


the emphasis were on the harms—economic, to be sure, but also affective and ideological from the get-go? In other words, these harms not only require an account of capitalism's policies but also their intrinsic imbrication in the affective/ideological structures that organize our expectations, desires, fantasy investments, attachments, and our antipathies.

Response to Joseph Masco and Lisa Wedeen's review of *The Age of Discontent: Populism, Extremism, and Conspiracy Theories in Contemporary Democracies*

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We would first like to thank Professors Masco and Wedeen for engaging with our book and providing valuable and thought-provoking criticisms. Other points, however, pertain to issues intrinsic to comparative, generalizable political science. A key objection seems to be that our model, like all models, proposes specific causal paths and omits others. There also seems to be a linguistic disconnect. While we focus on economic crisis, we are not rational-choice theorists, nor do we only think material concerns matter; yet these topics are the focus of their review.

To start with, our goal was to explain why we often see a correlation between economic crises and discontent at the macro-level, while cultural explanations (such as cultural backlash or sentiments of being left behind) provide better explanations on the micro-level. Generalizations of this type requires trade-offs, and ours took cultural antagonisms as pre-existing.

Secondly, Wedeen and Masco suggest that “contrary to ... political science, people’s feelings can be at war with their interests”; yet we do not find this to be an accurate description of political science or our work. In fact, we argue that emotions shape perceptions of interests, as much as the editors do. We claim that when faced with these crises, emotional responses cause people to embrace narratives that reflect their pre-existing cultural antagonisms. These narratives do not have to be consistent, nor

do the harms they envision have to be real. Rather, it is the perception of economic harm, and the resulting emotional responses, that matters.

Nor does our argument imply that “human beings have emotions only when politics are contentious” or that “cultural antagonisms” are “epiphenomenal.” We repeatedly argue in our book that, while our causal model is indeed unidirectional, it is (as all models are) a simplification of reality that needs to be fleshed out when applied to actual cases. Thus, in our case study chapters, we extensively discuss issues of cultural antagonisms, such as that Spanish nationalism and racial resentment in the United States were exacerbated by economic trauma but also used to help justify the neoliberal austerity that contributed to that trauma.

Another example of two disciplines divided by the same language is the discussion of affect. Our conceptualization follows neuroscientific theories of emotion used in political psychology, especially Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT), which argues that emotions occur prior to (and thus shape and mold) interest and behavior, and that these can be “independent” of their material or other interests. We confess that we are unclear on how our definition differs substantively from that used in critical theory, or in how the concept used in Affect Theory might have changed our conclusions or findings.

Finally, we are unsure how to answer some of the questions raised. How would one assume cultural antagonisms are epiphonema when the goal is to explain why they seem to matter more at some times over others? Is it not “thinking dialectically” to point out the contradiction between the comfortable lives many of the discontented lead with their anger and fear, especially when we compare their situations to those of similarly situated individuals who are not discontented, or that of ethnic, racial, or religious minorities?

Unfortunately, it still seems that we are speaking past each other. The points brought up by our colleagues are important, interesting, and vital questions that have value not just for our fields but in understanding our current political system. The question we are left with is how do we move forward and bridge these gaps in order to create communal knowledge rather than recreating the same studies in our isolated silos?