recognizing rather than underplaying this hegemony in transnational elite networks enables us to foreground an alternative way of democratizing power. It is a view attentive to popular aspirations and struggles for justice and equality.

Through this analysis, we contribute to the scholarly discourse on the emerging world order by offering a nuanced and constructive critique of the concept of multiplexity. By highlighting the limitations of a multiplex approach to power and proposing a neo-Gramscian alternative, we provide improvements to turn it into a robust ideological framework for understanding the complexities of global governance. Our critical examination emphasizes the necessity of integrating popular voices and agency – not as spectators in a multiplex theatre but as interlocutors and agents – to democratize international order.⁹

The liberal foundations of multiplexity theory

Multiplexity is an innovative concept in IR to study the emerging world order. Its promise lies in its emphasis on entanglements, diversity, and “deep pluralism.”¹⁰ The concept rests on five core assumptions: the absence of global hegemony by any single nation, even if we recognize power inequalities and hierarchies; increasing role of multiple consequential actors such as states, non-state actors, corporations, and social movements, among others; a pattern of interdependence across sectors and issues; a plural global governance architecture of global, regional, and subnational layers; and a world of cultural, ideological, and political diversity offering pathways to

⁸ Inderjeet Parmar, “The US-Led Liberal Order: Imperialism by Another Name?,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 151–72; Parmar, “Transnational Elite Knowledge Networks: Managing American Hegemony in Turbulent Times,” *Security Studies* 28, no. 3 (2019): 532–64.

⁹ Phoenix Andrews, *I Heart Politics: How People Power Took Over the World* (Atlantic Books, 2024).

¹⁰ Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Deep pluralism refers to the idea that power and authority in global society are diffused widely within a system that has high interaction capacity and strong interdependence. See Buzan, “A World Order without superpowers,” *International Relations* Vol.25, no.1 (2011): 1-23;

peace and prosperity.¹¹ We believe that this concept is a useful addition to debates on the emerging world order and it also works in relation to a growing trend in multiple ways of globalizing IR scholarship.¹²

The concept of multiplexity merges a material and ideational view alongside an empirical and normative understanding of crosscutting international orders, recognizing the complexities of a diverse world. Acharya thus both describes the interconnected world, analyzes and evaluates it, and prescribes pluralism as the way forward for a transitioning world. As such, the concept offers a complex perspective for examining the limitations of traditional ideas of international order based on multipolarity or liberal internationalism. There is much to admire about the optimism of the concept in bleak times of global disorder.

Yet, no concept is devoid of theoretical underpinnings. The concept of ‘multiplexity’ operates on the assumption that diverse states, groups, and units overlap, and the enhanced interaction capacities among crisscrossing actors is an empirical fact. And normatively, interactions can increase cooperation, address global problems, and bring peace and prosperity. An underlying thread of these empirical and normative assumptions is arguably the overarchingly liberal view of the world, with a constructivist metatheory of the agency of multiplicity of actors. Thus, multiplexity is a liberal-constructivist concept in IR.

As Acharya argues, “It is a world of multiple modernities...[of which] Western liberal modernity... is only a part... A multiplex world is like a multiplex cinema – one that gives its audience a choice of various movies, actors, directors, and plots all under the same roof.” He claims that the emerging world order will not be dominated by the hegemony of any single power, even if there are enduring power inequalities. But a moment’s reflection shows that entry to this multiplex cinema is available only to those with an ability to pay. Furthermore, the different plots under the same roof exclude critical documentaries or images of the world because audiences find them disturbing.

¹¹ Acharya, “After Liberal Hegemony.”

¹² Felix Anderl and Antonia Witt, “Problematising the Global in Global IR” *Millennium*, 49, no.1 (2020): 32-57; Justin Rosenberg and Milja Kurki (ed), *Multiplicity: A New Common Ground for International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2021).

Thus, even if Acharya's concept of multiplexity talks of multiple modernities, it is nevertheless liberal, lacks a critique of, and skirts popularly-felt problems caused by, global capitalism. The concept overlooks entrenched power structures. Significant global challenges, such as unrestrained American imperial power, unending wars, attendant epistemic violence, transnational elite networks that hijack democratic processes, crony capitalism, and global inequalities, remain outside this optimistic view of a multiplex world.

Despite Acharya belaboring the idea that multiplexity is different from Ikenberry's liberal international order because the multiplex world – unlike the world of U.S. led liberal hegemony –is attentive to the “Global South,” it is also liberal in the sense of endorsing a universal view of interaction, interdependence, and growing interconnection as a panacea for global governance. While it is opposed to American hegemony, the concept of multiplexity nevertheless rests on implicit liberal theoretical heuristics – such as communication and interactions among diverse actors who offer negotiated solutions, cooperation in an interdependent world to protect pluralism, and unity in diversity for global development and challenges. These principles are laudable but in contemporary international politics, it reproduces the status-quo of elite hierarchy that defines the boundaries of interactions and solutions. Thus, it is crucial to interrogate this liberal-constructivist theoretical foundation of the concept of multiplexity, particularly its commitment to the democratization of power.¹³

Specifically, the multiplex world concept is devoid of a view on power, understood as who controls and influences whom, what, when, and where in international politics. A brief concern with power, if at all, in Acharya's articulation of multiplexity is a chastened form of power due to the force of interactions and interdependence in the emerging world order. As Acharya, Estevadeoradal, and Goodman put it, “In a multiplex world, influence is achieved not so much through power but through a nation's interaction capacity.” Importantly, “In this world, an increasing number of nations cooperate to produce public, club, common and private goods and an increasing number of these states are not great powers. Furthermore, while the United States remains dominant

¹³ For a similar critical interrogation within Global IR see Felix Anderl and Antonia Witt, “Problematising the Global in Global IR.”

in the global system in an aggregate sense, other nations are creating their own capacities, sometimes together with the United States and sometimes not.”¹⁴

This emphasis on increased interactions and interdependence to create influence is liberal in its form and content, and it is not new.¹⁵ We term this the continuation of the “interaction-interdependence delusion.” While greater interdependence can foster dialogue and cooperation, it does not automatically translate to a democratization, understood as a commitment to the principle of political equality.

Increased interactions and interdependence can reinforce existing power hierarchies and enable dominant actors “to step back” as new players speak the language of the system, without fundamentally altering underlying power dynamics. This is arguably why rhetoric is important to talk back against the disciplining forces of the system that celebrates polite interactions.¹⁶ But even then, rhetorical powers often clamour for a seat at the world’s top table only to reproduce the established patterns of discrimination and power.¹⁷

For instance, the integration of emerging economies into global financial institutions has often led to these countries conforming to prevailing neoliberal policies rather than challenging them. The very birth of neoliberalism, as a recent influential study shows, was due to interactions of economists, sociologists, journalists and business leaders to retain the “common intellectual framework” of maintaining free market interdependence against the rising tide of democracy.¹⁸ While there may be more voices at the table, the overall structure and decision-making processes remain largely unchanged, limiting the potential for genuine democratization.

¹⁴ Amitav Acharya, Antoni Estevadeordal, and Louis W Goodman, “Multipolar or Multiplex? Interaction Capacity, Global Cooperation and World Order,” *International Affairs* 99, no. 6 (November 6, 2023): 2344, 2361.

¹⁵ Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Robert Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World*. (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁶ Sasikumar Sundaram *Rhetorical Powers: How Rising States Assert Competence in International Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming)

¹⁷ Sundaram, *Rhetorical Powers*

¹⁸ Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2020).

Similarly, climate change negotiations, have seen the participation of a wide range of actors. Yet, there is less cooperation than discord, conflicting interests, and power imbalances.¹⁹ Powerful states such as the US, EU, and China and corporations such as ExxonMobil and Saudi Aramco often dominate the negotiations, shaping outcomes that favour their economic interests while marginalizing less powerful actors, highlighting the limitations of assuming that increased participation automatically leads to more equitable solutions.

With a liberal notion of influence rather than a critical understanding of power dynamics, the theory of multiplexity tends to view global crises as products of unintended consequences rather than outcomes systematically engineered by elites.²⁰ This perspective underestimates the role of powerful actors in maintaining global structures to their advantage.²¹ Elon Musk's recent activism in American and British politics is not an aberration for elites.²² The global financial system is structured in ways that benefit wealthy countries and multinational corporations, often at the expense of poorer nations. The 2008 financial crisis revealed how financial elites in developed countries could engage in risky behaviour with impunity, while the consequences were disproportionately borne by less powerful actors.²³ Unlike the explicit claims and fallout of some tech-billionaires, elite machinations in politics were implicit but constant. By failing to account for these dynamics, multiplexity as a concept presents an overly optimistic view of pluralism and the potential for democratic engagement in global governance.

Furthermore, the idea that G-Plus structures provide more inclusive and effective global governance works within the liberal ideologies of the current world order. As Acharya puts it, "A multiplex world is a G-Plus world, featuring established and emerging powers, global and regional institutions and actors, states, social

¹⁹ For a mainstream view see John S. Dryzek and Hayley Stevenson, *Democratizing Global Climate Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); for an alternative view see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

²⁰ Partha Chatterjee, "Empire after Globalisation," *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 37 (September 11, 2004): 4155–64; Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Great Divide* (Penguin: 2015); Jule Goikoetxea and Mònica Clua-Losada, "Life and Growth of the Thirteen Marxist Feminist Theses," *Capital & Class* 48, no. 2 (June 1, 2024): 187–95.

²¹ Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Parmar, "Transnational Elite Knowledge Networks".

²² Peter Hagel, *Billionaires in World Politics* (OUP, 2020).

²³ Stiglitz, *The Great Divide*.

movements, corporations, private foundations, and various kinds of partnerships among them.”²⁴ Such a view underestimates the existence of cabals, elite networks, and groups that have a stake in the status quo of neoliberalism rather than changing it. These informal networks, supplementing formal power structures, often operate behind the scenes, influencing policy decisions. For us, a significant concern with the theory of a multiplex world is the susceptibility to co-optation (as the next section will show in detail). While dominant Global South groups and movements were initially seen as potential challengers to the Western-centric order, they have largely been integrated into the existing liberal governance framework without significantly altering it. As a result, their ability to democratize power and address global inequalities has been limited, ignoring mass resistance and protests.²⁵

Thus, at an epistemological level, such a liberal foundation underlying the concept of multiplexity arises from working within the American ways of practicing IR, which are often critical only at the superficial level of methods and methodologies.²⁶ It fails to engage deeply with more transformative perspectives on power such as those of Lukes, Foucault or Marx. Within this American style conceptualizing of multiplexity, references to multiple modernities or postcolonial thinkers like Edward Said, Sudipta Kaviraj, Gyan Prakash and Dipesh Chakrabarty remain marginal to the realms of interrogating power.²⁷ By adhering to a predominantly liberal framework – albeit with constructivist leanings, the concept of multiplexity also underplays engagements with alternative postcolonial and decolonial perspectives that offered similar diagnosis of multiple modernities and build a vocabulary for robust critiques and solutions. This limitation makes the concept of multiplexity less effective as a tool for democratizing power and addressing systemic issues in international relations.²⁸

Cooptation in The Multiplex World

²⁴ Acharya, “After Liberal Hegemony,” 280-281.

²⁵ Andrews, *I Heart Politics*; and Robert Overtz, ed., *Workers’ Inquiry and Global Class Struggle* (Pluto, 2021).

²⁶ See Daniel J Levine, *Recovering International Relations: The Promise of Sustainable Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁷ Naeem Inayatullah and Daved L Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

²⁸ Yet it may aid acceptance into the IR canon as crises of world order deepen.

The concept of a multiplex world with a liberal foundation of influence through interactions and interdependence is under constant risk of cooptation, which can effectively hijack the normative worldview for deep pluralism. Cooptation, as we define it, is a process whereby elite members are assimilated into institutional networks with the implicit expectation that they will serve the interests of hierarchical elites. Philip Selznick, in his classic study of the Tennessee Valley Authority, examined how the US federal government coopted anti-government sentiments by making it a project that came from “grassroots democracy.”²⁹ As Selznick argues, “One means of winning consent is to coopt elements [of opposition groups] into the leadership or organization, usually elements which in some way reflect the sentiment, or possess the confidence of the relevant public or mass... it is expected that the new elements will lend respectability or legitimacy to the organs of control and thus reestablish the stability of formal authority.”³⁰ A similar process of cooptation is visible in the liberal power dynamics that underlie the concept of multiplex world, which any critical inquiry must make explicit. Established elites use resources and skills, including voices of challengers, to absorb those seeking change, making rising elites work within the system without granting them any significant new advantages.³¹ Cooptation is an issue of power that paradoxically relies – even emphasizes – the agency and role of the coopted.

Before examining co-optation through illustrations from the BRICS and G20, however, its ‘prehistory’ should be considered. Studies show that demands for a ‘New International Economic Order’ (NIEO) were advanced by postcolonial states to promote a relatively radical redistribution of world power towards the ‘Third World’.³² The reactions of the representatives of Western power either thwarted or co-opted through a strategy of divide and rule.³³ Both ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ forces were united in this effort, involving the efforts of David Rockefeller, Trilateral Commission (TC), Heritage Foundation, Coors Foundation, World Bank, secretary of state, Henry

²⁹ Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949).

³⁰ Philip Selznick, “Foundations of the Theory of Organization,” *American Sociological Review* 13, no. 1 (1948): 34.

³¹ Markus Holdo, “Cooptation and Non-Cooptation: Elite Strategies in Response to Social Protest,” *Social Movement Studies* 18, no. 4 (July 4, 2019): 444–62.

³² Philip S. Golub, “From the New International Economic Order to the G20: How the ‘Global South’ is Restructuring World Capitalism From Within,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, 6 (2013): pp1000-1015.

³³ Jennifer Bair, “Taking Aim at the New International Economic Order,” in *The Road from Mont Pelerin*; ed., Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp.347-85.

Kissinger, and Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. TC led the effort against NIEO demands.³⁴

Kissinger mobilized the World Bank to "blunt [global] southern demands" alongside a strategy of Bank loans conditioned on market-based reforms – contrary to statist development strategies favoured by NIEO proponents.³⁵ The strategy of divide and rule peeled away OPEC countries from other third world states, and subdivided the remainder between so-called aspirational middle-class states versus the poorest economies. TC also developed a programme of 'reform' entitled *Towards a Renovated International System* based on Brzezinski's concept of a multi-tiered international system centred on the rule-making West and a set of third world states as rule-takers on the operational periphery of the system.³⁶ The racialized character of both Kissinger's and Brzezinski's approach to the NIEO is revealed in the latter's fear of another "1905 moment" – when Japan defeated Russia; and by Kissinger's references to OPEC and other third world states as "savages" holding the West to ransom. Kissinger proposed to the Club of Rome and TC that splitting the Third World required Western unity behind "a lofty tone and a forthcoming stance."³⁷ The clearest articulation of this approach was provided in a *Foreign Affairs* article in 1975. Tom Farer argued that the third world would be best accommodated by "creaming off and co-op[ting]... the natural elite... into the establishment... and by slightly increased shares of a very rapidly growing pie." The list of states mentioned as part of the 'natural elite' included several that later resembled the 'BRICS': Brazil, India, Nigeria, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, among others. Farer concluded that an accommodation of this kind implied concessions "without threatening the fundamental arrangements which an accommodationist policy, as much as the hard line, is calculated to preserve."³⁸

³⁴ Parmar, "Transnational Elite Knowledge Networks."

³⁵ Patrick Sharma, "Between North and South: The World Bank and the New International Economic Order," *Humanity* 6, 1 (Spring 2015): pp191-193.

³⁶ Golub, p.1005; also Jordan Michael Smith, "The Breakup: American Foreign Policy in the 1970s," *World Affairs* 177, 6 (March/April 2015): p82.

³⁷ Daniel J Sargent, "North/South: The United States Responds to the New International Economic Order," *Humanity* 6, 1 (Spring 2015): p.209.

³⁸ Tom J. Farer, "The United States and the Third World: A Basis for Accommodation," *Foreign Affairs* 54, 1 (October 1975): pp91-92.

Seen from this historical vantage point, Acharya's assessment that there will be "leadership-sharing between the Western powers and the emerging powers" and such possibility "is more attainable than (hard) power sharing,"³⁹ seems idealistic. Even BRICS have largely been co-opted to serve existing liberal rules of global capitalism rather than an institutional avenue for leadership sharing.

The more recent expansion of the BRICS is well-known.⁴⁰ The group has 45% of the world's population, yet produces just 23% of total global output and 18% of trade. According to IMF currency composition data, the share of the US dollar in all foreign exchange reserves was around 59% from the end of 2023.⁴¹ Many BRICS countries simply cannot escape dollar dominance.⁴² But more importantly, the BRICS function within the same neoliberal capitalist framework that they ostensibly seek to challenge. Prashad notes, "the BRICS formation has not endorsed an ideological alternative to neoliberalism." In fact, he calls it "neoliberalism with Southern characteristics."⁴³

For instance, in 2016, BRICS established the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), both capitalized at \$100 billion notionally, although the NDB received only \$25 billion in immediate capital injections. As Patrick Bond observed in 2015, the CRA's structure meant that for heavily indebted countries like South Africa, only \$3 billion would be available, compelling them to turn to the IMF with much more stringent conditions.⁴⁴ This arrangement does not produce an equal voice for BRICS members; instead, it perpetuates intra-competition for authority within BRICS, where different elites from India and China for example jockey for position in light of their geopolitical competition, which also reinforces existing power structures.

³⁹ Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony," 280.

⁴⁰ Matthew D. Stephen, "Rising Powers, Global Capitalism and Liberal Global Governance: A Historical Materialist Account of the BRICs Challenge," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 912–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066114523655>; Duggan, "BRICS and the Evolution of a New Agenda Within Global Governance"; Hurrell, "Beyond the BRICS."

⁴¹ See Serkan Arslanalp, Barry Eichengreen, Chima Simpson-Bell, "Dollar Dominance in the International Reserve System" IMF Blog, June 11, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/06/11/dollar-dominance-in-the-international-reserve-system-an-update> accessed on 1 July 2024.

⁴² Photis Lysandrou, *Dollar Dominance: Why it Rules the Global Economy and How to Challenge it* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2025).

⁴³ Vijay Prashad, "Neoliberalism with Southern Characteristics: The Rise of the BRICS," Research Paper (New York: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2013)

⁴⁴ Patrick Bond: "Co-dependent BRICS from Above, Co-opted BRICS from the Middle, and Confrontational BRICS from Below." In: Patrick Bond & Ana Garcia, Ana (eds): *BRICS an Anti-Capitalist Critique*. (South Africa: Jacana Media, 2015) pp. 286-296

Similarly, Panitch argues, “The alacrity with which the World Bank has welcomed the BRICS New Development Bank relates to the fact that its goals look not very different from the resource-depleting, export-oriented economic strategies that have heretofore governed the participation of emerging markets in capitalist globalizations.”⁴⁵

The idea that Northern actors are “worried” about BRICS does not indicate that they serve as an alternative to the current global order. BRICS have been absorbed into existing neoliberal institutional frameworks. Even with the recent expansion of BRICS+ that includes staunchly anti-American members, the competition between China, India, and South Africa to serve as self-proclaimed “leaders of the Global South” is palpable.⁴⁶ Their leadership struggles show that each of them want to show commitments to the tenets of open economy, free market capitalism, reducing dissent, and serving as best protectors of order even at the expense of listening to others. New institutions merely extend the reach of elite networks without altering their hierarchical nature.

The G20 is another example of an institution that purportedly expands global governance to include diverse voices. Established in 1999, the G20 was intended to provide a mechanism for informal dialogue within the Bretton Woods system, broadening discussions on key economic and financial policy issues among significant economies. Its goal was to promote cooperation for stable and sustainable global economic growth.

However, instead of challenging the Bretton Woods system, the G20 has often reinforced it. Over time, the G20 has become a financial meeting point that collaborates in neoliberal governance, allowing G20 members to engage with emerging markets for discussions on capital investment and growth without addressing the underlying issues of IMF lending and debt restructuring. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008, Panitch notes, “The G20 was designed to get the major ‘emerging market’ states to take responsibility for the ‘new international financial architecture’..., providing legitimacy for the continuing central

⁴⁵ Leo Panitch, “BRICS, the G20 and the American Empires,” In Bond & Garcia; pp:65-66.

⁴⁶ On BRICS expansion see Stewart Patrick, “BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order” *Carnegie Report*, October 9, 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/brics-summit-emerging-middle-powers-g7-g20?lang=en>

role of the US in superintending a greatly expanded but increasingly volatile global capitalism.”⁴⁷

The broadening of the G20's membership base can be seen as an attempt to legitimize the existing order by including developing countries. However, this inclusion has not led to significant changes in the principles of global governance. Instead, it has created a more extensive oligarchy that broadens the hierarchical order. As Heine argues, “the very reason the G20 was set up... was because the G7 could not deal with the Asian financial crisis at the time, and needed a broader entity to cope with it....The G20...still performs a useful function to help the world economy navigate perilous waters, as globalization beats a retreat and the dangers of a fractured international system loom larger”.⁴⁸ However, it is also clear that G20 states operate in a liminal space between complete immersion in the G7-dominated system, and a degree of strategic autonomy or neutrality. This ‘space’ – which also exists for the BRICS+ – may provide the forum for greater inclusion of authentic popular voices of those who struggle for justice and equality.⁴⁹ In addition, any such global forum of southern forces is an opportunity to challenge the powers of the North, as shown by the G20's resistance to NATO's demand that they align with its strategy in the Ukraine war. Nevertheless, BRICS and G20 remain connected with the major institutions of the liberal order, including the WTO, IMF, World Bank and seek to influence them as well as build parallel or semi-autonomous but not necessarily exclusive processes and systems of their own.⁵⁰ Hence, the strategies of the global south's elites remain a double-edged sword.

We recognize that our critique is explicitly ideological. Although we provide some illustrative empirical evidence to back up our argument, word limits render impossible a full case study.. By only focusing on the crisscrossing of actors, without making its liberal ideological foundations explicit, the concept of multiplexity expects interactions and interconnections to mysteriously change the underlying structures of power. But

⁴⁷ Panitch, “BRICS, the G20 and the American Empires”; pp:64

⁴⁸ Jorge Heine, “G20 summit proved naysayers wrong – and showed Global South's potential to address world's biggest problems,” *The Conversation*, 21 September 2023; <https://theconversation.com/g20-summit-proved-naysayers-wrong-and-showed-global-souths-potential-to-address-worlds-biggest-problems-213739>.

⁴⁹ [Between Walls and Fences: The Global South's Dilemma at the G20 Meetings in Rio de Janeiro](#)

⁵⁰ Tricontinental Institute for Social Research: “The Churning of the Global Order,” *Dossier* 22, January 2024. [20240118_D71_EN_Web.pdf](#) accessed on 1 July 2025.

regular interactions end up reinforcing the status quo. This limitation suggests the need for a more critical approach to the concept of multiplexity, one that recognizes the risks of co-optation and seeks to address the deeper issues of power and inequality in global governance.

To genuinely democratize power to permit political equality, it is crucial to develop a critical approach to conceptualize multiplexity that addresses the risks of co-optation and seeks to transform the underlying structures of power. This approach must incorporate insights from radical and postcolonial theories, recognize the persisting (not declining) hegemony of the West, the role of emerging elites in shaping global governance, and emphasize the importance of grassroots movements and contingent change. Only by addressing these deeper issues can multiplexity world – both in theory and in practice – fulfill its potential to create a more equitable global order.

Critical Multiplexity

We offer "critical multiplexity," by incorporating insights from radical and postcolonial theories to provide a more robust framework for understanding world order. Here the insights of Gramsci and Kautsky are relevant, even if they are not the only source to provide an alternative ideological view of power to reconceptualize the multiplex world.

It is often argued that Gramsci paid little attention to world affairs.⁵¹ This is far from accurate as his pre-prison and prison writings are replete with analyses of colonialism, comparative studies of Chinese, Japanese, and Indian intellectuals, the impacts of the European balance of power on Italian political development, and the growing significance of the United States in world affairs. He noted the future shift of world power to the Asia-Pacific, and wondered about its impact on the transatlantic bloc.⁵² Similarly, Kautsky showed that ruling classes of capitalist states cooperate in novel

⁵¹ Jonathan Pass, *American Hegemony in the 21st Century: A Neo Neo-Gramscian Perspective* (Routledge, 2019).

⁵² Dante Germino, *Antonio Gramsci: Architect of a New Politics* (Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

ways to exploit the world's resources.⁵³ These elites have a vested interest in incorporating diverse voices to perpetuate exploitation.

From such a perspective, at the heart of the process of integration of the US-led LIO, is a hegemonic order driven by transnational elite networks. US overseas endeavours were seemingly benign in the deployment of foreign aid for developing nations. Yet, their foreign aid targeted Global South civil society elites (including China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and India, among others), thereby forging fundamental connections as part of an intricate hegemony-building process, engineering an international elite consensus.⁵⁴ We thus suggest there exists a US-centered *imperial transnational historic bloc* – a broad coalition of allies and unequal partners with the US - that is elitist and racialised but which has always required and frequently sought the co-optation to one extent or another of the elites of weaker societies.⁵⁵ This was as true of the British Raj as of post-independence India, which both depended on agreements – formal and informal – between the empire and wealthy maharajas and the new 'Nehruvian-Gandhian' Indian political elite,⁵⁶ as it is of US influence around the world, including the global south, today. It was precisely what empire intellectuals, notably historians, sociologists, statisticians, and anthropologists, worked for. As Thomas B. Macauley's minute on Indian education of 1835 declared, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."⁵⁷

⁵³ Shuhong Huo and Inderjeet Parmar, 'A new type of great power relationship'? Gramsci, Kautsky and the role of the Ford Foundation's transformational elite knowledge networks in China. *Review of International Political Economy*, 27(2), pp. 234-257

⁵⁴ Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*; for liberal optimistic view of these elites see G. John Ikenberry & Charles Kupchan, "Socialization and Hegemonic Power," *International Organization* 44, 3, Summer 1990, pp.283-315.

⁵⁵ Inderjeet Parmar and Mark Ledwidge, "Anglo-American Power in the Wake of Brexit and America First," in Elaine Fahey, Ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Transatlantic Relations* (London: Routledge, 2024), pp. 308-322.

⁵⁶ S.K. Ghosh, "On the transfer of power in India," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 17: 3 (1985), pp.30-45. Indeed, Jawaharlal Nehru not only fully accepted British dominion status for India to maintain the closest ties to Britain, he also courted US support for what he referred to as India's "manifest destiny" to dominate the Indo-Pacific region; pp.39-41.

⁵⁷ Macauley was a British civil servant in India and officer of the East India Company. The quote is from Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2007), p.38.

To be sure, the greater economic strength, national self-confidence, re-energised historical grievances, and assertiveness of the more significant middle-level global south states is changing the balance of power between the US core and global south.⁵⁸ In this sense, not just in theory but in practice we live in a multiplex world. There is an intensification of the re-negotiation of the relative status of powers in the institutional architecture of the US-led liberal international order, and the making of parallel and alternative - though often complementary - institutions that include western states but are not always dominated by them.

But world order - justified and legitimized by American/Anglosphere exceptionalism - is an imperial transnational historic bloc. From such an ideological view, this multiplex world both in theory and practice is not about benign interdependence. Instead, a formulation derived from Gramscian hegemony theory, but combined with Kautsky's concept of 'ultraimperialism', allows us to see the fundamentally exploitative practices of transnational elites that underlie the empirical fact of the multiplex world. Kautsky's approach denotes national ruling elites' and classes' collaboration based on shared interests even within a competitive and conflictual inter-state system, and expresses the complexities of global transitions that witness simultaneously selective collaboration, accommodation, competition and simmering underlying conflicts of interests. Such transnationalism, however imperfect, is consequential in diminishing, but not eliminating, the chances of outright great power military conflict and also helps explain how US power is both enabled and questioned by global south elites, as it was by historically-colonised societies' elites. Elite networks embrace, socialise, and reward the forces within them, and are effectively a 'power technology' of US and allied elites.⁵⁹

Gramscian hegemony dovetails well with the Kautskyian conception of 'ultra-imperialism' and provides a better explanation of how real-world power works – and thus the dynamics underlying the conceptualization of the multiplex world – in all its

⁵⁸ Leonardo Ramos and Javier Vadell, "Global reordering and the emergence of the BRICS+," Global Disorder Research Network Working Paper, City, University of London; <https://researchcentres.city.ac.uk/cips/global-disorder#unit=working-papers>; Elisabetta Brighi, "The globalization of resentment: Failure, Denial, and Violence in World Politics" *Millennium* 44, 3 (2016): 411-432.

⁵⁹ Elite networks' power in US foreign policy is demonstrated in Inderjeet Parmar, "American foundations and the development of international knowledge networks," *Global Networks* 2, 1, 2002, pp.13-30.

complexities. Kautsky's concept contends that to exploit the world's people and resources, ruling elites of superordinate and subordinate states/societies form alliances that are not fixed, nor stable, but which express themselves as cooperative, competitive, and even conflictual often at the very same time.⁶⁰ This is the case over time due to the effects of "uneven and combined development."⁶¹ Consequently, many Global South states, including Indian, Brazilian or Chinese elites are in a liminal space, a transitional phase of complex hybridity, on the outmost circles of global power, at the centre of which the US power reigns supreme.⁶² It is this 'contradictory' location of the elite in the hierarchies of global power that requires attention in the reconceptualization of multiplex world, both to give meaning to the empirical fact and to generate avenues to offer normative criticisms.⁶³

Critical Multiplexity in Practice: Struggles of the People

By incorporating our ideological framework, we offer a better avenue to conceptualize the multiplex world through the lens of the people and their struggles. This approach contrasts with the current form of liberal multiplexity, which often fails to adequately focus on deep pluralism. The focus on "the people" is not a novel idea. Previous debates on global civil society highlighted the potential role of individuals and grassroots movements in challenging neoliberalism. However, these earlier views faced significant challenges. They were often overly optimistic, assuming that the post-Westphalian order endorsed by institutions like the World Bank, with its focus on development NGOs and social movements, could effectively challenge the status quo. In reality, this approach often reproduced existing inequalities and reinforced teleological notions of poverty and underdevelopment.

⁶⁰ First published Karl Kautsky, "'Der Imperialismus,'" *Die Neue Zeit*, 11 September 1914; 32 (1914), Vol. 2, pp. 908-922. English version available in <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/ultra-imp.htm> Accessed on 1 July 2025.

⁶¹ Justin Rosenberg et al, "Debating uneven and combined development/debating international relations," *Millennium* 50, 2 (2022).

⁶² See, for example, Thomas Piketty et al, "Capital accumulation, private property, and rising inequality in China, 1978-2015," *American Economic Review* 109 (7), 2019 pp2469-2496; and Lydia Assoud et al, "Extreme Inequality: Evidence from Brazil, India, the Middle East, and South Africa," AEA Papers and Proceedings vol. 108, May 2018 (pp. 119-23); <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pandp.20181076>.

⁶³ Inderjeet Parmar, "Global power shifts, diversity, and hierarchy in international politics," *Ethics and International Affairs* 33, 2 (2019), pp.231-244.

Furthermore, the idea of global civil society as a sphere of solidarity failed to recognize that this solidarity was frequently paternalistic and patriarchal towards the poor.⁶⁴ It also rested on an artificial separation between the state and civil society. Even early critical views, which saw civil society as distinct from the state and spearheaded radical activism, did not fully capture the intricate connections between the two. The reliance on trade unions and church groups to represent the people's voice also proved limited, especially with the rise of radical left and right movements that exploited exclusionary communities.

In our view, focusing on the people means emphasizing their popular struggles for social and economic justice rather than merely ethno-nationalist or status-based identity groups, which divide rather than unite people, as populists often do.⁶⁵ This bottom-up perspective that focuses on social and economic justice provides the best framework for studying the democratization of power in a multiplex world. Top-down global ordering projects often produce disorder for various populations across different regions. Merely adding new elite voices to the global institutional framework – mostly people of color – without changing the discourse or addressing the concerns and struggles of the people is insufficient.

Conceptualizing the multiplex world must focus on how to increase accountability to the people, meaning elites should be answerable to the people's everyday concerns. This necessitates that multiplexity be an explicitly political goal tied to distinct notions of justice and equality. The multiplex world should not simply address multiple issues but focus on issues of both epistemic and material justice.

Thus, instead of merely noting the proliferation of “consequential actors” who represent the multiplex world, conceptually it is necessary to distinguish between

⁶⁴ See Paul Le Blanc and Stephanie Luce, “The World Social Forum and Global Justice,” *Against the Current*, no.103, March/April 2003. <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc103/p1070/> accessed on 1 July 2025. Also as Naomi Klein put it long time ago, the World Social Forum though a major gathering of the oppressed was becoming a paternalistic forum filled with major figures, see Naomi Klein, “Outflanking the rich and powerful” *The Guardian*, January 26, 2001. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/jan/26/greenpolitics.eu#:~:text=This%20exclusivity%20is%20protected%20at%20all%20costs,an%20equally%20dogmatic%20set%20of%20global%20prescriptions>. Accessed on 1 July 2024.

⁶⁵ A class-based and social justice-oriented approach to resistance and popular struggles unifies large majorities of the people on a wider basis than narrower identitarian movements; Parmar, “Global Power Shifts, Diversity, and Hierarchy in World Politics”.

actors who genuinely focus on *justice* and act and think about it and those who become consequential by virtue of increased entanglements and interactions in world politics. This approach effectively rules out practices that merely expand the oligarchy's base in global governance organizations like the UN, G20, and BRICS. At a methodological level, we suggest that those who offer a critique of global capitalism and neoliberal logics of accumulation and profit i.e. their ideological orientation against unlimited profits and growth are actors who are genuinely focused on justice and the struggles of the people – across barriers of class, race, and gender, and not beholden to narrow and divisive identity politics. Theoretically David Harvey and in political practice Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana comes to mind. Similarly, at a methodological level, we suggest focusing on those who employ the means of popular, inclusive collective action and thought to combat global issues such as climate change, the AI revolution, and the North-South divide as their primary objective is material justice and fairness. Such actors can emerge both from the Western world and from the periphery and criss cross in their work with state power but also is transversal to the state.

From such a view, the critical aspect of the consequential actors in the multiplex world is in addressing the inequalities of world politics and economy. This means actors who engage in open contestation and struggles and who are rooted in and can “translate” people's voices are more consequential actors in a truly multiplex world than mere groups and units. A critical conceptualization of multiplex world focused on democratizing power must offer a substantive critique of American and Western military and economic power entrenched in global institutions. Actors who can speak “truth to power” and truth about power are essential for democratizing it, unlike those non-European actors who seek to navigate existing hierarchies to secure more power for themselves.

While turning the multiplex idea towards justice and equality shows the distinctly ideological side of the concept, we also believe that this shift is necessary. Without an alternative critical ideology, the concept of multiplexity remains within the liberal order, strengthening the hegemony of Western powers through non-Western voices. Contestation, challenges, argumentation, and rhetoric should play central roles in the critical multiplexity world. This approach allows for voicing the struggles of the people rather than relying on polite persuasion.

Furthermore, the concept of multiplexity that retains a traditional liberal-based understanding of the world remains distant from the concerns of those without access to institutional networks, and who suffer from poverty and relentless wars. Such people often end up as refugees and migrants. Therefore, a reconceptualized concept of critical multiplex world must also be a world of civil disobedience and transgressions.⁶⁶ It is with transgressions that the idea of liberty that emerged in Haiti diffused across the world. The idea of civil disobedience – practiced by Gandhi, inspiring Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, is justice-based spectacles within the multiplex world, infused with power politics, which also changed the world.⁶⁷ In recent years, mass resistance to racist police violence, Indian farmers' mobilisations, Arab spring rebellions, and protests against Israel's genocide in Gaza, are all important popular struggles against elites in the multiplex world. Similarly, consider the role of humanitarian organisations that tend to the needs of the forcibly displaced; or scientific networks ch during the Covid-19 pandemic and who are working to prevent the next pandemic; or activists aiming to mitigate the impact of catastrophic climate change. These are struggles that challenge the elite networks even when many of these organizations and networks frequently come under scathing attack or cooptation by elites. In other words, political actors who refuse to contest the existing rules or challenge world politics through transgressions and civil disobedience are not part of the critical multiplex world.⁶⁸ Instead, as elites, they expand the bases of oligarchy through superficial claims about diversity, equality, and race.⁶⁹

For example, there is an increasing idea that global governance must offer space to people from the Global South. However, elites from these societies often capitalize on these diversity rules to occupy top positions without representing the people's struggles. Figures like former UK PM Rishi Sunak and former US President Obama

⁶⁶ Bernard E. Harcourt *Critique and Praxis* (Columbia University Press, 2020).

⁶⁷ Sundaram *Rhetorical Powers*

⁶⁸ Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, "Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory," *Critical Times* 4, no. 3 (December 1, 2021): 359–88.

⁶⁹ G. William Domhoff and Richard L. Zweigenhaft, *Diversity in the Power Elite* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).

demonstrate that expanding the oligarchical base with "diverse" members who do not represent the struggles of the people actually contributes to the problem.⁷⁰

This tendency to globalize diversity while maintaining racial, caste, and social inequalities makes the multiplex world a relatively limited alternative to addressing the problems of world politics. Instead, if we focus on popular struggles, not just their formal representatives, a reconceptualized critical multiplexity can show that the world must be made equitable and help alleviate people's discontents. If the concept of multiplex world remains a strategic concept infused with ideas to help non-European elites secure more power and status, its potential for global change will be limited. Such a perspective problematizes the notion that the multiplex world is merely a strategic concept to help non-European elites secure more power. Instead, it emphasizes the need for a more radical approach to global change.

Conclusion

In this article, we have critically interrogated the hidden power dynamics embedded within the concept of multiplexity. As global events, such as Western handling of the Israel-Palestine conflict, demonstrate, the military and economic power of the West remains significant and must not be underestimated. The premature declaration of the end of global hegemony overlooks the persistent influence wielded by Western powers. By examining the problems of power in the concept of the multiplex world, we have highlighted the pervasive issue of cooptation, which reveals the limitations of institutions like BRICS and the G-20, which ostensibly promote pluralism and diversity but reinforce Western liberal management of global order.

Recognizing the problem of co-optation exposes the fault lines of novel concepts that fail to scrutinize their ideological underpinnings. Our interrogation of the ideological foundations beneath the seemingly neutral concept of multiplexity reveals a persistent liberal focus on incorporating diverse voices without disrupting the underlying system of inequality, other than to broaden the basis oligarchy by including, at a relatively

⁷⁰ Priyamvada Gopal, "Rishi Sunak does represent a minority – his class of plutocrats," *Al Jazeera* 27 October 2022; <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/10/27/rishi-sunak-minority-class-plutocrats-diversity>; Inderjeet Parmar and M. Ledwidge, "... 'a foundation-hatched black': Obama, the US establishment, and foreign policy," *International Politics* 54: pp373-388.

junior level, global south elites. By drawing on the perspectives of Gramsci and Kautsky, we move beyond liberal-constructivist views of power that underpin the theory multiplexity, thereby allowing us to emphasize the ideological aspects of multiplexity to enable prioritization of material justice and equality.

Our ideological shift foregrounds popular resistance and struggle, placing people at the forefront of the multiplex world.⁷¹ A truly democratic concept of multiplex world does not merely aim to expand the basis of oligarchy but instead focuses on popular struggles for equality and social justice, not in the identity-based populist. This normative approach emphasizes that consequential ideas in the the concept of critical multiplex world are those capable of translating people's problems into effective policy options and alternatives. In this sense, the concept of critical multiplexity is explicitly political.⁷²

Our perspective is just one way to lay bare the liberal impulse in the concept of multiplexity. But the idea of focusing on people and their struggles comes with a problem of identity communities. People exist in multiple communities, and the translation of people's struggle in a truly multiplex world will inevitably have to confront the problems of right-wing and liberal exclusionary communities. Top-down global ordering projects often produce disorder for different populations, and focusing on communities as a proxy for the people within it can create more disorder in the multiplex world. An avenue for further research is to investigate how the concept of critical multiplex world can increase accountability and remain answerable to the people's problems and concerns without promoting views of exclusionary communities and their radicalism. The notion of the "people" or "chosen people" is the exclusionary community that seeks domination with scant regard to justice. Critical multiplexity with its focus on the people must be an explicitly political goal tied to distinct notions of justice and equality without giving way to exclusionary communities. This requires a

⁷¹ Ben Ehrenreich, "Welcome to the Global Rebellion Against Neoliberalism," *The Nation* 25 November 2019; <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/global-rebellions-inequality/>.

⁷² There are numerous examples of popular movements for human rights, social justice and equality; but can global south elites be enlisted to open forums to empower them in global fora? Critical multiplexity argues that this is most likely to happen with continuous popular struggles that force open agendas. See Joint Statement on the 76th anniversary of the UDHR and the 6th year of the Adoption of UNDROP, "Advancing Human Rights, Economic Justice, and Participatory Democracy: A Call to Action." *Focus on the Global South*, December 17, 2024. <https://focusweb.org/advancing-human-rights-economic-justice-and-participatory-democracy-a-call-to-action/>

space where open contestation, struggles, and the people's voices are translated to a global audience, but conscious of the identity-community trap in such contestations.

In conclusion, to genuinely democratize power, the multiplex world must embrace a critical approach that prioritizes material justice and equality. This involves moving beyond the liberal order's superficial inclusivity to address the root causes of inequality and injustice. Critical multiplexity requires accountability to the people, a focus on their struggles, and a commitment to transforming the underlying structures of power. Only then can multiplexity become a truly transformative concept, one that is capable of addressing the pressing challenges of global governance for and by the people and creating a just and equitable world.