

GETTING READY FOR THE DARK AGES?

Preppers, Populists and Climate Prophets:
The Disintegration of Global Hegemony, PC
Hysteria and the Deplorable Ugliness of Decline



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Scenario

We have been writing about hegemonic decline and its social and cultural consequences since the 1970s. Well, it appears increasingly that there was something to our arguments, as dystopic as they may have sounded.

Below we discuss the way people react in situations of global crisis using a number of cases and focusing specifically on Sweden, a country that was seen as a paragon of the well-functioning welfare state based on a strong sense of belonging and trust in social institutions. If this is no longer the case it is due to a historical context that we can refer to as declining global hegemony, outlined in short order as follows: declining global hegemony of the West, contracting economy and export of capital to new developing areas of the world, shift from industrial to financial accumulation in old centres, increasing competition between old and new centres, increasing exploitation of natural resources, increasing instability as larger political regimes fracture into

opposing units leading to increasing violence and warfare, mass migration from collapsing peripheries to the old declining centres, growing internal conflict in situations of increasing class polarization and ethnicization, and identity politics becomes generalized. This process began in the late 70s with the decline of modernist ideologies and their replacement with cultural identification (roots, religion, gender etc.) and identity politics. It developed into a double polarization, horizontal between identities and vertical between increasingly wealthy elites and increasingly poor working and former working classes. This was associated with a shift in the dominant mode of thought in which associationism replaced rational argument, i.e. association in time and space to label individuals into new categories that are highly polarized, for example if you are against immigration you are against immigrants and thus a racist. If you have lunch with a racist then you are a racist. This is identity talk, in which the content of the discourse is eclipsed by its social indexical properties, that is, what it tells us about the identity of the interlocutor. The context in which this occurs can be mapped in global terms as shown in Figure 1.1.

Mapping declining hegemony

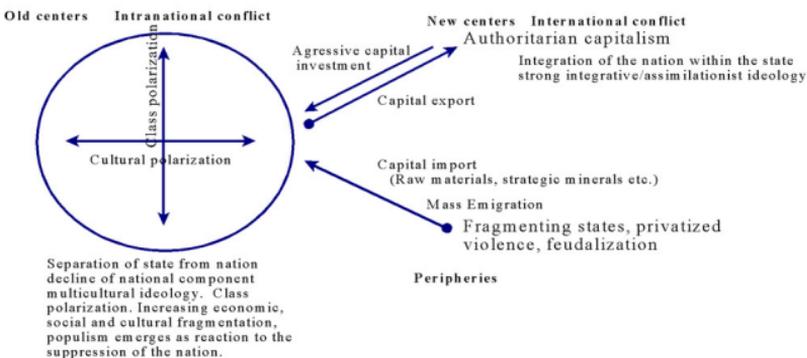


Figure 1.1. Mapping declining hegemony [created by the authors].

Declining hegemony in the centre is expressed in the double polarization depicted in Figure 1.1, a polarization that increases to near hysteria when elites lose control.

When things get bad we get worse. The title of this chapter refers to the reactions of people in the context of interminable decline. It is important to understand this process since it is so clearly human. The famous nineteenth century witchcraft epidemics in Central Africa were triggered by European colonial expansion in the area and the ensuing breakdown of the social order. Instead of resisting the superior power they took it out on themselves and magic became a major instrument of internal self-destruction. Are we so different?

There is some truth, perhaps a lot of truth, to people's irrational reactions. In a recent publication (Friedman 2019) dealing with political correctness it is suggested that the nervousness of elites when they discover that increasing numbers of people are becoming *populist* transforms their disdain into rage, just as populism itself is a form of people's rage against those who they once thought represented them.

Declining hegemony generates global crises that in worst case scenarios lead to global chaos, a likely result of a tightly interdependent global system.

In Sweden!?!?

Yes, as we shall see below, Sweden, has become a target of political discourse, symbol of the failure of social democracy. Since we have published on this since the late 90s there have been numerous publications dealing with a country in deep trouble (Norman 2019) that more than reinforce what we have been describing for a couple of decades. The following will focus very much on Sweden since it exemplifies the extremism of our times.

Throughout Europe there has been a fusion of social democrats and liberals as well as cultural elites more generally, sometimes designated as the *latte left*. This began in the 80s with New Labour, New Democrats, and the Neue Mitte often partaking in *purple* governments (right-left fusion). These elites are increasingly frightened by the rise of the *populists*, subject of innumerable academic conferences, and now they feel the need to crush the enemy in the name of ‘the truth’. They have replaced a declining working class with immigrants as the people to fight for. The epithets are recognizable: in a recent publication (Friedman 2019) the issue of political correctness is analysed in relation to the rise of new liberal elites who identify as cosmopolitans in relation to the declining socio-economic conditions of the working class and their opposition to mass immigration and multicultural politics. This was dealt with by elites through shame tactics until they realized that there were increasing numbers of people who appeared to be populist. So shaming has been replaced by outright war against what are designated as extreme right populism and racism, *terms that have been expanded to encompass all expressions of national sovereignty*. In this mounting struggle against the new populism identified as the new extreme right by ‘respectable’ politicians and liberal-left media, and aided by Soros investments in the demise of the nation (Andrew 2020), there is no intellectual argument. The only intellectual activity would seem to be to find links that enable one to classify the *Other* as evil and dangerous. Thus, populists have become so because some evil people, the nationalists, have fooled them into believing that the world is moving in the wrong direction, i.e.. globalization. Strange party alliances, for example in Sweden between (neo) liberals and social democrats have been established primarily to keep the rising populist party, the Sweden

democrats, out of any positions of power. It is forbidden by many parties to even speak with them ... or at least until recently, when it became apparent that they have become the largest party in the country, in spite of politicians and media bad-talking.

The inescapable issue centres very much on the question of immigration and elite multicultural politics. There are good reasons for this. Mass immigration from the Middle East and Africa has been occurring throughout Europe. This is not the labour migration of the 60s and 70s to an expanding Europe based very much on post-war American capital investment. It is the continued and increased immigration of the mid-eighties until today and in Sweden, as in Germany, it is primarily from crisis areas in the Middle East and Africa. And it is occurring in a Europe in economic decline, not least in the former industrial foundations that have been exported to China, India and so on. Where there is labour migration it is primarily in construction and services and is a question of labour dumping. As the economy has become increasingly based on finance, class relations have become progressively polarized and welfare states cannot function when increasing percentages of the population are not working or working in subsidized employment.¹ Sweden is an ideal typical example of this. It has led to the virtual bankruptcy of a large number of communes. Immigration into declining economies can only lead to polarization and conflict. The emergence of parallel societies and immigrant ghettos has already begun to take its toll. Instead of integration a new underclass has emerged with all the problems that accompany it. Urban violence has reached new highs in Sweden. There are 60 'risk' zones of which 22 are no-go zones substantially controlled by immigrant gangs, where the police have more or less lost control. The traffic in heavy drugs is more or less open,

and sexual violence has escalated. On top of this record numbers of police have quit their jobs. All of this is well known and has been taken up in the international media, but it has been systematically denied by most politicians in Sweden (until recently): ‘repressed’ is the best word. Instead we hear: ‘we have never had it so good’, ‘crime is declining’, . . . until late summer 2019, when panic broke out after the spectacular murder in broad daylight of a woman holding her baby . . . and in a good neighbourhood to boot! This time the crime could not be covered up. Of course the woman’s boyfriend had just completed an eight-year jail sentence and was involved in serious criminal activity. Now the media have become schizophrenic, reporting increasing violence on the one hand and claiming that it is right-wing propaganda on the other. An amusing example of this is an article published in the *New York Times*, a front page article claiming, just as in the US elections of 2016, that Russian influence, hacking and support for extreme right media had led ordinary Swedes to believe that there was a close connection between rapidly increasing violent crime in the country and mass immigration . . . all of this was described as a propaganda campaign meant to exploit fear and maybe coming elections (Becker 2019). The article does admit that there are problems in a country where 25% of the population is of immigrant background (19% first generation in 2018)² but tries to imply that it is all being exploited by Russian agents who pay young immigrants to create trouble. Three internet sites were directly named as complicit in this conspiracy: Samnytt, Nyheter idag and Fria Tider, all alternative news sites that have been critical of accepted or politically correct descriptions of Swedish political reality and the sites were depicted in huge print on an entire page so as to be easily identifiable. This conspiracy, similar to that about ‘Russia

meddling in US elections' blames all alternative interpretations of reality as the work of foreign infiltration.

As the political elites centralize into a purple centrism they continue to use progressive language but have now shifted from class to 'race', especially immigrants and minorities who are now endowed with a 'protected species' identity. The rights of the 'Other' is the new progressive democratic principle while the local/national is relegated to the sphere of reaction. The new opposition is between cosmopolitan elites, 'anywheres' and locals, 'somewheres', as a self-penitent liberal has put it (Goodhart 2017). We interpret this as the outcome of the vertical polarization that accompanies hegemonic decline (Fig.1.1).

Ideological Inversion

In periods of imperial expansion an ideology of domination arises in the form of evolutionism or at least a ranking of peoples in relation to the hegemonic centre. In declines this is often inverted so that all things of the centre are seen negatively. This is documented in Friedman (2019) but it has, as we would expect, become extremist in recent years, in which liberals have become experts in self-hate. Recent polls³ have demonstrated the divergence between extreme white liberals and all other groups in the US, the latter of whom display more positive feelings to other groups than their own. This is a widespread phenomenon referred to below as Occidentalism, the inversion of Orientalism. It has been suggested in the Swedish media and even in parliament that the recent robbery-attacks by gangs of immigrants against kids (förnärdringsrån: 'humiliation-robbery', including pissing in the victims mouth while calling them 'fucking Swedes')⁴ could be labelled racism. The suggestion was rejected by the government.

SAS posted an advertisement on 2 November 2020 featuring ‘what is Scandinavian? Nothing!!’ they took it down after 40,000 hate mails. Liberal media claimed that the hate was all extreme right-wing and orchestrated by Putin.

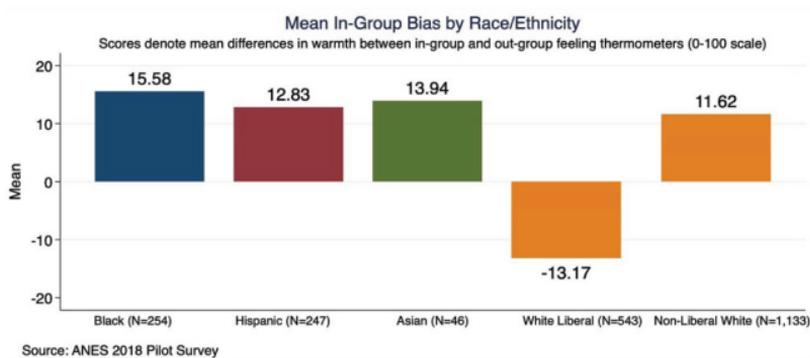


Figure 1.2. Mean in-group bias by race/ethnicity [created by the authors].

Displacement

Just as in the epidemic of witchcraft accusations in late nineteenth century Central Africa, the lack of comprehension of crisis leads to massive displacement of blame.

Part of the displacement process is to take it out on Western white men, especially celebrities. This is an expression of the extremist turn in Occidentalism, i.e. self-hatred of the West. A Frenchman married to a member of the Swedish academy caused a disastrous scandal in 2018 when he was accused publicly of sexual harassment by 16 women, apparently related to an internal power conflict in the academy. The alleged rape occurred some 15 years ago with a woman who had already had sex with him several times, and who accused him of not stopping the oral sex that she initiated following intercourse when she changed her mind. The events were of course related to the ‘MeToo’

movement and the Frenchman was clearly a distasteful individual. There was no material evidence and in Sweden it is very difficult to make rape charges stick, but the court loved the case and said overtly that the plaintiff's recounting of the facts was absolutely trustworthy. Several other media personalities were also accused of sexual abuse, cases that filled the media at the same time as more than 7000 rapes were reported this year, the majority allegedly committed by either non-citizens or by immigrants with permanent residence. While some of those (11% in 2018; 58% foreign born) have been prosecuted, the very great majority have not, precisely on the grounds of lack of evidence, even when there was available DNA. The police have no time for this; they are busy with gang related crime and, they say, the cases would never pass the legal system. Now we don't want to exaggerate. One of us grew up in New York at the height of a major crime wave. And most people never become victims, not even in war zones. But Swedes never worried about this kind of thing in the past. While the media may have avoided much of the worst, some journalists have covered the increasing change and readers of newspapers are increasingly afraid of what is happening. It is partly the contrast and the speed at which it has emerged. Recent reports show that young women as well as increasing numbers of both young and old are afraid of going out at night in many urban areas.

The situation in Sweden as in Europe is also specific in that the majority of immigrants are from MENA (Middle East and North African) countries and many have an extra added ingredient of distaste or even hate for most things Western (De Winter 2016). This is a product of a prevalent version of Islam, not merely among Islamists, something that is constantly denied but which has been well documented. The denial is itself part of the reaction to the situation, the possibility of islamophobia!⁵ And all

of this is reinforced by the elite's Occidentalism referred to above (Friedman 2009), which inverts the former imperial Orientalism, i.e. the former centre is a target of self-disrespect and even self-hate (Adamson 2021, for an important analysis).

Climate Angst

Another displacement in relation to the reality of crisis is the shift to climate and especially to global warming ... it is as warm now as it was in the early 80s when 40 elderly French women and men died of the heat. Of course there is an ecological crisis as the result of the acceleration of capitalist competition, but the reaction or perhaps anguish is related to a more general fear of loss of security that is general in an era of hegemonic decline. The head of the Green Party in Sweden exclaimed last summer that her lawn had turned brown, and it was terribly hot! Something has to be done, mostly in the way of higher taxes that hit the poorest members of society, hence the 'Yellow Vests' in France. We even have a prophet from Sweden, an apparently autistic 15-year-old who started striking from school and quickly gained a following of millions and met the United Nations, the EU and even the Pope. Strikes have increased among school children, and it has been invoked by politicians in their effort to raise taxes on fuel. All of this is very much the work of 'climate Greta's' celebrity parents, and a lot of financial and political support from various companies including the Rockefeller Foundation. And this cultish phenomenon is built on 'science'. Science tells us that the world will end if we don't drastically cut CO2 emissions. Yes climate committees that insist on global warming today predicted in the 1970s that we were on the way to a new Ice Age. The relation

between CO₂ and climate is and has been much debated, and if there is a real global warming—which is clearly the case—there are plenty of other explanations. After all there is no explanation for why the climate cooled from the 1940s to the 70s, in spite of increasing CO₂ emissions, sparking the fear of new Ice Age. But this time they are right! *And all of this is going on at the same time as nothing is said of the rapid destruction of nature at the hands of an over intensified capitalist surge resulting from competition to death in the crisis of the global system.* Greta Thunberg sailed from England to the US in a zero-emissions yacht supplied by a wealthy German property owner. Greta was accompanied on the voyage by Malizia II's skipper Boris Hermann, her father Svante, and Pierre Casiraghi, the grandson of Monaco's late Prince Rainier III and the actress Grace Kelly. Splendid! Great work for the climate! And many thanks to her supporters. Greta has now gained the status of prophet. Three cheers for Hollywood. And thank you 'green capitalism' (Attard 2019).

Quite a few years ago, French geo-physicist Claude Allègre published a book, *L'imposture Climatique ou la Fausse Écologie* (2012), (never published in English), which caused quite a scandal due to his being a well-known scientist who had served as education and research minister in the socialist government from 1997 to 2000. The book might be uneven and full of typos, but its argument is that the scientific evidence for the relationship between CO₂ emissions and global warming is not established by any means. There was a prolonged attack on the validity of his arguments, some of which were actually somewhat scientifically based, and of course, Allègre was not denying climate change, but rather claiming that we need a lot more real science and not mere correlation-based computer models. An interview included in the book is revealing:

‘For a long time you have been more or less alone in France in your criticism (denunciation) of the thesis that ‘global warming’ is caused by human activity, even if recently, a growing number of experts have begun to join in your struggle ... ‘It is not a ‘struggle’ against the thesis. It is about scientific questioning. My struggle is against extremism in all forms, against alarmism, fear, green totalitarianism, against all extremisms, no matter what their origin. This is a struggle for rationality and for reasonableness. (2012, 17)

Even if there were still room for critical discussion in 2012, it has all but evaporated with the emergence of the ‘climate cult’. It was accurately depicted as extremism from the start. And what is interesting in this cult is its reference to ‘research’ as the source of its authority. A researcher in Stockholm suggested at a conference on the future of food that cannibalism might be a good solution to climate change.

This can be read as mental breakdown, one that has been discussed in other countries as well (Murray 2019; Koppetsch 2019).

While many have now discovered, or rather become aware, that the world is moving quickly to a state of violent fragmentation of identities, as Murray and Koppetsch mentioned above and even the left seem to grasp that liberal and leftist elites have helped create a new and growing populism (Goodhart 2017), none have been able to place these developments within the larger global systemic context, one that would have allowed us to see it all coming at a time when it was not yet an issue or at most politically incorrect. Briefly, the systemic relation is the scenario described above for declining hegemony. It is not at all uniform as a process but differential in geopolitical terms. In the West (the core of dehegemonization),

there was a decline of a dominant modernist identity in the late 70s and 80s leading to its replacement by a focus on culture and especially cultural identities: indigenous, ethnic, religious regional, sexual, and so on. At the same time there was a shift from industrial to financial accumulation generating a plethora of fictitious forms of growth and speculation including the so-called culture industries. This included both flexible capital accumulation, a new class polarization, and the formation of liberal cultural elites who identified as progressive and cosmopolitan, i.e. ‘anywheres’ in Goodhart’s terms (2017) while former industrial working classes, Goodhart’s ‘somewheres’ disintegrated and experienced strong downward mobility. This political economic process included the collapse of former global peripheries into a spiral of violence and mass emigration to the declining centres where integration was out of the question and even opposed by liberal elites who have become Occidentalists, preferring other ‘cultures’ to their own. This process also includes the rise of new centres, in part or whole. China, for example, is not undergoing disintegration as it rises on the road to hegemony, nor is it rife with identity politics even if there are examples of ethnic politics in the peripheral areas of the country. As this process is always fragile and full of potential conflicts, it is not surprising to find major conflicts, but these are unlike those in the West about the expansion of state power where national identity is taken for granted.

As the contradictions of decline proliferate, Hobbes’ state of war is approaching, a war of identities that fractures all domains of life, not only sexual coming out, but sex reassignment surgery among youth, which is not apparently successful since those who undergo it are often even more depressed. Not feeling at home in one’s body has become a social phenomenon; gender dysphoria and

the larger LGBTQ movement is itself ridden with contradictions—for example, why be queer if I can change my gender completely, thus reproducing the traditional dichotomy, and then suddenly claims of ‘transphobia’ (Petter 2019)? So, not just ethnicity, regionalism, nationalism, racism, Islamism, and so on. It’s all about identity dysphoria. In the wake of the collapse of a socially identifiable future we have become a world of fragments.

Preppers and Paradoxes

The more rational and direct response to crisis is to move out of urban areas. Ruralizing migrants are building up stores of water, canned goods, wood to burn, etc. They are often armed and sometimes form communities of people who think in similar ways. These are the so-called ‘preppers’, but they have forerunners in the numerous communes that have appeared in the past century, beginning primarily in the decades of the Cold War with fear of nuclear and other disasters, all under the general rubric of *survivalism*, which has become a more urgent and organized project of late (Williams 2017; Yuhas 2020). It is a relatively rational response even if it has extreme consequences. It consists in a form of social risk reduction that affects all of us to varying degrees. It has long-term historical precedents in similar periods of imperial collapse and ruralization, sometimes referred to as the onset of ‘dark ages’.

But there is also a significant population that has ‘escaped’ or been forced from urban areas because of a combination of high costs and increasing insecurity. These are mostly young families who move into neighbouring, more rural communes. While not preppers, they are part

of an important exodus from declining centres. One might add to this a specific phenomenon in Sweden that has been referred to as structural homelessness, a combination of ordinary people who can't afford their costs of housing and so-called refugees who have their rents paid for two years by the state and are then cut loose. Many of these are forced to move to rural areas that previously experienced depopulation, following de-industrialization, where there are neither jobs nor services. This is a new landscape, or perhaps a mere repetition of the disintegration of former imperial systems.

The current Covid-19 crisis is a perfect incubator for extremism with its hoarding of toilet paper, and hate for the 'Others'. It also demonstrates how identity trumps (haha) political ideology. Some Americans have revolted against the lockdowns that Democrats have integrated into their identity, proof that Republicans are fascists. But in Sweden it's the other way around. The result? Demonstrators revolting against lockdowns in Democratic party-ruled states carry signs exclaiming 'Do like in Sweden'. And some Democrats say that *all* Swedes, i.e. social democrats and liberals, are actually Republicans. If you are *for* lockdowns then you *must* be a Democrat! Strange Covid-19 bedfellows . . . Trump and Swedish left liberals?

Extremism is about the incapacity of people to understand their own critical predicament, one that leads them to find magical solutions and objects of fear and hate rather than grasping the mechanisms that have brought them to the brink of disaster. How many ridiculous theories argued that the end of previous civilizations was due to natural changes, to warm, to cold, volcanic eruptions and what not? As our system destroys itself we destroy ourselves demonstrating, once again, our incapacity as a species to understand our own best interests.

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Notes

1. In societies with limited welfare, immigration is primarily in the form of cheap labor in services which generates little tax revenue for various reasons, often criminal.

2. (www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/pong/tabell-och-diagram/helarsstatistik—riket/befolkningsstatistik-i-sammandrag/).
3. ANES, 2018, pilot survey.
4. www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/2GILRr/tonarsranare-urinerade-pa-sitt-offer—och-filmade.
5. In our work on the Hawaiian movement we found that Hawaiians who were not engaged in any actions supported them as well as the demand for sovereignty. Similarly, reports have shown that a large proportion of Muslims in Europe support Sharia as a replacement for democracy.

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