

Draft for SSHA Annual Meeting in 2026

World-Historical Trajectory and Contour of Struggles against Exploitation in the Global South in Longue Durée

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Abstract

This study explores the world-historical trajectory and contour of ‘struggles against exploitation’ in the global South during the long twentieth century. This study develops a more comprehensive concept of labor unrest, focusing on *exploitation* as the primary theme. The idea of struggles against exploitation thus explains major social movements, popular protests, and labor unrest that mobilize people to demand an end to their capitalist exploitation, absolute or relative poverty, material hardship, economic grievances, and dispossession. Based on the empirical investigation of protest events related to struggles against exploitation in the global South reported in *The New York Times* between 1870 and 2020, this study examines the following research questions: 1) Did popular struggles against exploitation appear in clusters of time? 2) Could the wave of struggles be distinguished by the zone of the world-economy, region, and country? 3) What were the global dynamics making the long-term waves of struggles on a world scale? One of the most striking findings is the identification of four *greater* waves of struggles against exploitation in the global South: 1918-22, 1928-38, 1945-66, and 1980-90, while the overall frequency of popular struggles has *declined* since the mid-twentieth century. The core clusters of struggles against exploitation in the capitalist world-economy shifted from *upper-tier semiperipheral regions* to *core-contenders of the semiperiphery* after the long 1950s protest wave. The regional clusters of struggles also shifted from Latin America to Eastern Europe during the 1980s. In conclusion, the temporal and spatial epicenters of popular struggles against exploitation in the global South changed during the long twentieth century due to the logic and characteristics of each phase of the regional and global political process and the long-term dynamics of capitalist accumulation in the capitalist world-economy.

Keywords

struggles against exploitation; labor unrest; capitalist world-economy; protest wave; global South

“The working men have no country.” – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Introduction

For the past decades, we have observed massive protests that have swept the world. It seems that we now have almost enough hindsight to compare this protest wave to revolutionary moments from the early 2010s, the 1980s, the 1960s, and earlier eras. Smith and Wiest (2012: 9) noted that the capacities and strength of social movements have expanded over time, while both keen class struggles seem to have almost *disappeared*, and labor unrests apparently *declined* in most regions of the world.¹ Then, can we expect an increase in the number of larger labor movements in the future?

This study explores the world-historical trajectory and contour of labor movements in the global South during the long twentieth century. Although some labor struggles across the global South focused mostly on local issues, the ultimate cause of their grievances could be traced to the context of the global political economy, and these protests are likely to strengthen movements for change in the global context. Indeed, worldwide cyclical outbreaks and resurgences of radical mobilization suggest that a common combination of social processes links together labor movements in various locales. However, the literature that studies global patterns and processes of protest waves faces methodological and perceptual limitations.

Examining labor movements from a world-historical perspective offers a means to understand the continuation of struggles and how periods marked by movements are one wave in a longer pattern of resistance. In order to develop an alternative concept in the framework of world-historical struggles, this study brings in a theoretical discussion about the struggles against exploitation beyond intra-national characteristics by analyzing the causes of struggles that are rooted in processes associated with world-historical integration. This study also argues how different topics for struggles appeared in different conditions and historical contexts and shared the common causes that operate and interact with varying historical, economic, and political

¹ According to the World Labor Research Working Group Database (Silver 1995: 172) from the Fernand Braudel Center at Binghamton University, there are two temporal clusters of labor unrests in the global South between 1870 and 1990: the one is from 1925 to 1929, and the other one is from 1946 to 1962.

characteristics within the nation-state vis-à-vis the capitalist world-economy in the world-historical structure.

Indeed, a world-systems perspective has suggested an alternative that discerns a society's resistance to the dominant structure of the global political economy. A world-systems perspective understands social movements as responses to the underlying structures of the world-economy (Amin, Arrighi, Frank, and Wallerstein 1990: 10-11). A world-systems perspective also argues that various linked struggles have transformed the structure of the world-economy (Boswell and Chase-Dunn 2000: xi). Besides, to demonstrate the explanatory strength of a holistic methodology, a world-systems perspective provides useful conceptual tools to critically analyze economic, political, and cultural realities in the global South (Tamdgidi 2001: 301). This work, thus, can provide valuable insight into understanding how radical social movements have been structured historically and globally. In particular, the idea of *antisystemic movements* provides a broad world-historical perspective on the character and transformation of social and labor movements that goes beyond the individual nation-state and incorporates both national and global transitions.

By employing the idea of antisystem movements, I will critically discuss the characteristics of labor movements as antisystemic movements of the global South and their revolutionary potentials to change the structure of the capitalist world-economy and the dominant hegemonic order. This discussion leads to the following research questions: 1) Did popular struggles against exploitation appear in clusters of time? 2) Could the wave of struggles be distinguished by the zone of the world-economy, region, and country? 3) What were the global dynamics making the long-term waves of struggles on a world scale?

Struggles against Exploitation in the Capitalist World-Economy

Labor Movements as Antisystemic Movements

Wallerstein (1984: 20-21; 1990: 23) earlier claimed that social movements organize with two main issues in two different regions of the capitalist world-economy: the *social* movement around “class” largely in core countries and the *national* movement around “nation” or “people” in largely

peripheral countries.² According to Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein (1989: 30), the *social* movement primarily defines the relations of employers over wage earners, or the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. Wallerstein (1990: 23) introduced the idea that the *social* movements began “as structures whose political bases were in the industrial proletariat and which later extended their bases of support by appealing to the anticapitalist (and in non-core countries anti-imperialist) sentiments of the broad masses of the population.” Arrighi (2004: 80) also argued that the *social* movements define oppression through class relations and aim to replace capitalism with socialism. For Wallerstein (2004: 91), the *social* movements shared some critical logics, and both represented massive resistance to the existing structure of the capitalist world-economy.³

Wallerstein, thus, invented the concept of *antisystemic movements* to cover the *social* movements. Antisystemic movements have been used as a key concept in world-systems analysis to explain the struggles that engage and oppose the dominant structure of the capitalist world-economy. Antisystemic movements include a diverse family of social movements that work to advance greater *liberty* and *equality* and they occur “in the *same period* and they share some *common ideological themes* that set them apart from earlier varieties of antisystemic movements” in the world-historical dynamics and context (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989: 35). According to Wallerstein (1990: 36), “to be antisystemic is to argue that neither liberty nor equality is possible under the existing system and that both are possible only in a transformed world.” Furthermore, what will be particularly crucial is how diverse antisystemic movements affect each other and interact with the structures that they are individually and collectively

² This study distinguishes between “social movement” and “*social* movement”: the former refers to general social movements which we have used in social movement studies, and the latter refers to the social movements specified in the definition of “*social* movement” in the analysis of antisystemic movement.

³ Both kinds of social movements parallel the historical debate between traditional-Marxists and neo-Marxists (Glassman 2006: 609). On the one hand, for more traditional Marxists, the most progressive struggles against capitalism were those of industrial workers in the global North. On the other hand, for neo-Marxists, the ongoing character of primitive accumulation outside of the global North implied that peripheral struggles against imperialism provide the main axis of progressive social transformation (Glassman 2006: 622). Glassman (2006: 614) argued that “the debate has often taken the form of an insistence by neo-Marxists that Marxists are too narrow and doctrinaire in their conception of revolutionary subjects and an insistence by Marxists that neo-Marxist are often backward-looking or even reactionary in their choice of revolutionary actors and social projects.”

decomposing and transforming (Dickinson and Schaeffer 2001: 281-282).

Notwithstanding these theoretical contributions, the concept of antisystemic movements has a theoretical vulnerability: *ambiguity*. This conceptual weakness derives from largely focusing on the *outcomes* of antisystemic movements rather than on the *social* characteristics in the *process* of antisystemic movements. According to Arrighi (2004: 80), the *social* characteristics of antisystemic movements had the acquisition of state power as their primary objective and the ending of class as the long-term objective despite differences in the social basis of their support (see also Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989: 31-32). In order to respond to the shortcomings of the antisystemic movement concept's overemphasis on the *outcome* of movements, we need to draw on a new theoretical approach that concentrates on the *process* of movements.

The alternative approach must deal with what kind of *social* characteristics are present in mobilizations located in different countries and regions that are linked to each other by the world-scale structure. In particular, this study attempts to develop a more *comprehensive* and *inclusive* concept that focuses on the primary theme of *social* movements, *exploitation*, to examine the nature of antisystemic movements. In this alternative analysis, the *social* characteristics of antisystemic movements can be explained by the concept of "struggles against exploitation." Struggles against exploitation challenge the processes of exploitation in the capitalist world-economy. According to Arrighi (1990: 16-17), the processes of exploitation refer to the fact that the poverty of regions in the global South continually induces their dominant political and economic ruling groups to participate in the world-historical division of labor in pursuit of marginal rewards that reap the bulk of benefits to the dominant ruling groups in the semiperipheral and peripheral regions. Processes of exploitation provide core regions and their agents in the semiperipheral and peripheral regions with the means to initiate the processes of exclusion. These struggles mobilize people to demand an end to their economic grievances through protest against their absolute or relative poverty and against austerity.

Exploitation in Capitalism and the Class Struggle

Traditional Marxist theory focuses on exploitation and oppression in class relations as the major engine that drives class struggle and leads movements toward the revolutionary transformation of

society (Murphy 1985: 225). *The Communist Manifesto* started with the declaration: “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” Marx and Engels contended that class struggles had become the distinguishing feature of capitalist society. The Marxist conception of exploitation is based on the proposition that labor creates value in the fabrication of commodities (see Marx 1990; 1992). In a capitalist society, the appropriation of surplus-value based on unpaid surplus labor by capitalists from workers is what constitutes exploitation. In the Marxist studies of exploitation, surplus-value is understood to have been created from social formations and formed at the expense of the working-class (Murphy 1985: 232; see Mandel 1975). This relationship has been more severe in the global South. According to Amin (1974: 24), “the contradiction is not between the bourgeois and the proletariat of each country, but between the world bourgeoisie and the world proletariat. The world bourgeoisie and the world proletariat have existed in a context not of the capitalist mode of production but of the system of capitalist formations.” Indeed, the exploitation of workers in the capitalist world-economy has been the exploitation of non-waged workers in the global South. Therefore, the proletariat of the global South suffers an increasing degree of exploitation when compared to the proletariat in the global North (Amin 1974: 25).

Boswell and Chase-Dunn (2000) distinguished capitalist exploitation through three societal causes: class exploitation, income inequality, and economic crises. Boswell and Chase-Dunn (2000: 52) argued that “exploitation, inequality, and economic crisis incite rebellious grievances from those seeking a larger share and more equitable distribution of income. The aggrieved also may struggle for more control over their working conditions and those features of the system that are thought to cause their deprivation.” Traditional Marxist theory focuses on the class relations of exploitation and oppression as the major motive for the social movements that emerge and develop through class conflicts and struggles. The process of exploitation under capitalism eventually leads to conflict between capital vis-à-vis labor, not only in the global North but also in the global South (Berberoglu 2019: 67-68).

Exploitation and Exclusion in Anti-colonial Struggles on Marxist Perspective

As in traditional Marxism, the only social movements that accomplish fundamental social

transformation are class-based social movements. However, Wallerstein (1995: 215) argued that the idea that the conflict between capital and labor is fundamental and that other conflicts based on gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality are all secondary is a long-lasting *Eurocentric* position. In the Marxist perspective, *oppression* is a class-based concept, and resistance to oppression should only exist in class relations. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1961) attempted to challenge Marx's theory from the context of the global South in order to explore the potential for mobilization against oppression. According to Fanon (1961: 102), the development of advanced Western capitalism is based on the exploitation of the global South, such that the unique characteristics of advanced capitalism cannot be separated from colonization. To Fanon (1961: 61), a revolutionary agent is not "exploited" as a proletariat but is "excluded" as a peasant or lumpenproletariat. Unlike industrial workers in advanced capitalism, peasants are the most marginalized and oppressed class in the global South. Peasants and unwaged laborers in the informal sector are *excluded* from the dominant relations of production in the colonial situation. That is, rather than focusing on the exploited, Fanon highlighted the revolutionary potential of the excluded. Further, Fanon argued that Marx's theory is vulnerable to critiques of the Eurocentric theory of revolution and claimed that Europe is no longer the center of the world revolution. According to Fanon (1961: 253), Marx's perspective underestimated the revolutionary potential of the global South and, counter to Marx's prediction, the twentieth century was the age of ethno-nationalist revolutions in the colonial world, rather than revolutionary class struggles in the advanced capitalist world.

Many anti-colonial struggles in the twentieth century employed the Marxist perspective. As for Marx, the basic idea of colonialism could be traced to *the German Ideology*: "... above all the extension of markets into a world market, which had now become possible and was daily becoming more and more a fact, called forth a new phase of historical development, into which in general we cannot here enter further. Through the colonization of the newly discovered countries, the commercial struggle of the nations amongst one another was given new fuel and accordingly greater extension and animosity" (see Tucker 1978: 182). Marx was apparently aware of the new phase of capitalist expansion to the global South. Additionally, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx pointed out national liberation as an outcome of the end of exploitation (Tucker 1978: 488-489):

“in proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within a nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.” Kautsky (1975) also argued that imperialism should be understood not as rivalry between the capitalist countries, but as a form of relationship between the advanced capitalist countries and the underdeveloped countries. Marxists gradually became aware of the significance of the subjective conditions for the creation of a revolutionary situation in the global South and, thus, pragmatically modified Marxist theory to suit the colonial context (Young 2001: 6). In conclusion, a Marxist analysis argues that the relation of domination and exploitation has become the means through which to reflect the whole basis of the historical power relationship between the core and the periphery.

Material Hardship and Struggles against Austerity

The Marxist category of “surplus population” is essential to Marx’s discussion of the general law of capitalist accumulation and the idea of the “industrial reserve army.” In Marx’s analysis, wages are exclusively managed through the expansion of the industrial reserve army. Marx did not separate the production of the surplus population from the production of regular workers. This is why we need a broader category to analyze the process of exploitation of not only industrial workers, but labor relations writ large. Jameson (2011: 151) concurred with Marx’s assertion that “we need to think of unemployment as a category of exploitation and not just as a precarious status or a separate situation about the exploitation of the salariat.” For Jameson (2009: 576), the excluded cannot be isolated from the “structural necessity for capitalism to create a reserve army of the unemployed and to exclude whole sections of society.” The categories of the unemployed and the precarious have been the centerpiece of capitalist labor relations. In Harvey’s view (2012: xiv), “the so-called ‘precariat’ has displaced the traditional ‘proletariat’” and “if there is to be any revolutionary movement in our times, at least our part of the world, ... the problematic and disorganized ‘precariat’ must be reckoned with.” Munck (2013: 757), from a global South perspective, suggested that the concept of precarity should be understood as part of the broader process of dispossession and the generation of new surplus populations. Therefore, the focus of

exploitation in late capitalism needs to shift toward questions of economic hardship and austerity.

Economic disadvantages such as poverty, inequality, material hardship, debt, and austerity are an ongoing manifestation in the countries and regions of the global South. Material hardship is partially derived from the longstanding inequality of the capitalist world-economy (Shefner, Rowland, and Pasdirtz 2015: 464-465). Marx's analysis of class exploitation has been extended to explain protests during economic crises in the global South. The appropriation of surplus-value from the global South by the core regions is a crucial expression of the hierarchy of power in the capitalist world-economy and results in material hardships. In particular, globalization processes serve as the catalysts for many social and political protests in the global South. Each of the national revolts and uprisings began in response to the methods of primitive accumulation and were further nurtured by the increasing disruption caused by economic reorganization for the ends of dependent capitalism (Walton 1984: 29). Anti-globalization riots in the global South are clear examples that show how socioeconomic contexts manifest in popular struggles against exploitation. Through the analysis of four semiperipheral countries in Latin America, Shefner, Rowland, and Pasdirtz (2015) also demonstrated a clear link between material hardship and popular protest and examined how globalization, political opening, and long-term hardship can lead to the occurrence of protest in the global South (see also Shefner, Pasdirtz, and Blad 2006).

Neoliberalism has also affected not only the traditional urban and rural laborers but also a wide variety of subordinate groups. Almeida and Johnston (2006: 3) singled out some of the grievance neoliberalism, such as "rising costs of living, cuts in social services, informalization and fragmentation of national economies, ponderous foreign debt, hyper-urbanization, low wages, harsh working conditions, and insecure employment in newly privatized enterprises and export processing zones." Thus, social movements in the global South, especially Latin America, have emerged in response to poverty and austerity under neoliberalism. Resistance has been carried out not only by labor unrest but also by subordinate groups excluded by neoliberal policies and against neoliberal social changes (Silva 2009: 26; see also Abouharb and Cingranelli 2007; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003; Veltmeyer and Petras 2000; Walton 1989; Walton and

Ragin 1990; Walton and Shefner 1994).

Extra-Economic Coercion and Struggles against Dispossession

According to Harvey (2003), Marx's description of "primitive" accumulation describes a wide range of processes. Harvey, thus, asserted that it is better to use the term "accumulation by dispossession." Harvey (2005: 160-165) provided four general types of processes that count as accumulation by dispossession: privatization and commodification of previously non-commodified assets; financialization; the management and manipulation of crises; and state redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich. According to Harvey (2003: 145), accumulation by dispossession has historically taken many different forms: "the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of various forms of property rights into exclusive private property rights; the suppression of rights to the commons; the commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial and neo-colonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); the monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; and the national debt and ultimately the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation." In Harvey's view (2003: 153, 172), the crisis caused by declining profitability that marks post-1970s capitalism has increased the intensity of accumulation by dispossession as a strategy, and while accumulation by dispossession has always been an aspect of the broader process of capital accumulation, in neoliberalism it has moved from the background to become the dominant form of accumulation. That is, as Levien (2011: 457) put it, accumulation by dispossession has been used as an "*extra-economic* coercion to expropriate means of subsistence, production, or common social wealth for capital accumulation."

The significance of Harvey's reconstruction of primitive accumulation is its attempt to explain the contemporary upsurge in political and social struggles centered on the dispossession of land rather than the exploitation of labor (Burawoy 2010: 309; Levien 2012: 938). Harvey (2005: 203) argued that social movements have appeared bifurcated between "mobilizations around protection" and "mobilizations around accumulation by dispossession." While mobilizations around protection are against "the exploitation of wage labor and conditions

defining the social wage are the central issue,” mobilizations around accumulation by dispossession include “resistance to classic forms of primitive accumulation (such as displacement of peasant populations from the land); to the brutal withdrawal of the state from all social obligations (except surveillance and policing); to practices destructive of cultures, histories, and environments, and the confiscatory deflations and inflations wrought by the contemporary forms of finance capital in alliance with the state.” In particular, resistance to the expulsion and displacement of populations due to large-scale land grabs, land enclosures, and development projects demonstrates how peasants as political subjects unfold their struggles against diverse processes of accumulation by dispossession in the global South (see Borras and Franco 2013; Hall, Edelman, Borras, Scoones, White, and Wolford 2015; Martiniello 2019). Harvey’s reconstruction of primitive accumulation is thus an attempt to explain the contemporary upsurge in political and social struggles centered on the dispossession of land rather than on the exploitation of labor (Burawoy 2010: 309; Levien 2012: 938; see also Hall 2013).

Furthermore, according to Rojas (2010: 337-341), struggles for land extend to the struggles for territory, referring to entire public domains, especially in Latin America. These new struggles for land and territory are being developed by new anticapitalistic and antisystemic movements in the global South. Thus, these new antisystemic struggles for land and territory are “always being reframed and integrated within the more global struggles against the capitalist system as a whole.” In addition, Shin (2013: 1170) argued that struggles against dispossession that involve the marginalized urban population in solidarity with conventional class-based labor movements strive “to secure access not only to urban space but also to political space while being sensitive to specific urban socio-political, economic, and institutional contexts” in the global South (see Dikeç 2001: 1790).

As a result, struggles against exploitation, which have emerged in the global South by mobilizing a wide range of subordinate groups, have been a response to and a rejection of the forms of exploitation and dispossession, material hardship and austerity, and poverty and inequality (Motta and Nilsen 2011: 2). To summarize the general contention about primitive accumulation, we can conclude that “the heterogeneity and geographical-historical complexity that ongoing primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, and accumulation by extra-

economic means lead to social struggles over capitalist development seem to pose severe challenges for social movements” (Glassman 2006: 622). Rojas (2010, 341) concludes that new antisystemic struggles against dispossession are “always being reframed and integrated within the more global struggles against the capitalist system as a whole.” These new struggles against dispossession are, thus, being developed by new anticapitalist and antisystemic movements in the global South.

World-Historical Trajectory and Contour of Struggles against Exploitation

Struggles against Exploitation and Protest Waves

From previous empirical studies on labor unrest on a world scale (Silver 1995, 2003), we could affirm several temporal and spatial clusters of labor unrest called strike waves. I also propose that antisystemic struggles in the global South have been concentrated in key protest waves across time and space (see Jung 2023). To map out the world-historical activities of struggles against exploitation in the global South, I use the dataset of protest events spanning forty-three countries and regions in the global South compiled from *The New York Times* between 1870 and 2016 (for a brief description of the dataset and country/region list, see Table 1.).⁴ Since *The New York Times* provides the greatest coverage of protest events in the global South, for the covered period, the dataset mostly includes reports of major labor unrests, strikes, and workers’

⁴ The protest event has to meet several criteria in order to be reflected in the protest event dataset. First, a protest event is observed by searching for one or more of the following keywords from the titles (headlines) of articles in the newspaper: *protest; rally; revolt; rebel; riot; demonstration; uprising; unrest; strike; and boycott*. These ten keywords are the most frequently used and reliable terms to report actual protest events in newspaper articles. Second, a searched article refers to an actual protest event, not a plan or plot to stage a protest event. Third, protest participants have certain claims or grievances against specified targets. Fourth, it is bounded by physical space and time. That is, protest events occur in a specific location during a limited time. Fifth, a protest event excludes any event and activity primarily organized by governments and other state authorities. Sixth, albeit most protest event analyses exclude protest events that engage less than two people, this study includes any protest event regardless of the number of participants. Seventh, most protest event analyses only include protest events that occur in public space and exclude protest events that are not open to the public. However, in this study, the place or physical setting of protest events is not restricted. In sum, a protest event can be defined as an individual or a collective action by a non-governmental actor(s) who claims certain social, political, or economic demands or expresses criticism and discontent against particular targets at a designated time and location.

movements and demonstrations in the global South.⁵ Although the frequency of protest events in the dataset is not an *actual* population of protest events in the global South, it is at least a highly representative sample of protests, approximately parallel to the overall picture of struggles against exploitation in the global South.

Table 1. Brief Description of the Dataset

Dataset	<i>World-Historical Protest Events in the Global South: Struggles against Exploitation</i>
Period of Analysis	January 1, 1870 – December 31, 2016
Newspaper Database	ProQuest Historical Newspapers: <i>The New York Times</i>
Number of Protest Events	4,325
Country/Region (43)	<i>Asia</i> (10): China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam <i>The Middle East and North Africa</i> (11): Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey <i>Africa</i> (5): Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Sudan <i>Eastern Europe</i> (8): Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine <i>Latin America</i> (9): Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela

One of the most striking findings of the empirical investigation is the identification of four *greater* waves of struggles against exploitation in the global South. Overall, empirical investigations reveal *temporal* and *spatial* clusters of struggles against exploitations across the global South in four key epochs: 1918-22, 1928-38, 1945-66, and 1980-90 (see Figure 1. and Table 2.). The first protest wave of struggles against exploitation began in 1918 after the Russian Revolution and ended in 1922. The second protest wave sparked in 1928 with the beginning of the Great Depression, reached its peak in 1934 and finished by the late 1930s. The third protest wave, for the emancipation of colonized countries and regions after the Second World War, began in

⁵ The major issues of struggles against exploitation are economic exploitation, material hardship and austerity, economic distribution and inequality, and extra-economic coercion and dispossession. Acts of resistance are categorized by workers, the precariat, the urban poor, and peasants. In the protest events in this category, as Silver (2003: 184) pointed out in the empirical study, “many of these acts of resistance are easily identifiable as labor unrest because the actors themselves openly declare that they demand to challenge and/or contain exploitation.” In particular, a certain type of protest – the strike – combined with certain kinds of issues – wages, employment, prices, working conditions, or economic hardship – can easily single out protest events as struggles against exploitation. A struggle against exploitation is generally an act of direct inter-class struggle such as labor against capital. However, a struggle against exploitation is sometimes an act against the state as an intermediary or agent of capital (Silver 2003: 187).

1945 and lasted until the mid-1960s. Finally, the fourth protest wave unfolded across the 1980s.

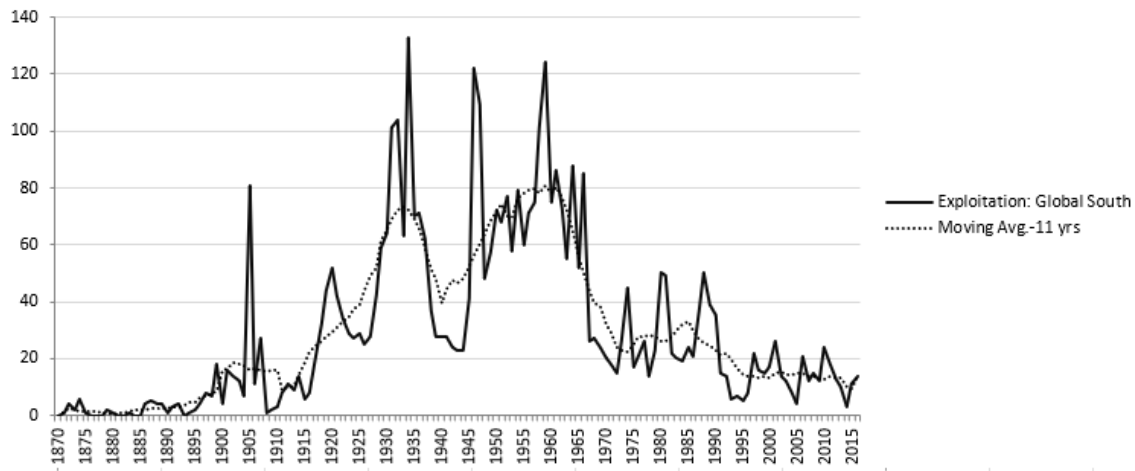


Figure 1. Struggles against Exploitation in the Global South, 1870-2016

Table 2. Four Protest Waves in the Struggles against Exploitation, 1870-2016

Protest Waves	The Late 1910s	The 1930s	The Long 1950s	The 1980s
Year	1918-22	1928-38	1945-1966	1980-90
Duration	5 years	11 years	22 years	11 years
Frequency of Protest Events	204	806	1,676	366
Annual Average of Protest Event	41	73	76	33
Peak Years	1920	1934	1946, 1959	1980, 1981, 1988
Key Countries	Russia, Mexico	Mexico, Cuba	Argentina, India	Poland, South Africa

Struggles against Exploitation and Regional Dynamics

Empirical investigation shows that struggles against exploitation between 1870 and 2016 in the global South were dominantly concentrated on Latin America at the share of 55.1 percent (see Table 3. and Figure 2.). Five of the top eight countries that featured struggles against exploitation were located in Latin America: Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, and Chile. Two countries, Poland and Russia, are in Eastern Europe, and one country, India, is in Asia (see Table 4.). The countries/regions in Eastern Europe (e.g., Russia and Poland) and Latin America (e.g., Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Chile, and Peru), which have been independent or became independent long before the countries/regions in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa, had experienced earlier gradual incorporation into the capitalist world-economy that aimed to develop and industrialize in the regions. These earlier incorporations created the region's

persistently subordinate position in the capitalist world-economy. Domestic development and industrialization became a contentious point between the state-capital alliance and the worker-student solidarity movement in these regions, which historically hosted strong labor organizations and higher participation rates in labor organizations.

Table 3. Rate of the Struggle against Exploitation by Region, 1870-2016

Region	Asia (10)	MENA (11)	Africa (5)	Eastern Europe (8)	Latin America (9)	Total
Frequency	910	176	192	666	2,381	4,325
Rate (%)	21.0	4.1	4.4	15.4	55.1	100.0

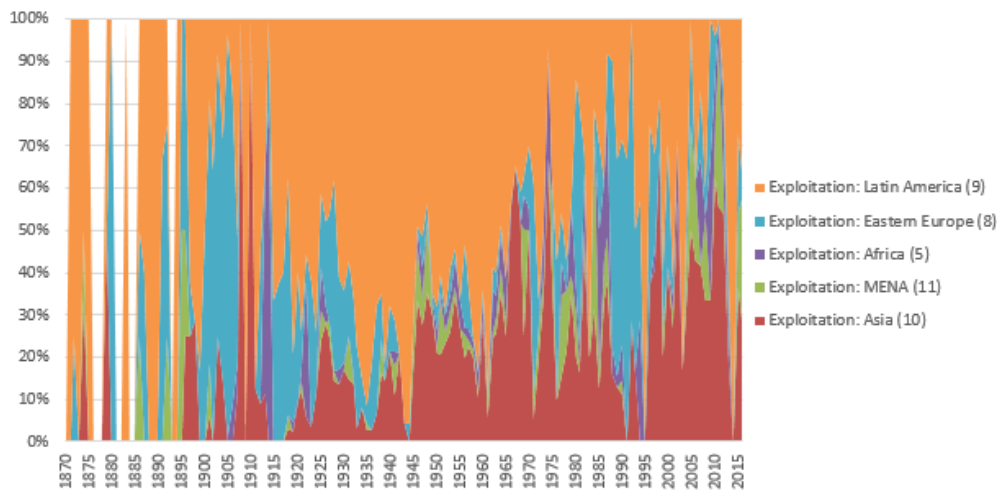


Figure 2. Regional Distribution of Struggles against Exploitation in the Global South, 1870-2016

Table 4. Top Countries/Regions of Struggles against Exploitation, 1870-2016

Country/Region	Frequency	Rate (%)	Region	Zone of the World-Economy
Mexico	572	13.2	Latin America	Semiperiphery
Argentina	526	12.2	Latin America	Semiperiphery
India	457	10.5	Asia	Semiperiphery
Cuba	366	8.5	Latin America	Periphery-Semiperiphery-Periphery
Brazil	315	7.3	Latin America	Semiperiphery
Chile	284	6.6	Latin America	Periphery-Semiperiphery
Poland	264	6.1	Eastern Europe	Semiperiphery
Russia	205	4.7	Eastern Europe	Semiperiphery

Looking at four protest waves of struggles against exploitation (see Figure 3.), Latin America and Eastern Europe were two major regions in the protest wave in the late 1910s, with

62.7 percent and 23.0 percent, respectively. In the second protest wave in the 1930s, Latin America dominantly shared struggles against exploitation at 70.7 percent. In the long 1950s, two major regions, Latin America and Asia, were at 62.1 percent and 25.7 percent, respectively. Lastly, in the third protest that persisted across the entire 1980s, struggles against exploitation were quite well distributed in all five regions in the global South: Eastern Europe, 37.2 percent; Latin America, 24.6 percent; Asia, 21.6 percent; Africa, 10.4 percent; and the Middle East and North Africa, 6.3 percent.

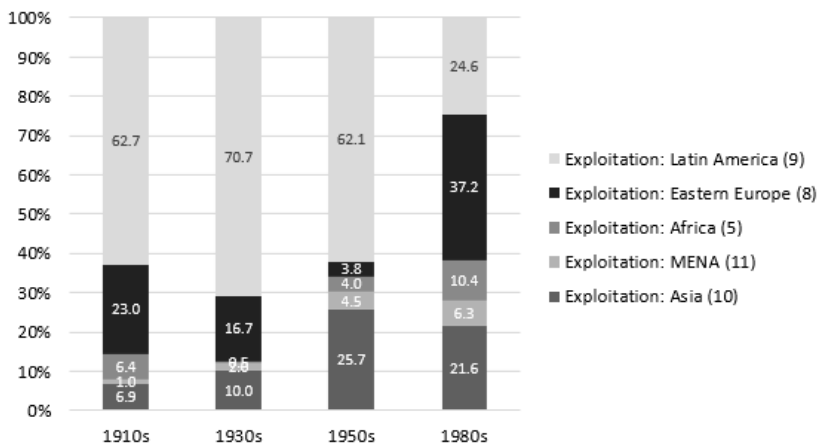


Figure 3. Regional Share of Struggles against Exploitation by the Protest Wave

Indeed, struggles against exploitation in Latin America have included: opposition to budget cuts in public services including education, health, and utilities; demands for improvements in job securities, wages, and working conditions; demands for agrarian and land reform from farmers and indigenous people; claims for affordable food, fuel, utilities, and public service prices; and denouncements of inequalities in income and wealth as well as low living standards at large. The frequent target of struggles against exploitation in Latin America has been the state and inadequate economic systems. In particular, the majority of protests have demanded that governments take responsibility for economic policies. A large number of labor disputes have also pressured employers and corporations for higher wages and better working conditions (see Eckstein 2001; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003; Johnston and Almeida 2006).

Struggles against Exploitation and the Capitalist World-Economy

The compiled world-historical activities of struggles against exploitation in the global South show dynamic fluctuation in both semiperiphery and periphery over the long twentieth century (see Figure 4. and Figure 5.). Empirical investigations reveal that between 1870 and 2016, struggles against exploitation mainly occurred in the semiperipheral countries/regions, 79.7 percent, rather than in the peripheral regions, 20.3 percent (see Table 5.). This means that the political role of the semiperiphery within the structure of the world-system has most likely been a *revolutionary space* (see Chase-Dunn 1988, 1990, 1998). This claim can be more clearly discerned when the data for the zone of the world-economy of the top countries/regions in struggles against exploitation have been searched (see Table 4).

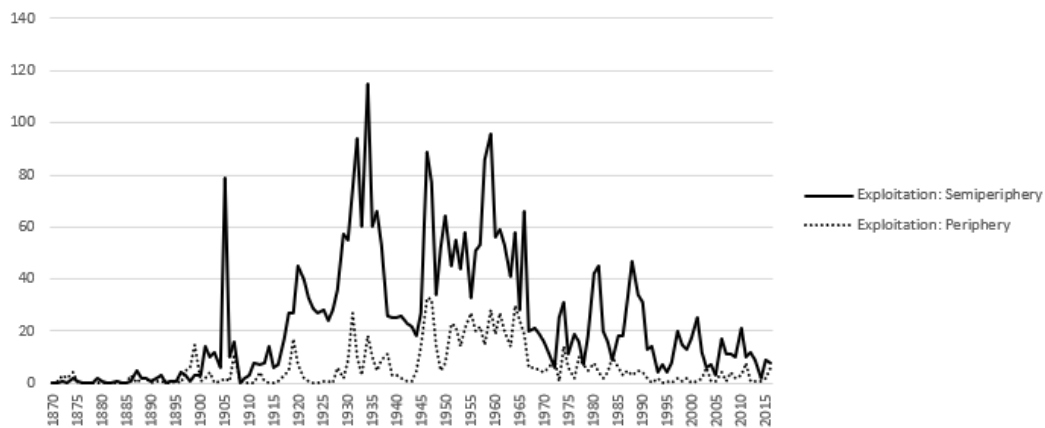


Figure 4. Struggles against Exploitation by Zone of the World-Economy, 1870-2016

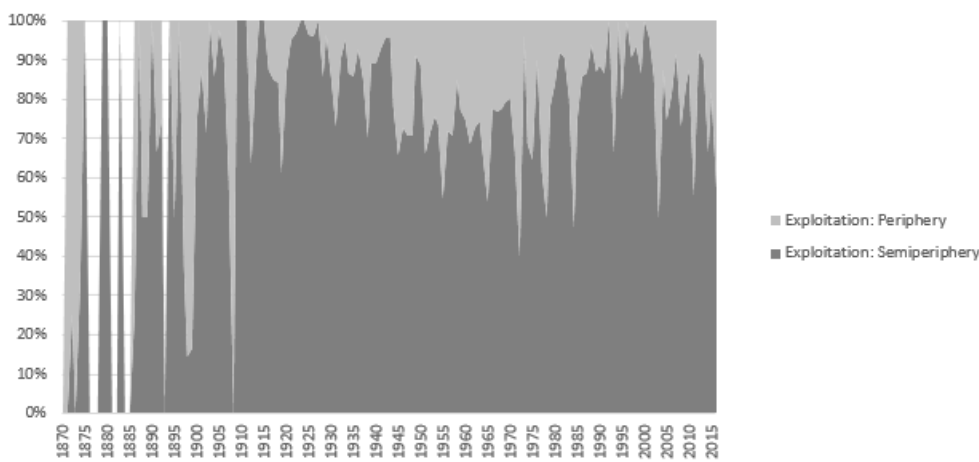


Figure 5. Share of Struggles against Exploitation by Zone of the World-Economy, 1870-2016

Table 5. Rate of the Struggle against Exploitation by Zone of the World-Economy, 1870-2016

Zone of the World-Economy		Frequency	Rate (%)
Semiperiphery		3,448	79.7
Periphery		877	20.3
Semiperiphery	Core-Contenders	1,277	29.5
	Upper-tier Semiperiphery	2,171	50.2
Periphery	Strong Periphery	773	17.9
	Weak Periphery	104	2.4

Note: A more *diversified* set of categorization – *core*, *core-contenders*, *upper-tier semiperiphery*, *strong periphery*, *weak periphery*, and *weakest periphery* – distinguished from the conventional tri-modal structure – *core*, *semiperiphery*, and *periphery* – of the world-economy, suggested by the latest network analysis in world-systems studies (Mahutga 2014; Mahutga and Smith 2011). For the classification of countries by zone of the world-economy, see Jung (2024).

In particular, the upper-tier semiperiphery took a central place during the period of the first three protest waves, the late 1910s, the 1930s, and the long 1950s. Since the 1970s, the core-contenders have increased the share of struggles against exploitation and dominated the fourth protest wave of the 1980s (see Figure 6). The picture can provide a clear picture of how to relate the upward mobility of the countries and regions in the capitalist world-economy and their struggles against exploitation: a great massive upward mobility in the second half of the twentieth century is connected to two great protest waves of struggles against exploitation in the semiperiphery in the long 1950s and the 1980s.

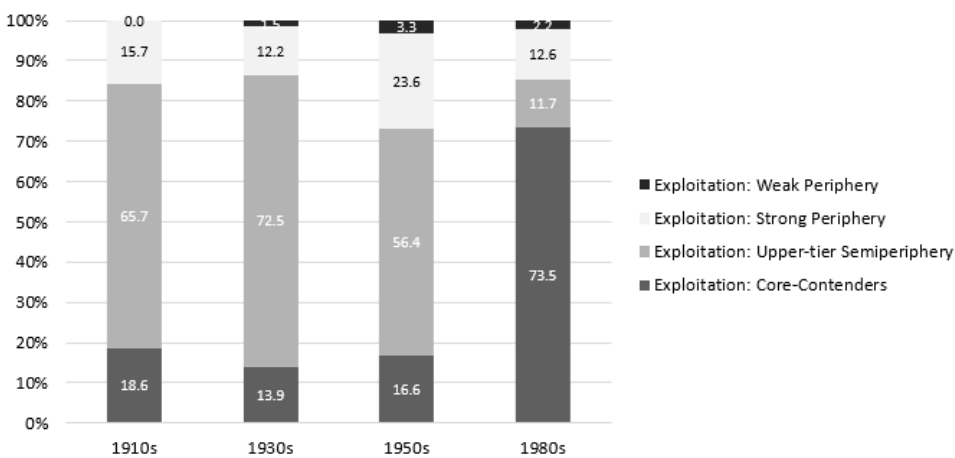


Figure 6. Share of the Diversified Zone of the World-Economy in Struggles against Exploitation by the Protest Wave

Furthermore, a brief linear correlation also shows that countries with a closer position to the core zone of the capitalist world-economy experienced higher frequencies of struggles against exploitation than other countries/regions in the global South over the long twentieth century (Figure 7.).

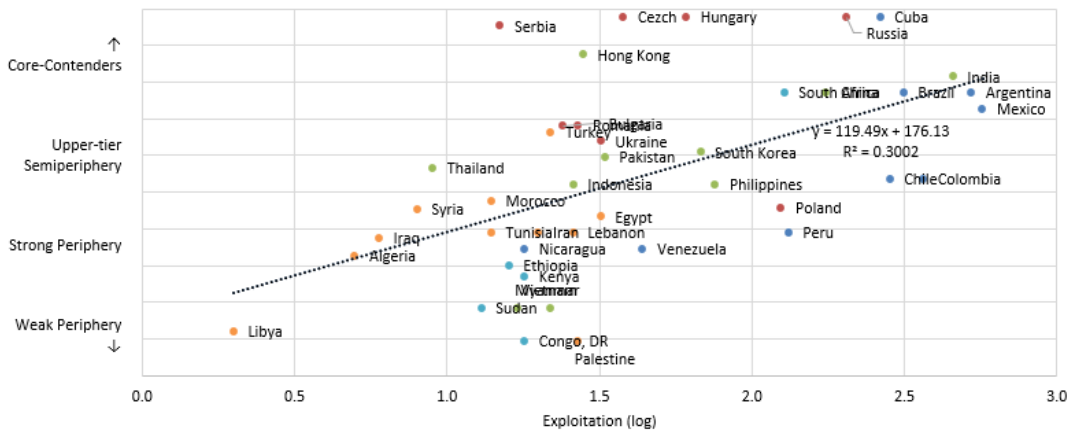


Figure 7. Correlation between Struggle against Exploitation by Zone of the World-Economy, 1870-2016

Struggles against Exploitation in Perspective

Over the long twentieth century, struggles against exploitation in the global South have unfolded as antisystemic movements against the dominant structure of the capitalist world-economy. Struggles against exploitation in the capitalist world-economy that originated from exploitation and class struggle have encompassed struggles against austerity, including fights against material hardship, and have extended into struggles against dispossession as part of a new wave of antisystemic movements. According to empirical investigation, the number of struggles against exploitation had been consistently increasing at the beginning of the long twentieth century, reached its peak period in the middle of the twentieth century, and started to decline since the second half of the twentieth century. These empirical findings of this study do *not* support the arguments that while capitalist contradictions remain unresolved, labor unrest continues in both the global North and South (Silver 2003) and, further, workers and workers' movements "will continue to play a central role in twenty-first-century global capitalism" (Silver 2014: 47), particularly in the global South.

Overlooking struggles against exploitation in the *longue durée*, they have articulated solid

relations and formed a global response to the capitalist world-system. The polarization of income levels among the zones of the world-economy in the global South started in the mid-1970s and has accelerated since the mid-1990s (see Figure 7.). The epicenter of struggles against exploitation had shifted from the upper-tier semiperiphery to the core-contender in the global semiperiphery through the massive protests in the 1980s. The rapid divergence of income levels among the zones of the world-economy and, especially, the rise of the core-contenders group in the global South have led *paradoxically* to an overall decrease in global inequality during the period since 1990.⁶ Struggles against exploitation then drastically disappeared.

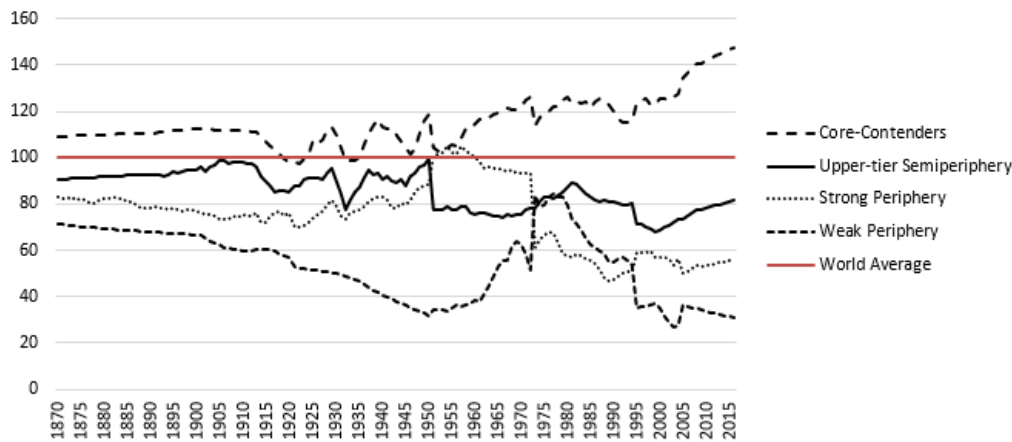


Figure 8. Income Level by Zone of the World-Economy, 1870-2016

Data Source: GDP per Capita (2011 US Dollar) from *Maddison Project Database* (Bolt et al., 2018).

The strength and persistence of struggles against exploitation in the global South have overall *weakened* and *declined* over the second half of the long twentieth century. Adopting a traditional understanding of class politics, this seems likely – people with higher incomes became more conservative – during a period of crisis in U.S. hegemony (Lipset 1960; Butler and Stokes 1974). Based on the empirical findings, this analysis could pose the following questions: Can we expect an increase in the number of larger labor movements in the future? Can struggles against exploitation transform the dominant capitalist world-economy in the future as they did in the

⁶ The average decrease in global inequality between-country is mainly due to the remarkable economic growth of China and India, which have the two largest populations and have experienced rapid economic development over the past several decades (see Firebaugh and Goesling, 2004; Hung and Kucinskas, 2011).

past?

We are witnessing that there is a growing possibility of an end to capitalist globalization as we know it. Centrist (neo-) liberalism as an ideology has run out of life, and globalism is now being adjusted to what we call 'deglobalization' as a result of broader geopolitical and geo-economic changes (see Bello 2013: 273-275). We are currently facing another period of rising outrage and discontent. Here is our dilemma in struggles against exploitation in perspective: the global epicenter of counter-hegemonic forces has disappeared in the global South. The core-contenders in the global semiperiphery have emerged as a revolutionary space in the era of deglobalization, but the revolutionary capacity is limited. One hundred seventy-five years ago, "workers of the world had nothing to lose but their chains." Nowadays, workers of the world have so many things to lose.

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