

GLOBAL CONFLICTS AND THE MACRO-REGIONAL MODERNITIES

Interview with Marek HRUBEC

ABSTRACT

The interview focuses on Marek Hrubec's Critical theory of global society and politics. It presents a critique and explanation of social, economic, political, media, cultural issues, and explains normative alternatives. It deals with the crisis of global capitalism and the contemporary situation in the West. It compares it with the recent developments in alternative modernities in the Islamic countries, China and Russia, India and South America, and Africa. It addresses issues of global conflicts and injustice, global poverty, intercultural dialogue, corporate power, revolution and transformation, the United Nations and the requirements of cosmopolitan arrangement, and the personal experience from Central Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

KEY WORDS:

global conflicts, injustice, recognition, macro-regions, modernities, critical theory, intercultural



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Martin Solík (M. S.): *You recently published your magnum opus *From Misrecognition to Justice*, formulating a Critical theory of social, political and cultural injustice. You discuss misrecognition and injustice not only on local and national levels but also in contexts that globally extend beyond those levels. I assume that your arguments are intended not only to describe the reality but also to problematize and analyze societal weaknesses, and deliver a vision of how it could be transformed. Could you shed more light on your line of research in this area?*

Marek Hrubec: What I am dealing with is how to overcome the incompetence of contemporary theories of society and politics which have failed to deliver an adequate critique and explanation of the contemporary system producing serious social, political and cultural injustices criticized by misrecognized people which would be formulated together with basic normative principles to guide us out of this substandard state of affairs. Contemporary theories suffer from reductionism because they address, in the isolationist way, only some aspects of these tasks, and they are not able to develop a formulation of necessary basic interactions among them.

The mainstream social sciences focus in the fragmented way single-mindedly on an allegedly neutral description of reality, where authors tend to obscure their critical reservations about reality – if they have any at all – and also shirk from articulating a normative concept of how society and politics should be ordered. The same applies to the mainstream theory of mass media, which inefficiently articulates a general concept of society and politics required to convey conditions for the democratic workings of the mass media. Because no adequate concept of criticism and normativity has been theoretically developed here, we also tend to be served with a description of reality steeped in ideological prejudices that often endorse the political and economic status quo. In contrast to social scientists, one of the predicaments of today's mainstream political philosophy is that normative considerations are only speculatively developed and ignore criticism and description of the real society and politics.

I think that a passable point of departure is criticism. Citizens themselves, through criticism historically developed over long years, participate and identify the problems they are up against which philosophers and social scientists should then try to identify, analyze, and solve. In this respect, the stance maintained by a Critical theory of society and politics is absolutely elemental because, unlike many other theories, it does not dogmatically foist on citizens what, according to this or that theory or analysis, is a pivotal topic and what is not, or what is bad and what is not.

M.S.: *Your book has provoked a rare, insightful and extensive debate in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In a discussion on critically focused alternative social and political theories, you come up with a Critical theory drawing on your own original methodological trichotomy of critique-explanation-normativity. In many respects, then, you transcend the arguments not only of liberal authors such as John Rawls but also key critical authors who developed a theory of recognition such as Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor.*

Marek Hrubec: Axel Honneth and others made great contributions. We would agree that a Critical theory deals with how people have long struggled against social, political, cultural and other kinds of misrecognition as the basis of injustice. This kind of struggle for recognition and justice has an important existential aspect. Local and global attempts at introducing greater social, political and cultural justice play a key role in the contemporary world, although, taken as a whole, other issues are at play here as well.

Methodologically, my theory is anchored in a concept of mutually integrated three approaches of criticism, explanation, and normativity. This trichotomy is a vehicle for building on real criticism raised by people, indicating not only what is worthy of criticism, but also determining – thematically – what actually needs to be analyzed and explained. Obviously, the aim is not just to capture various momentary haphazard criticisms but to explore various criticisms emerging in long-running historical trends and in the present. These are then followed by an explanation of society and politics, including various positive elements of reality which can subsequently be moulded into the more coherent form of a normative concept of desirable society and politics. And this trichotomic move repeats again and again in practice and theory, and the next round uses the results of the previous round which means that the critique uses normativity, etc. This is my way of striving towards a new concept of social science based on critical philosophy and critical social science. In this respect, the Critical theory of society and politics that I have formulated is a bottom-up approach that starts with people and, unlike most mainstream analyses in philosophy and social sciences, it does not rely on the authoritarian attitudes of philosophers, social scientists and politicians dictating to the citizens what is worthy of analysis and support. I am not suggesting that most mainstream authors intentionally endorse authoritarianism. It is just that they are not aware of the entrenched problematic background aspects of their point of view. In my methodological trichotomy, I bring into play the ideas of the historic original Critical social theory but my trichotomy is generally philosophically based and cultivated in the social sciences, with mutual links conceived between the individual elements of the trichotomy and the more complex hexagony.

M.S.: *You also articulate your arguments in a global context and formulate criticism even in those places which, regrettably, we frequently overlook, as these are countries and people who are geographically remote from us, but whose struggle for recognition should not – for multiple reasons – remain beyond the sphere of our concern.*

Marek Hrubec: I demonstrate the limitations and inadequacies of the attempts to address contemporary issues in global capitalism only by means of older national approaches. A transnational and global problem requires, on one hand, local and national responses, and, on the other, transnational and global reactions. Most European social scientists and politicians tend – naively – to harbor the hope that they will resolve problems with their local and national actions. They lack creativity and courage. Just look at the inability to deal with the economic crisis in Europe and on a global scale. However, for the critically minded social and political philosophers and social scientists, of course, this is a fascinating challenge spawned by a new historical era of global interactions.

Although there is no room here to dwell on all social, economic, political and other aspects of this theme, I could present at least one point by way of an example. I often hear the argument that, while the problems of the current political and economic system are discussed, contemporary protests are the domain of a relatively small number of people and that, although their ranks have been swelling in the recent years of crisis, they still account for only a small minority. Politicians wrongly take this to mean that they are pursuing a policy which is legitimate in the eyes of the majority and is therefore correct. My theory, on the other hand, shows that we need to move beyond this West-centric (and hence at least implicitly racist) concept of political protest, which usually only factors into the equation of the classic public manifestations of dissatisfaction among citizens in Western countries (demonstrations and strikes), yet ignores the everyday forms of criticism made by many people who are struggling against social, political and other misrecognition primarily in the poor and developing countries of Africa, Asia and elsewhere. There, hundreds of millions of people are often literally fighting for survival and express their protest by small signs of criticism in their everyday actions. UN statistics indicate that tens of millions people die of starvation and hunger-related illnesses every year, and that billions of people are poverty stricken. If we take into account of their everyday resistance and protests, we can say that we live in a time where the current system of global capitalism is a target of mass criticism.

M.S.: *Is it possible that, at some point in the future, corporations will have such a war chest that they will be able to “buy” or, less crassly, “privatize” states? We are already in a situation where some countries’ indebtedness is more than their GDP and where, by contrast, corporations are making profits.*

Marek Hrubec: I agree with the argument that corporations, especially transnational corporations, control large swathes of the economy and, by extension, have a say in large parts of the economies and policies of individual countries. Economic globalization has handed transnational companies the opportunity to exploit cheap labor in developing countries, to avoid paying hardly any social security, to move assets to tax havens, and consequently to accumulate huge profits – their passport to political power. William Robinson’s analyses clearly show that transnational corporations, when considering channelling their financial investments into a particular country, usually demand the right to ride roughshod over national laws which, at least to some degree, have been democratically enacted by citizens through their legislators. A company building a factory will typically seek tax breaks, the construction of an industrial zone, etc., from the state. Small and medium-sized enterprises, especially local firms, do not enjoy such concessions. As a result, economic and political decision-making is becoming less the realm of citizens and their democratic institutions, and instead is being used in the service of the sectarian interests of powerful corporate groups and the neoliberal politicians pandering to them. It needs to be stressed that global capitalism is weakening democracy and strengthening the hand of the property-owning oligarchy – a plutocracy. The decline of democracy goes hand-in-hand with the problems of technological civilization: the increasing usage of global cyber-technology to gain corporate and state control and to diminish the privacy of individuals and entire groups, from intercepting emails and telephone calls to misusing cameras and social networks.

Historically speaking, in the Western countries in the last 300 years, economics and politics took root within the framework of the nation state, and various influential economic and cultural forces slowly, but surely, found themselves legally regulated under national policy. Democratic mechanisms, albeit limited, were a means of legally regulating national capital via national democratic politics. Although globalization is a long-term process, in the 1980s the economy was emancipated from the national framework and, as a result, the national democratic influence wielded over the economy was diminished. The economic diktat of transnational capital became a threat to democratization. Leslie Sklair’s well-known analysis stresses that an even greater danger is posed by the transnationalization of a class financial system providing an outlet for extreme financial speculation detached from the real economy. Financial speculation with national currencies is just one of the manifestations of this casino system. Efforts by the global capitalism’s actors to reap the highest possible profits have resulted in heavy-handed, aggressive economic interventions in local and national economies, which then find themselves encountering unexpected turbulence and slumping. The nation state still has a role to play, but it has been redefined and integrated into the new larger framework of a nascent decentralized, transnational and global state, the components of which are not only nation states, but also powerful corporations, the IMF, WB, NATO, G8, etc.

A neat view of this problem can be seen from the standpoint of post-socialist Central Europe, which, on one hand is being sucked dry by countries more in the West and, on the other hand, is doing the same to developing countries more in the East and the South. Because we are caught in the middle – we are on the fringes of the West, but not the planet – we are in a position to grasp this geopolitical problem. However, many people here are unable to comprehend this issue due to their strong experience of the previous regime, and therefore they are forever stubbornly anti-socialist and openly West-centric. This is tragicomic flagellantism.

In the West, many people – also social scientists, politicians and journalists – often have even less understanding because, on the whole, they only know Western languages and they do not have access to information from non-Western sources in Chinese, Arabic, Slavonic languages, etc. They rely solely on the way information is retold in Western languages – if, indeed, they are interested in non-Western matters at all.

M. S.: *What is the role played by the global economic crisis, which has become a memento of sorts, but also a marker in time still used as an excuse by governments and transnational corporations alike?*

Marek Hrubec: Ever since global capitalism temporarily hit the rails in the 2008 global crisis, many powerful banks have tried to get nation states to cover their losses and save them from bankruptcy. It is well known that the state rescues of large banks and other firms – bailouts – drew on taxpayers' money and often took place at the expense of citizens meaning that various forms of cuts were made to the welfare state, education, science, etc. Profit is privatized and loss is socialized. Democracy is subordinate to oligarchy. This triggers social upheaval among the public and intensifies the search for scapegoats, feeding a rise in xenophobia, nationalism, neofascism and even military conflict.

Closely related to this is the fact that bailouts, i.e. a form of state capitalism, have not always been implemented solely in the state where the corporation in question had its head office. As many banks are transnational, they have needed rescuing by the governments of as many as five or six countries at once. Now the TTIP is attempting to follow a similar transnational path. Politicians today are somewhat more aware of the need for grittier transnational approaches, although – regrettably – they deploy them in the name of banks and other large companies rather than for the benefit of citizens. It has become apparent that a simple diversion away from neoliberalism to the old national model of neo-Keynesian economics no longer works in a globalized era. As Jerry Harris explains, it is not enough to pour money into loss-making enterprises in a given nation state because transnational companies can easily transfer their profits and other funds abroad. This renders state aid largely unjustifiable for a given nation state. Attempts at economic sanctions or economic wars between nation states are also bound to fall flat in the long run. This is an outdated attempt to tackle new problems. What we need is a new solution for injustice at macro-regional and global levels. This is why significant success has been chalked up by the BRIC countries which, by nature, are macro-regions and cannot be easily beaten in the large-scale global game. The challenge for today is to face up to the contradictions and conflicts of global capitalism and come up with alternatives in the name of social and political justice.

From a global perspective, the workforce in Western countries has no chance of competing with the low pay of labor in developing countries. In the interests of global solidarity, this low pay needs to be increased and supplemented with health insurance and pension security by means of amendments to legislation. This will give companies less incentive to prioritize emerging countries in their search for labor and will help to maintain at least certain jobs in the EU and the U.S.A. Nevertheless, employment is set to decline. People have long been deploying industrialization and automation which has made their work easier but, at the same time, will increasingly and irrevocably take work away from them. Yet some politicians are being reactionary and essentially acting as slave dealers when (albeit sometimes with the best of intentions) they decide that the main solution is to create new work simply so that people have jobs, even when this is not necessary and machinery and computers can do many tasks instead. The fruits of industrialization and authorization need to be redistributed more among the people and less among oligarchs. High progressive taxes, high income taxes, the closure of tax havens, and the introduction of an unconditional basic income would be a good start in making the end of control by the 1% wealthiest who, according to research by Oxfam, own as much global wealth as the remaining 99% of the planet put together.

M. S.: *In my own research, I strive to consider solidarity in the global arena. In doing so, I place a stress on the issue of social recognition in the context of the capacities and limits of the mass media. Again, all major communication conglomerates operate in a global market, yet they are virtually all based in North America, Europe, Australia and Japan, and their development is undeniably geared towards concentrating economic and symbolic power. What is your take on this problem?*

Marek Hrubec: We can start, based on the criticism raised by many citizens and social theorists to date, by identifying the main problem of the mass media. It is exactly as you have indicated – the content of the news and other programmes in the mass media is guided mainly, on the one hand, by the interests of the owners and, on the other hand, by the interests of the corporations gracing the mass media with the advertising it feeds on. This is a distortion and, hence, effective censorship of the democratic expression of a true plurality of citizens' opinions. Therefore, the content of mass media broadcasting frequently serves not for the democratic purpose of citizens' interests but for the profit-making of a handful of private owners and their backing of political parties which work in the interests of these oligarchs. We do not live, then, in a mass media democracy but in a mass media oligarchy. Furthermore, since most of the wealth is concentrated in Western countries, the greatest influence of the mass media in the world is predominantly West-centric.

Both, private and public-service media outlets, tend to feign that their news is neutral, while concealing the ideology of the content. As I have insinuated, private media largely promotes – yet veils – the interests of its private owners. They also rely on the advertising of other corporations and, as such, are not in a position to criticize those corporations in their media. They must report news which coincides with the interests of corporations, not of the general public. I am afraid that, in many countries, public-service media also sources income from the advertisements of corporations. Even when this is not the case, public-service media is often controlled by sectarian groups pursuing their own agenda and often essentially acting against their own employer – the taxpayer.

Several exceptions apart, the situation is not usually any better among the alternative media. This media tends to be privately owned and frequently portrays itself as a broadly open alternative when, in reality, it is not very penetrable. I am not thinking here of the entirely legitimate opinion-driven individual media which, naturally, needs to draw on a range of texts and comments for purposes of interpretation. Rather, I mean the absence or complete marginalization of other alternative similar opinions, or deliberate manipulative presentation only via less intellectually robust agents who can be depended upon to put off readers. Alternative media with the funds to reach large numbers of people usually often de facto accounts only for the second strongest opinion, such as that of the political party currently in opposition, and does not offer real alternatives in greater plurality. Genuine alternatives generally lack the funding needed to have a greater impact and therefore citizens, as a rule, tend to be in the dark about them. Real alternative media continues to be minimalist in scope and, unfortunately, only reaches a small segment of the population.

M. S.: *How do you view media limits when it comes to reporting on events in developing countries about which we currently know precious little?*

Marek Hrubec: Considering the fact that economies are transnationally and globally interlinked, people living in the West largely live on output and raw materials originating in developing countries, where the population is often impoverished. Supplies of goods and materials from the developing world to countries in the West have yet to be accompanied by information in the media about the inhuman conditions in which such raw materials and goods are frequently procured. In the current era of global capitalism, knowledge of such global interactions and circumstances is fragmented and citizens of Western countries hardly know anything about them. Companies are not keen to disseminate such information because they wish to continue exploiting sources and labor in poor countries, while consumers do not care and are not interested in such things.

Gradually, however, workers and other people in the affected areas, together with activists, social movements and active social scientists, are making increasing headway in releasing information about such injustices and, as such, are sometimes preventing at least the most pressing issues, such as child labor, brutal

exploitation, inhuman working conditions and environmental devastation. For the time being, though, the information is only coming through in dribs and drabs and merely shows the potential that can be harnessed, i.e. the stream of change is by no means in full flow now. Global information communication and social networks are an opportunity to criticize more sharply the current social and economic imbalances between the North and South, environmental destruction, and other problems.

M.S.: *You place an emphasis on the fact that we need to tackle (locally, nationally, macro-regionally and globally) problems associated with the causes and impacts of global capitalism and the crises thereof; along with xenophobic conflicts between cultures and between the majority and minorities, giving rise to various types of abuse that cannot be ignored. How can we develop an interdisciplinary Critical theory offering also practical scenarios to the handling of such problems?*

Marek Hrubec: While a Critical theory of global society contains several aspects, I would highlight two in particular now: political economy and political culture. The first is mainly an analysis of the economic aspect of global interactions, i.e. global capitalism and its economic crisis. In this respect, I have already mentioned the negative impact of transnational companies and speculative capital, accompanied by the reinforcement of the oligarchy to the detriment of democracy and social and political justice.

Now, I would like to stress the second aspect which concerns the cultural dimension of global interactions, specifically the relationships between cultures, and the relationships between the cultures and global civilization, including the problems with their pathological technological and military aspects. Global interactions have intensified contentious and chaotic contact between people from different cultures, resulting in more conflicts than before because various interests, values and institutions in different countries and cultures are in dispute. Included here are various xenophobic attitudes, the reinforcement of nationalism and the escalation of political conflicts. In particular, while the era of G. W. Bush resulted mainly in conflicts between the Western and Islamic countries, there are also conflicts between the West and other macro-regions around the world which develop their own cultures and kinds of modernizations. These non-Western areas of the world are unwilling to be cowed into accepting the Western version of culture and modernization, as Eisenstadt explained. The terms “multiple modernities” and “intercultural dialogue” indicate that various paths need to be respected. Of course, the term “modernities” includes here not only a cultural dimension but also economic and political ones.

M.S.: *What examples of different types of modernity could you mention?*

Marek Hrubec: China is conducting its own experiment of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”; most countries in South America – especially Venezuela, Bolivia and Brazil – are endorsing experiments which are much more leftist than the politics and economy in Western countries at present; Russia and India are also shying away from blindly following the Western version of modernization, instead striving to blaze their own trail consistent with their historical and contemporary cultural and economic specifics. To be sure, these specifics include various problems that need to be addressed, but that is no reason for the Western model of politics and economics – a model that, let us not forget, is in crisis – to be foisted on these areas of the world. The same could be said of Islamic countries. These various parts of the world, then, especially BRICS, could be said to be following at least partly their own paths of development and, in foreign matters, are striving to replace the unipolar world, headed by the West, with a multipolar world in which a voice can be given to numerous perspectives.

Accordingly, an adequate Critical theory of global society and politics must critically reflect the problems of global capitalism and the related oligarchization and social and economic injustice, and, on the other hand, the problems of cultural injustice, or issues associated with the suppression of the plurality of specific cultures and their various versions of modernization. Such a formulation could then guide us towards a normative solution not only encompassing political justice but also reinforcing elements of economic democracy and components of intercultural dialogue or polylogue. Intercultural polylogue is required in many areas of the world, and authors from various cultures, including Enrique Dussel, Abdullahi An-Na'im, Marietta Stepanyants, Kwasi Wiredu and Tu Weiming analyze and develop it in various ways.

M.S.: *How do you view the what's-going-on in Islamic countries in this respect, and how do you assess the influence of Western countries there?*

Marek Hrubec: Aside from the history of European colonialism in Islamic countries, the kernel of the problem is that, at present, the military forces of the U.S.A. and other Western countries maintain a presence in every other Islamic country. Instead of intercultural dialogue, we have intercultural war. Imagine the hypothetical opposite situation, with an Islamic occupying force in every other European country and in every other state of the U.S.A. I believe that many people in the West would fight against this.

In the wake of 9/11, the U.S.A. was itching for vengeance. Never mind the fact that Afghanistan had nothing to do with 9/11, war was for long-standing reasons in the cards there. The U.S.A. had bankrolled and made allies of the fundamental Islamic extremists there in order to use them to fight against the Soviets in the 1980s. However, Al Qaeda then started to break away, and this became a thorn in their side.

Moreover, authoritarian Saudi Arabia, which is where the 9/11 attackers were from, supports extremist Islamists in many Arab countries. American support is there, too. In response to the current pathological project in parts of Iraq and Syria, for example, United States General Thomas McInerney has explained that the U.S.A. made a major contribution to the creation of the Islamic State. He was referring not only to exercises at a base in Jordan and elsewhere but primarily to the weapons supplied to the Islamists from Libya, where the U.S.A. had previously engaged in military conflict.

M.S.: *The U.S.A. has even been forced to acknowledge mistakes in its military policy towards certain Islamic countries.*

Marek Hrubec: Yes, it is well documented that the U.S.A. administration had to confess that it had made a mistake concerning the war in Iraq and that, in fact, Iraqis had no weapons of mass destruction. The main targets in Iraq were actually oil and the sphere of influence. The good news is that Tony Blair was finally summoned to the International Criminal Court in The Hague last year because of his war crimes. The same invitation has yet to be extended to G. W. Bush and others, perhaps because the U.S.A. has introduced an unconscionable law on potential U.S.A. military intervention in The Hague if an American citizen were to be detained there.

This has not been the only mistake to have been admitted. The war in Libya was also a confirmed error. U.S.A. intelligence services have come clean that they were wrong and that, in 2011, there were no attempts at genocide in Libya. Yet, it was this very argument of genocide that Hillary Clinton used as the main excuse to bomb Libya. Libya enjoyed the highest standard of living in Africa. Now it lies in ruins. And we can mention other cases as well. Read Guantánamo Diary by an imprisoned detainee Mohamedou Ould Slahi, for example.

The U.S.A.'s military budget for this year is in excess of USD 600 billion, which, as in every year, is many times larger than the budget of any other country in the world. Such a concentration of military funding is, in itself, pathological. The U.S.A. is just one of the world's nearly 200 countries and there is no reason for it to have such a military budget and to usurp the right to play the world's policeman. Global order should be secured by the institution intended for this purpose: the United Nations.

M.S.: *With your critique of injustice, you reinterpret many of the cultural, economic and political phenomena of the present day and offer starting points for descriptive and normative explanations of the repressed claims of social groups and individuals. What trends have come into play as a result of powers such as Russia and China?*

Marek Hrubec: This is a very important question that allows me to build on my previous reply concerning the plurality of modernities by identifying two basic paths followed by the largest countries to experiment with socialism and communism in the 20th century. What is more, these are not just individual countries, but entire macro-regions with their own specific modern, cultural and long history.

Naturally, any new experiment requires a critique of the problems and necessary change. Especially because, obviously, these cases did not concern full versions of socialism, but only attempts at the introduction thereof, with various elements of authoritarianism. Both countries recognized the shortcomings in their organization and started to carry out transformation – China after Mao Zedong’s death at the end of the 1970s, the Soviet Union starting in the mid-1980s after Brezhnev’s death. Both countries endeavored to make economic and political transformations, but each of them ultimately settled on only one as a priority. While the Soviet Union eventually went the way primarily of political transformation, China’s preference was for economic transformation. This difference in the concept of change was to be an absolutely fundamental and decisive factor in further development of these countries.

If we were to personalize these policies, it would be fair to say that Gorbachev preferred glasnost, i.e. political openness, whereas Teng Xiaoping decided to rely on market solutions. As soon as Gorbachev started to lose control and influence over the transformation of the country through his political reforms, he also became unable to manage the economic transformation and ultimately the system collapsed. The resultant disorder destroyed the largest social experiment of the 20th century, which was not given a chance to transform. Teng Xiaoping went in the opposite direction. He kept hold of political power and used it as a vehicle to launch the necessary economic reform. However, he was unwilling to abandon the key features of the then state version of socialism, i.e. a planned economy and societal ownership. At the same time though, he opened the door to elements of capitalism, i.e. the market and private ownership. That is not to say that he wanted capitalism to prevail over socialism.

M. S.: *Have those paths given rise to any political and economic models with specific consequences?*

Marek Hrubec: Yes. Teng was well versed with Marx’s argument that, for the transition to socialism, a country’s economy must be well developed in order to prevent the system from crumbling and regressing to a previous stage of development. Aware of the fact that China was a backward feudal country unprepared for the transition to socialism, he believed that Mao Zedong had made the switch prematurely. Teng attempted to resolve this flaw by allowing elements to enter Chinese socialism that would be able to fill in the gaps in the Chinese economy’s historical development which should have taken place before the arrival of socialism. He was aware of Marx’s idea of not only negative but also civilizing tendencies of capital. Furthermore, Teng knew that Marx’s classic model of economy and politics was merely an initial sketch of socialism and that a functioning economy, politics and society required a more intensive and more topical paradigm. He believed that socialism, in its given stage of historical development, should be based on the following conditions: first, on a lesser degree of central planning, accompanied (but not controlled) by the market; and, second, on societal ownership, which should encompass not only state ownership, but also provincial, municipal, village, cooperative, etc., ownership, accompanied (but not controlled) by private ownership. In this respect, the political philosopher Wei Xiaoping told me several times in Beijing that China stands on an important crossroads in terms of maintaining this balance between the main and supplementary elements in the future as well as in terms of developing each element. It is crucial. In China, this model is modestly named “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, but it is essentially a broader concept that, to a certain degree, is also partly applied in other countries, as documented in various experiments, for example, in Africa.

Although the people’s access to decision-making on societal ownership, planning and other issues is very indirect, China has benefited from its economic version of transformation. Almost 400 million Chinese have started to enjoy the same living standards as those in the EU, another 400 million have climbed out of poverty, and the remainder is also projected to do so. Even conservative calculations make China the second largest economy in the world, and its influence in the global environment continues to grow stronger. In contrast, the political version of transformation in the Soviet Union saw the state collapse, and its successor, Russia – in the wake of Yeltsin’s neoliberal shock therapy – needed one and a half decades to work its way among the relatively influential BRICS countries, albeit largely by relying on oil and gas exports. While China draws its strength from being a factory for the world and, to a sizable degree, by redistributing profits in favor of the socially needy. Russia, on the other hand, is unstable because of its dependence on the current prices

of the oil and gas it exports, and the socially disadvantaged in Russia are not well supported by liberal conservative state programmes. It is not yet clear how political transformation will continue. At this point in time, we could limit ourselves to one point by saying that, in Russia’s case, it is still an open issue whether the transfer of political power to successors will trigger a destabilization problem, whereas China has managed to pass on the leadership of the country seamlessly to the fifth generation by adhering to established rules. So far the specific Chinese model, with its preference for economic over political transformation, while championing a combination of planning and the market and a combination of societal and private ownership, is an engine for further development in China and for bulking up its influence in the world, despite numerous shortcomings. It remains to be seen how political transformation will proceed.

If we examine their global role, both countries – Putin’s Russia and Xi Jinping’s China – are evidently striving to make decent contributions to the breakup of the unilateral world in which West-centric politics and economy are predominant, and to form a more balanced multilateral global order in which major influence is wielded by China, Russia, India, Brazil and other countries.

M. S.: *What are the specific types of modernization in India and Latin America and how do these two macro-regions compare? Let’s start with India.*

Marek Hrubec: When contemplating modernization specific to India and South America, I would start by highlighting two characteristic concepts: the first concerns the not fully but only partially autonomous types of modernization, and the second one refers to a gradual revolutionary transformation rather than merely smooth transformation or outright revolution. Returning to my previous comparison, although Russia and China were influenced by the concept of socialism and are influenced to some extent by the Western concept of capitalist politics and economy, they were distinct and relatively independent modernization alternatives to the West in the 20th century. In contrast, India and the Latin American countries were fully colonized by Western superpowers, which forced the basic pillars of Western economic and political order upon them. In this respect, at first glance, they do not constitute entirely autonomous alternatives, even though they have their own rich and long history and culture. More detailed investigation reveals that, despite colonialism, they have come up with their own types of modernization and, in the future, could be followed by other parts of the world. But whether they will follow good or bad models is unknown.

Although, at the time of colonialism, Britain controlled India with its own repressive political order and, once this collapsed, a formal political democracy prevailed there. Hinduist, Islamic and other cultural historical traditions have infused this structure with its own specific character. Furthermore, since gaining independence, India has gone through a unique stage in search for its own version of socialist development which, following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, started subtly being replaced by a capitalist path in the early 1990s. There was no visible revolution standing as a milestone at the given time. Rather, we could say that revolutionary transformation gradually asserted itself. Just as, following the fall of colonialism, Gandhi pushed for socialist, secularly-oriented Indian home rule Hind Swaraj, and Nehru then built on this with his socialist revolutionary transformation, in the 20 years since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, a capitalist revolutionary transformation in India has steadily come to the fore which exhibits all known problems. The India people’s Bharatiya Janata Party has bit by bit established a neoliberal capitalism legitimized by means of Hindutva and cultural and religious conservatism, as recently witnessed in particular under Modi’s leadership. Therefore, there currently seems little hope that the slums in downtown Delhi, Kolkata or the countryside will stop haunting us any time soon.

M. S.: *And what about modernization in Latin America?*

Marek Hrubec: In the macro-region of South America, we can trace the opposite process, from right to left, again by means of a path of transformation which, in certain cases, verged on revolutionary transformation. Therefore, I will limit my reply to South America, because in Central America and Mexico developments have been very complex and ambiguous.

Following the collapse of right-wing dictatorships in South American countries in recent decades, more social movements and left-wing governments have started to make headway than is usual in Western countries. This has not been a return to state centralism based on the model of the Soviet Union but the democratic cooperation of people active in civil society and social movements with administration on local, national and macro-regional levels. First, more radical democratic socialist projects came to the fore, inspired by Chávez's low-intensity revolution in Venezuela, in particular under Morales in Bolivia and Lugo in Paraguay. Chávez's project of 21st-century socialism had an effect which spread beyond those countries and influenced more or less most of the countries in South America. Secondly, Lula established numerous social programmes in Brazil at state and national levels and promoted the grassroots participatory democratic projects of citizens, which then had a filter-through effect on the upper echelons. For example, the participation of citizens and social movements in the introduction of a social forum in Porto Alegre subsequently had far-reaching consequences which saw the social forum spreading to other countries and macro-regions and the organization of global social forums. Similarly, a participatory budget was deployed in Porto Alegre, enabling citizens to have a say in the municipal budget. This type of economic democracy then spread to hundreds of towns and states in Brazil and beyond, across South America and even into certain countries in Europe and other parts of the planet. In recent years, I have seen an entire participatory system interlinking economic and political democracy in multiple places in Brazil. Sociologist Emil Sobottka from Porto Alegre has shown that participation must be institutionally intensively organized to prevent it from being abused by people who wish to essentially restrict participatory democracy.

Elements of participation have been supported by the Brazilian government from Lula through to Dilma Rousseff today. The same applies to cooperation between countries in South America, especially Venezuela and Brazil, in the establishment of the Bank of the South, that made it possible to break away from the World Bank and its asocial neoliberal imperatives. The fact that Brazil itself is the largest South American economy and political arena and one of the BRICS countries has had a major impact on the spread of these progressive elements throughout South America and, to some extent, the world. Another significant influence has been the fact that at least Brazil and Venezuela have been able to finance their social projects from relatively large oil reserves. And South American countries do not act in isolation because their political leaders are aware that, especially in a global era, it is the large countries and groupings that hold the power. This is why they have set up various macro-regional groups: the Union of South American Nations, Alba, Mercosur, and Celac.

M. S.: *Critical global studies then indicate that recent developments in various macro-regions around the world have followed a transformative trajectory, especially with revolutionary demands. What is the situation with revolutions and transformations?*

Marek Hrubec: This is really a very important question because it touches on major developmental tendencies of recent decades. Building on political philosopher Jerry Cohen, generally speaking, we could say that revolutions have delivered usually violent, unconstitutional, rapid, and fundamental change, whereas transformations have been characterized by non-violent, constitutional, steady, and moderate change. Pivotal social and political change in the modern times took place often against a backdrop of revolution but recently more complex changes have prevailed. On a path of transformation, fundamental – it means revolutionary – changes take place over the longer time, hence this is revolutionary transformation. In the Soviet Union, we first saw an attempt at such a way forward in the 1980s but ultimately this speeded up the collapse of the entire system and the country. Revolutionary transformation has been under way in China since the end of the 1970s. This type of transitional development between revolution and transformation has also been under way in India and South America. This does not necessarily mean that a target revolutionary situation has been achieved everywhere but that developments are in progress in this direction. On the contrary, in the countries of the Arab Spring, revolutions quickly emerged but they were not particularly successful and in the end they resulted in no truly fundamental and positive change. Thus, it is important to see that the mentioned relevant sustainable economic and political changes of multiple modernities of recent decades are revolutionary transformations, not revolutions.

However, I would avoid throwing my weight behind just one of these paths. Whether a given situation is ultimately a revolution, transformation, or revolutionary transformation depends, when all is said and done, on the resistance put up by the holders of illegitimate power. If the resistance is very significant and the population is already very frustrated, the result is revolution. If resistance is low key but persistent, there generally tends to be change based only on transformation. If relatively radical changes are successfully enforced during the longer time period, this is a revolutionary transformation.

M. S.: *One issue fundamental to the future of the Earth's civilization will be how we come to grips with the coexistence of diverse modernities and their cultural and, especially, economic demands. You show that, at present, they are often ignored because, in particular, the voice of the global poor seeking survival and their struggle against misrecognition usually do not take place in streets via protest movements, as is the norm in Western countries. These most marginalized groups can formulate their needs only in extreme poverty.*

Marek Hrubec: In many places throughout the world, the global poor really do have experience that differs from that faced by the marginalized people in Western countries. Different forms of development in non-Western countries result in different forms of misrecognition and recognition, although some historical parallels can also be identified. At any rate, at least one billion poor people in developing countries are struggling for everyday survival in extreme poverty where they need to secure at least the most necessary food and a roof over their heads, and have no means to engage in effective demonstrations in the streets and on the squares against the current economic and political order. Most of them live in remote areas and do not have the funds to travel, for example, to the capital of the country. Having said that, even if they did have the money to cover the cost of travel and other expenses, it would be of little use to them because decisions on fundamental matters of the global economy and politics, including marginal areas with many poor people, are often taken elsewhere, usually in wealthy Western cities where transnational corporations are established. Therefore, expecting poor people in developing countries to use conventional forms of protest, such as demonstrations, strikes, etc., is a West-centric attitude stemming either from ignorance or arrogance. Classic forms of the Western type of protest can be expected in developing countries only marginally. Just as in the past when slaves were invisible as agents of protest because they were not recognized as human beings and their resistance was overlooked, today the global poor are misrecognized and their everyday struggle for survival is virtually invisible to people in Western and other countries.

M. S.: *What solution can we derive from this? Do the global poor have any chance at all? Do any possible scenarios and points of departure exist?*

Marek Hrubec: I would say that the global poor are potentially a new subject of social change. This is also an opportunity for many women, especially in developing countries, because approximately 70% of the global poor are women. Their work in the household or in the field where they grow food to feed their families, is not at all recognized on the labor market – as if it did not exist. And yet this work accounts for an enormous proportion of all the work carried out by people across the world. Furthermore, housework is a basis of and condition for all other work because, in the absence of a domestic background, people would generally be unable to engage in any other work at all, and it would be impossible to bring up children and reproduce future generations. And in those cases when women do find a job, they generally find themselves working two shifts, i.e. they have their day job, and they have the housework. Employers are aware of this and are afraid that they will often stay at home to look after small and sick children. In this light, they are often reluctant to employ women, or they discriminate against them by paying them less money. All of this also holds true, of course, in Western countries. Therefore, the eradication of poverty and the guarantee of the gender-just redistribution of labour in the household are essential for the emancipation of women.

Various global interactions can be problematic for the poor because they are damaged by transnational companies in global capitalism. On the other hand, global opportunities to prevent such injustice may also emerge. Non-profit organizations and agents, involved in global social movements, cooperate with the poor

who have been damaged by transnational corporations, whether this concerns exploited workers or, for example, the rural population which has to scrape by in extreme poverty in an environment contaminated by businesses. For example, in India, where 40% of the global poor live, they work together to demand extraterritorial recognition of their social rights which they seek judicially from (generally Western) states in which the corporations concerned are based. Most Western states committed themselves to the extraterritorial recognition of social rights back in the 1970s when they signed human rights protocols, especially the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The application of these legal documents had little impact before the global era, but in recent decades of global interactions the use of these legal instruments, readily available and having a relatively large impact, has become viable.

However, it would be wrong to believe that the global poor, in cooperation with social movements and non-profit organizations, will have fundamental power to change social and other injustices. Their activities are very important because they draw attention to the struggle for justice prompted by local misrecognized needs, and enable these needs to be tracked but it is impossible to expect changes only through the actions of these agents without regard to economic or other conditions. On one hand, for example, you see people who have been pushed to the margins of the world who are exploited mainly so that minerals and other natural resources could be looted. On the other hand, we can see how the poor are starting to be involved in the global economic system of consumption and production. Starting in the mid-1990s, former Chinese president Jiang Zemin motivated Chinese companies to engage in more business abroad by means of the slogan “Go out” (“Zou chuqu”). In those places where Western companies have no interest in view of the low profits available, Chinese companies are coming along and building infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, as well as schools, and they are developing the local African economies. China is looking for minerals and for markets for its cheap products, while Africa needs investment and companies for its development. As a result, more than a billion Africans and more than a billion Chinese are interacting. Increasing numbers of Africans are becoming involved in this cooperation, just as the Chinese were integrated into production for consumers from Europe and the U.S.A. since the 1970s. This transformed China into a global factory, and the country is now investing in Africa.

M. S.: *This gives me the idea that a parallel could be drawn between the abolition of the slaveholding order and the possible weakening of the current Western model of capitalism in developing countries.*

Marek Hrubec: We can view that issue from several angles, including from the perspective of efficiency. Sad to say, slavery was not brought to an end just because of the resistance of the slaves and moral arguments but also – and in particular – because it had become economically inefficient. Likewise, now the existing Western model is also showing signs of inefficiency in Africa because it too profit oriented. This is why China is introducing new economic opportunities in Africa and other developing areas of the world, including investment in infrastructure and schools, and is effectively destroying the old Western model of exploitation, which set apart the unneeded population of the developing world and abandoned it on the poor peripheries.

Naturally, the protests of the global poor and their resistance to Western corporations and states, combined with their engagement in the Chinese model, cannot be idealized because, in some respects, the increase in their standard of living is and will be affected by economic mistakes and environmental destruction. Overall, however, we are witnessing momentum behind the decline of the Western concept of capitalism, momentum which, through the Chinese model, is delivering hope to hundreds of millions of people so that they can escape from poverty, as many poor Chinese did in China. However, many problems brought about by this current path of development will still need to be tackled.

M. S.: *It is common knowledge that the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank (WB) support the interests of corporations and, as such, help the world's richest to become even richer. The largest producers of raw materials, such as coffee, aluminium, cotton, salt, and various types of staple food ingredients, rank among the poorest in the world. How is it possible that we have tolerated this situation for so long?*

Marek Hrubec: I will start by emphasizing that influential corporations, hand-in-hand with the IMF, WTO and WB, nurture a system that could be termed as a global state. Most people, including me, of course, place much greater demands on state institutions and do not consider the current system to be a global state. Nevertheless, the neoliberal concept of the state is based on a minimal state which is detached from the idea of the welfare state and other ideas of a more challenging concept of state anticipating public support of health care, education, culture, etc. Neoliberals satisfy themselves with merely reduced, simple economic rules benefiting transnational companies and their service organizations, and, in case of dispute, are content with putting up a defense by reference to basic legal treaties or by deploying political and military enforcement via affiliated countries. In this respect, unfortunately, we live in the conflictual system of a neoliberal global state where major imbalances of global capitalism arise to the detriment of developing countries.

At the same time, the injustices of global capitalism are largely tolerated because, in this period of mass media, people in the West are fragmented by information. Most people do not have enough information and, when they do, in their isolation they do not integrate into groups that would attempt to mobilize change for greater justice. The existence of the macro-regional and global economy requires that we set up adequate political and legal institutions of justice, i.e. normative institutions on macro-regional and global levels. On a macro-regional level, for example, we have the European Union, but this is not yet sufficiently integrated and does not have sufficient institutions for the genuine democratic participation of citizens and for social justice; it has little power and, as yet, there is no truly functioning European government with other institutions. Therefore, the EU may currently find it difficult to stand its ground both internally, in relation to European citizens, and externally, in relation to other macro-regional units which are strong for various reasons: U.S.A., China, etc.

M. S.: *What normative points of departure do you see on a global scale?*

Marek Hrubec: On a global level there are currently no adequate institutions. The UN was a progressive response to the situation following the World War II and, in many respects, genuinely delivered numerous positive steps. However, 60 years down the line, it requires a fundamental and creative overhaul. For example, it is unacceptable for the UN to essentially be controlled, via the Security Council, by just five superpowers with the veto power. No country from the global south is represented as a permanent member of the Security Council. The acceptance of India, Brazil, South Africa and Egypt, for example, as permanent members could at least be a first step on the way to greater justice.

It is also unacceptable that the citizens of various states are represented very unequally within the UN solely on the principle of one state, one vote, i.e. according to a principle of methodological nationalism. For example, at the UN General Assembly, 1.5 million Estonians have the same single vote as 1.3 billion Indians. This is a striking injustice which could be resolved by introducing a global parliament in which, based on methodological cosmopolitanism, the same number of citizens would always have the same number of votes – as is the case today in the parliaments of various countries or in the European Parliament. The current principle of methodological nationalism, however, could be preserved within the General Assembly which could represent another, less significant chamber of the global parliament: a “UN Senate”.

The redefined UN could then tackle current injustices in the economic and social area on one hand and in dialogue between individual cultures on the other. As the African author Kwame Gyekye notes, this would constitute respect not only for the plurality of cultures but also for common humankind. The UN should address planetary problems of wars, the environment, new dangers related to the electronic control of citizens, biotechnology, financial speculation, and the issue of a global reserve currency based on a basket of currencies rather than on the unfair dominance of a single state, etc. More institutional opportunities for civil participation in political and economic democracy, extraterritorial recognition, cultural polylogue, the global parliament and other elements I have mentioned could be among the first steps towards establishing a new order delivering expanded social, economic and cultural justice, and environmental sustainability. Such a system could secure the downfall of global financial speculation, put an end to the dominance of transnational corporations, and push through greater redistribution to developing countries from the global pie of production and trade, while ensuring greater respect for various cultures and various kinds of modernization.

M. S.: *The methodological trichotomy we have discussed reflects the dynamism of developments – momentum behind struggles for recognition commenced by negating the undesired situation, identifying positive elements and subsequently nurturing them into the required state of affairs. However, I frequently realize that, in mass media studies, we have issues with the last of these elements, i.e. the normative aspect. The problem here is that commercial media is unwilling to develop alternative normative values about the global justice, for example, because its goal is to accumulate profit, and our normative expectations (i.e. of citizens and social scientists) are of virtually no interest to it.*

Marck Hrubec: We have already mentioned the adverse impact of corporations on the mass media, which distort, in particular, political and economic news. It follows that while explaining the current situation, we are looking for normativity devoid of this negative influence. The normative solution has two aspects – public and private. On one hand, we need to promote public-service media and rid it of private distorting pressures and on the other, we must regulate the private media's political and economic news, e.g. broadcasting times could be regulated, or the news should be eliminated from commercial media altogether.

Experts and citizens have drawn attention to the fact that mass media stands alongside parliament as another power wielding great political and economic influence, yet this should be democratically managed. Just as we elect politicians, all citizens can have the opportunity to elect the management of public-service mass media: television, radio and, where appropriate, the press. As I have mentioned, however, currently the public-service media in many countries is often subject to pressure from advertisers who dictate the content of political or economic news in such media (by censorship or by the self-censorship of reporters). Another problem of public-service media is that control is often usurped by a group of journalists representing only a small political current, which then abuses the taxpayer's money by promoting, in a sectarian and non-democratic way, its own political and economic interests and those of its sponsors, while ignoring the plurality of opinions held by citizens. Today, we are still standing at the dawn of the democratization of the media because the election of various media councils and boards remains excessively in the hands (directly or indirectly) of the government or parliament. What is more, the broader management of mass media (by which I mean not just the directors), which should represent the plurality of citizens' interests, is not elected at all. Yet, it is the elections to councils and boards that are a certain, albeit partly flawed, positive element of democratization that we need to build upon and develop. Citizens should have the opportunity to cast their vote directly. Reinforcing the influence of citizens and, consequently, democracy in mass media means to introduce the public election of management of the public-service media. In general, greater participation of the people needs to be introduced not only into political democracy but also into economic democracy and media democracy, which is effectively absent today. While some people may think this is something which will not become reality for a long while yet, we have to start putting it together at some time.

As regards the practical promotion of democracy in the mass media, citizens need to be informed as much as possible about their opportunity to reject the oligarchy and introduce democracy in this sphere. Citizens would at least then be able to vote in parliamentary elections for political parties capable and willing to propose democratization of the mass media.

However, such a solution must extend beyond the local and national levels because economy and politics are interlinked on a transnational scale, and the citizens of developed Western countries feed on developing countries, as I have already mentioned. Justice will also require additional information about the situation in developing areas of the world which are linked to Western countries. For example, the extraction of minerals in a developing country could be made conditional on the fact that, in the target country using such minerals, there will be sufficient media coverage of the social, economic, and environmental aspects behind such extraction. This development is sure to go hand-in-hand with significant everyday resistance – demonstrations, strikes, and various everyday forms of protest against injustice.

M. S.: *Numerous philosophers and social scientists believe that their theories can only have a theoretical impact. You and the people around you in the Centre of Global Studies in Prague are proof of the opposite. You have resolved to critically formulate problems emerging not only in the realm of theory, but also on a practical level and on a transnational and global scale, including developing countries in Africa, etc. The answer can be found directly in your academic activities. A fundamental factor is that the development of a theory in the Czech environment has been able to engender a far-reaching and constructive debate in theory and practice.*

Marck Hrubec: I am attempting – with my colleagues – to analyze theoretically the themes which constitute major problems in social, political and cultural practice. The theory I am developing is therefore not detached from people's lives and does not only analyze various particular themes which appear to be interesting and fun for certain intellectuals. I am picking up on the practical struggle against social, political and cultural injustice and, by analyzing this, I am striving to contribute to a solution to such long-term and topical injustices.

It would be the height of naivety to believe that individual isolated philosophers, through their speculation, or individual narrowly specialized social scientists with their fragmented knowledge understand today's highly complex global society, and thus, can help along the necessary social change. We need entire interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary social scientific teams to do that. Therefore, our Centre's team is generally focusing on four fundamental activities, one theoretical and three practical. First and foremost, we are a social scientific centre and therefore, above all, we engage in research, and it is to this area that we devote most of our attention and time – in social and political philosophy, sociology, political science and other related fields and their overlaps. We then carry out research in three areas, always bilaterally. People from these areas influence us, as we do them. The first area comprises the presentation of the results of our research in university teaching. The second area is the performance of our social scientific activity in interaction with members of civil society and social movements. The third area is the provision of advisory activities in the public sphere. However, not all of our researchers carry out all of these activities; rather, they focus only on certain areas.

We cannot limit our research linked to these three other spheres only to local or national levels because the inherent nature of examining global interactions indicates activities beyond the borders of the nation state. For us, this means cooperating not only with colleagues from the EU and the U.S.A., as is usual, but also with Chinese, Brazilian, Russian and other counterparts. Inter alia, we have tried also to assist the development of new institutions, for example, with African colleagues at a new university in Africa; with colleagues from South and North America the preparation of macro-regional and global social forums; with European colleagues the Europe-wide campaign on unconditional basic income or the promotion of participative budgeting; and globally an intercultural dialogue, etc.

M. S.: *In early 2014, you have become the head, Rector, of a new university in east Africa. How do you work with your African colleagues?*

Marck Hrubec: I have long dwelt on the issue of global poverty which territorially primarily means sub-Saharan Africa, India, and areas of south-east Asia. Extreme poverty is a major problem resulting in the deaths of many people and desperate living conditions for others. In this situation it is not enough for Western countries to proffer small amounts of development assistance and cooperation as a little compensation for the historical crimes of colonialism and slavery, the breakdown of many countries, and the current exploitation of mineral resources and cheap labor. What we need is for local educated people, with a true knowledge of the issues faced by local people in global interactions and able to conceive of and coordinate improvements in standards of living in areas with extreme poverty, to be directly active in those areas. It is with this in mind that my African colleagues came up with the proposal to establish a new university and invited me to help develop it because, thanks to my specialization in social philosophy and global studies, I am in a position to contribute assistance not only with the creation of sound conceptual and practical conditions, but also by establishing cooperation with teaching and science centers in many countries.

In early 2014, then, I started contributing to the establishment of a new university on the boundaries of Burundi, Rwanda, and Congo. This university is intended primarily for students from countries that are still reeling from the after effects of conflict or where conflicts have yet to be resolved, but it is also open to others, especially from the east of Africa. Burundi is the fifth poorest country in the world, Rwanda has been unable to really recover from the recent genocide because a neoliberal regime has taken root there, and eastern Congo remains afflicted by armed conflicts in an environment where transnational corporations extract coltan, gold, diamonds and other raw materials, and where ethnic disputes between groups from these states are still in swing. We are confident that the new university can help to raise new generations capable of dealing with these problems. We are setting up five faculties and introducing new fields of studies which are needed primarily

to accommodate the requirements of local people. Great hope is vested in the students because they genuinely display keen interest in studying, in gaining an insight into the situation in eastern Africa and in global contexts, and in subsequently applying their knowledge in practice.

Unless we are stopped by various economic, political and military pressures, we will continue to develop the university. However, there is no guarantee how long the peace will last. Even now, as we are doing this interview, there are armed conflicts directly in the Cibitoke province where the university is located. In the past few days, more than 100 people were killed and many others were injured among the fighting groups from Congo and Burundi.

The interview took place at the conference "Responsibility at the Age of Irresponsibility" in Bratislava in November 2014, and later in Prague in January 2015.

Prepared by Martin Solík.

