

THE FLETCHER FORUM of WORLD AFFAIRS

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EDITORS' NOTE

Intractable Problems, Critical Solutions

By the beginning of 2022, the world finds itself amid seemingly intractable problems. Nearly two years into a deadly pandemic that has eluded resolution, we have failed to determine a clear plan for stemming climate change, and more persons than ever before face poverty and food insecurity—to name a few. In theory, humankind has structures in place at the global, national, and regional levels to deal with such wicked problems. For example, the United Nations system includes agencies to address the environment (UNEP), health (WHO), food insecurity (WFP), women's rights (UNW), and more. Plenty of national governments mirror their ministries and departments around these same themes.

However, as students of international relations, we are acutely aware that life is going better for a few and worse for the many. We are compelled to ask: what and where are the solutions purported by these institutions, organizations, and the governments that guide us?

As a result of multiple lacking plans, one must wonder about the institutions themselves. What populations do they favor, and who holds power within them? This is one of the essential functions of critical perspectives: deconstructing the basis of the institutions and organizations that govern our world to explore pathways toward not only new plans, but also new ways of working.

In our Winter 2022 edition, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* has sought to go “beyond state and citizen” and discover the dynamics of structural power that seem to inhibit global progress. Though there are many definitions of structural power, *The Forum* finds inspiration in James A. Caporaso and his work on dependency theory, that is, a “positional concept

that focuses on the impersonal bias of international relations, which systematically gives an advantage to certain actors due to their specific positions or roles in the international system.”¹ Impersonal, here, may be a misnomer, as many of the works in this season’s edition of *The Forum* explicitly—and perhaps, appropriately—endorse a normative perspective on power. Put in other words, this kind of power “[derives] from structures that constitute the framework in which actors (are forced to) act” and that benefit some more than others.² We take “structures” to mean institutions and organizations, one of the most prominent being the State itself.

Before I introduce you to this edition’s excellent authors, I want to take a moment to emphasize the importance and appropriateness of the critical analysis of power in this student-run journal setting. In addition to seeing this work as a general contribution to the common good, we see this study as the duty of academics and thinkers like those of The Fletcher School.

In her conclusion of a panel discussion on Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAAIL), Vasuki Nesiiah brilliantly summed up this duty:

“There is a significance to the positionality of graduate students. Your main work is to think and to think critically. What made TWAAIL important is its focus on people... Find your mentors. TWAAIL is both an approach to law and a network of scholars. No one is policing it, but it is grounded in a particular approach to politics, the politics of knowledge and its distribution.”

Essential movements such as TWAAIL emerged from the very work of institutions like The Fletcher School and the methodologies of critical perspectives, and it is the intention of publications like ours to push this work forward.

Our edition begins with an interview of prominent lawyer and activist, **DERECKA PURNELL**, who reflects on her new book, *Becoming Abolitionists*, and the dangers of policing and institutionalized racism. **DR. CHRISTOPHER FORD** then analyzes the deterrence of withdrawal from the globally controversial Nuclear Weapons Proliferation Treaty with his article, “Deterring or Dissuading NPT Withdrawal: Lessons for the Like-minded.” Next, **ALEX KLOSS** introduces us to art as resistance and presents a conversation with famed political cartoonist, **KHALID ALBAIH**. Together, Kloss and Albaih discuss the potential for cartoons to question the status quo of Sudanese and greater Middle Eastern politics. In “Urban Consumers and Natural Resources: An Ontology of Disconnection,” **DAVID D. SUSSMAN** provides theoretical and empirical framings for how urbanization has accelerated humankind’s disconnection from nature.

FELICE GAER tracks the reimposition of a universal definition of human rights by the Biden Administration in her article, “Universality Restored.” **DR. SAMANTHA LAKIN** reminds us how language (re)defines identity and contributes to structural inequality with her article, “Language, Identity, and Power in International Assistance Missions.” In her discussion on digital governance, **DR. KHATUNA BURKADZE** illustrates UN, EU, and NATO frameworks for advancing inclusive digital development. **NOAH YOSIF** provides us with quantitative evidence of the impact of monetary policy on economic inequality and makes pertinent policy recommendations for states. In “Democracy and the Rule of Law in Afghanistan: A Cautionary Tale,” **MEHDI J. HAKIMI** raises awareness on the undermining of the Afghani legislature by outsized executive power. Finally, **DR. CHIDI ODINKALU** closes our edition with his reflection on the TWAIL panel at this year’s Decolonizing International Relations Conference, before presenting excerpts from the panel itself.³

The work of thirteen excellent student editors went into the creation of this edition. I want to thank them and our exceptional Managing Print Editor for the Fall 2021 semester, Kyrre Berland. I also want to thank the members of *The Forum’s* Executive Team, who spend many hours in addition to their normal schoolwork to manage the publication’s operations, finances, communications, and other content platforms. I also want to thank our authors who have contributed to this edition and their patience through many rounds of editing and proofing. Finally, I want to thank the students and administration of The Fletcher School, who continue to support *The Forum* with their resources, readership, and encouragement. *f*

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Stephano Guzzini, “Structural power: the limits of neorealist power analysis” *International Organization*, 47 (3) (1993): 443-478, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:97877/FULLTEXT02>.
- 2 Andrej Pustovitovskij, “Reconceptualising Structural Power: A New Concept Made Out of Sterling Parts,” *E-International Relations*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/12/18/reconceptualising-structural-power-a-new-concept-made-out-of-sterling-parts/>.
- 3 See “Fourth Annual Conference on Decolonizing International Relations,” The Fletcher School, October 2021, <https://sites.tufts.edu/decolonizeir/>.