

# HOW PEOPLE LIVE UNDER THE UNCERTAINTIES OF TODAY'S TIMES

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## Abstract

I have a growing feeling that we humans nowadays don't think enough and certainly don't think very accurately about our world, subject to a revolution, an upheaval produced by artificial intelligences, in fact so radical that sometimes we don't know if now is now or yesterday, or tomorrow, if the up is somehow not down and vice versa. Improbable nightmares seem to be more common than improbable dreams. We no longer listen to that rational argument which, naturally, is opposed by the slightest resistance on the logical road to a conclusion.

**Keywords:** *uncertainties, expectations, perception.*

## 1. PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS UNDER UNCERTAINTY

The preference goes towards the least resistance to perception or suspicion, image and negation. It is no less true that most components of the contemporary "vibration" are in continuous movement and transformation, with huge information encapsulated and, of course, digitally encoded in the collective mentality, in a "new" psychology that remains anchored in the national identity and religion, but less in science, rationality and moderation. And let's not forget that the psychology of negation is one of the fundamental features of man, which explains the inability to provide answers commensurate with various dangers.

That's how diversity works. The important thing is that things are not ephemeral, although subject to contingency but exist through intelligence, as a condition of duration. "Nothing is missed in the first place, but it can be," warns Gh. Vladuțescu, and continues "Nothing, it seems - in today's global world, I would say - is no longer uncreated, imperishable, whole, immovable, endless, because everywhere is not always the same, itself, uncomposed, indivisible."

We proposed the concept of a *mechanism of expectations*, the one capable of generating clarity of thoughts, calming of mind, preparation for adaptation to the desired reality, of course better than that of the moment. The mechanism of expectation is, I think, akin to containment, that is, containment, discouraging chaos. I think the mechanism has a dramatic quality. For example, we perceive the gap between our feeling or intuition and what we would have expected from the economic or social figures. We also perceive the gap between feeling and reality. Under conditions of acute uncertainty, exceptional skills and incredible luck are required. To fill these gaps, ingenuity and innovation are essential. Innovation means finding a better way to meet people's expectations every day. We have a real chance of fulfilling them, there and when rigorous science meets imagination. But not randomly, but by our own will.

I would advance the idea that it is a human mechanism, innate and then educated, as an impulse to control the chaos that lurks in the thickets of events. Perhaps also anticipating the future. Challenged by chance, we build our own expectations. Of course, the past shows us both what we lived and how we lived, as well as how we acted. But the past should not be the driving force in people's behaviour, but a resource from which to selectively extract information about the prospect of the events we might face in the future. In these perspectives we include not only what happened in the past, but also some possible events, which did not manifest in the past, but can have a decisive role in choosing our course of action today. Charles Dickens beautifully says in "*Great Expectations*": "Sometimes happiness and love have to be found in things that we have decided to leave in the past."

## **2. SCIENCE HAS NOT YET REMOVED PEOPLE'S SUFFERINGS**

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Fortunately, and contrary to the impulses of superficiality, science, art and philosophy continue their work. Obviously, the spirit of competition, the ambition to succeed where it is hardest to succeed, are at the forefront of this fundamental work of the society. But we shall see that it is not enough to keep pace with the changes brought about by the information society. For example, we ask ourselves the rhetorical question: how can we explain that all these achievements have not, at least, mitigated the effects of global crises or recessions? The work of science is also insufficient because it is the time to recognize that science, for example biochemistry and molecular biology with which we continue to have a relationship of great trust, is not yet a good generic solution to the numerous diseases (viral infections, cancer, heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, Alzheimer) that have not been eradicated and continue to bring much suffering and death, even in the rich societies of our world. Many diseases have proven to be multifactorial and very nonlinear, that is, the effect of one factor is determined by the strength of the other. Many of these diseases reflect the intimate nature of the human system. We need something else, something that is both rational and scientific.

## **3. EXISTENTIAL INFORMATION**

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Information constantly needs to be interpreted in order to be useful. Long before the formulation of new concepts now at the top of research on the origin of life - in 1987, Mihai Drăgănescu, stated that the emergence of life "is not an accident but rather the consequence of an existential tendency of the Universe" (Drăgănescu, 1988). He finds himself in an absolutely surprising convergence with Sara Imari Walker who says today that "There is a driving force trying to explore... Life is the physics that builds and cultivates the spaces of possibility" (Drăgănescu, 1988). Long before them, in 1917, in a surprising pragmatic philosophy, Arthur Conan Doyle added in the words of Sherlock Holmes: "What is the object served by this circle of (human) violence and fear?

For it must strive for some ultimate goal, otherwise our universe is governed by chance, which is unimaginable" ("The Return of Sherlock Holmes"). Beyond the structural substance, there cannot fail to be something deeper, because the universe itself has a beginning that comes from something. Then the very laws of physics are subject to and channelled by information. Information, being so important, prompts us, if not compels us, to assume that it has certain roots in the primary constituents of matter. Unlike what we might expect and what scientists used to think, the way in which we perceive the outside world isn't just based on raw data coming through our senses. It's a combination of our brain's predictions combined with that new data. The brain compares the generated data with the data received, identifies any errors, and updates its internal patterns as needed so that it can predict and thus it perceives more accurately the following time. Errors can be more or less trusted, depending on the context. It's all about minimizing uncertainty.

There is a need for a unification of physics, biology and psychology. What is the difference between a thimble of bacteria and a supercomputer? Believe it or not, bacteria contain more circuitry and more processing power. Perhaps this is not so surprising when you consider that all living life calculates: from individual cells responding to chemical signals to complex organisms navigating their environment, information processing is essential for all living systems.

## **4. THE WAY IN WHICH PEOPLE THINK**

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Various degrees of faith strength are involved in the foregoing. But it's not enough to believe. Because people think in different ways, what they believe often depends on how they think. A suite of thinking would be: we think; we can't help but think; we think in a certain way and ultimately this is the sequence in which we can really think and develop. This is how we can help our culture and community develop. I have found a suite of statements converging on a mindset that I want to convey to you in turn: "We should not go too far from our own culture; We should not look for paths that are

alien to us and that we cannot truly understand. If we want to broaden our horizons to include other ways of thinking, we should look for them nearby, in the cultural traditions with which we are intimately familiar and with which we have a real psychological connection; we should continue to think in these traditions and, through dialogues with their great achievements of the past and with the achievers of our time, do our utmost to add our own links to the great chain of humanity to which we belong," says Benjamin Brown, philosopher and professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in his book "Thoughts and Ways of Thinking: Source Theory and Its Applications" (Brown, 2017). This is an echo, in my opinion, of Marin Sorescu's 1981 words, in a literary analysis cenacle dedicated to him: "By remaining ourselves and not being ashamed of being as we are - sometimes even more naked, and more uneaten, both in the rain and at the crossroads of times, spells and microbes - we are more interested in the wider humanity than we would be by borrowing in one and over the wrong things and risking nothing with our much-little." I confess that every time I read these words in public, I become overwhelmed by emotions. And recently, at the Romanian Academy, I did not restrain myself from referring to today's slaves, the bearers of a detestable servility.

Generating, manipulating and ranking the tools to learn and advance into the unknown is not at odds with the need to imagine goals that represent the realities that are so dear to us. I believe that the new world of virtual assemblages and the new world of the science of experimentation through digital simulation cannot and must not be separated from the world of thought, practical or philosophical. In this new world, constantly announced through all media, political, sociological and philosophical, we ask ourselves whether the current European civilization represents a recent invention. The answer is obviously NO! All pre-existing forces had their role. The deep forces and realities embedded in the collective mind have a very long life, as Fernand Braudel explained in his fundamental work on world history.

## 5. CRISES SHOW HOW DEFYING UNCERTAINTY CAN BE DEVASTATING

"The failure of Lehman Brothers on September 15, 2008 triggered perhaps the biggest financial crisis in history. Certainly, the Great Depression of the 1930s involved a much larger collapse in the economic activity. But never before have short-term financial markets - the facilitators of day-to-day trade - closed on a global scale," he states in the article. Exuberant markets, with seemingly inexhaustible liquidity, dried up within 24 hours when investors were gripped by fear. A contraction in global economic activity followed. Economic forecasting proved not only wrong but fundamentally futile when it ignored the major risks lurking in the global economy. The International Monetary Fund said in the spring of 2007 that "global economic risks have declined" and that "signs from the U.S. and elsewhere are very encouraging." And in December 2006, the highly respected journal, "The Economist" wrote the following: "Market capitalism, the engine that drives most of the world economy, seems to be doing its job well."

The opposite followed! Alan Greenspan believes that the explanation for this disaster of prediction based on econometric models lies mostly in human psychology, in what Keynes called, in 1936, "animal spirits," that is, "a spontaneous impulse to action rather than inaction." The mechanism of expectations generated and fed by the out-of-control greed of speculators on the stock markets has been triggered.

Our great compatriot Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, the founder of environmental economics, pointed out that the logic of an indefinite equilibrium "ignores a crucial phenomenon: the fact that, in a new economic situation, an individual can modify his preferences" (Georgescu-Roegen, 2009). He also makes an essential statement in the same vein: "if we maintain that facts are sufficient to answer the question affirmatively (whether experimental resources lead to real discovery), then we must necessarily come to the conclusion that reality is antirational and not just rational" (Georgescu-Roegen, 2009). I would complement

Georgescu-Roegen (from whom I received an exceptionally beautiful letter in April 1990) by saying that no fact should be considered a priori as "too absurd." It is about the importance of both irrational factors and unpredictability in the economic decision-making.

People generally tend to behave as they have done in the past, and knowing how people have acted in the past can give us the best clue as to how they are going to act in the future. But there are times when people change their behaviour -- sometimes very quickly -- and then we have to rely on the information that exists about variables, motives, attitudes, but also about emotions that have engulfed people, because emotions intensify on the former. This is the way to complement behavioural data for advanced prediction purposes (Katona, & Likert, 1946)

The successful prediction has long been seen as the primary goal of respectable science, and economists are dominated by the idea that they are scientists. "Theory is judged by its predictive power," said Milton Friedman in 1999. Mainstream economists, with the lessons of crises not yet learned, continue the tendency to believe that we are responsible for the future and can predict what will happen. Such a trend simply means building fantasies. Those who do not follow the mathematical-deductivist line have no place at the main table. There are many examples, perhaps the coolest of which is George Akerlof's original 1970 Market for Lemons model, Nobel Prize in economics in 2001. It was developed by adjusting certain parameters to better represent the real market. Both the American Economic Review and Review of Economic Studies rejected the paper's publication as "trivial," while reviewers for the Journal of Political Economics rejected it as incorrect, arguing that if the paper were correct, then no commodities could be traded. It was not until its fourth attempt that the paper was published in the Quarterly Journal of Economics. Today, the paper is one of the most cited works in modern economic theory and the most-read work in economic journals of all time (more than 40,000 citations in academic papers as of January 2024). It has profoundly influenced almost every area of economics, from industrial organization and public finance to macroeconomics and contract

theory. The psychological explanation of the divergence between the economic prediction and reality must be strongly considered, as outlined before.

Do we need a new kind of economy? Yes. There is a new approach called complexity economics or evolutionary economics. It shapes the economy as an evolutionary system that is dynamic and constantly changing. Economic behaviour is determined both by individuals and by the society as a whole. In other words, never abandon the reality of the present for the fiction of the future.

## **6. ABOUT THE NEED FOR COOPERATION IN ORDER NOT TO LIVE UNDER THE YOKE OF UNCERTAINTIES**

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We kind of admit that uncertainty is like a wild animal. Its domestication seems to me well explained by the line in a movie of a famous rider about his no less famous horse Hidalgo, a wild mustang from the American West of the Indians, to the question about the horse: "Did you find it and domesticate it?" "No, I did not domesticate it. We're fine together." Indeed, in the end of the film the horse returns to the herd of wild horses. It is therefore a freely consented cooperation.

Cooperation is now seen as the primary creative force, supporting increasing levels of complexity and organization across biology. "Cooperation plays this central role because it exports fitness from the lower level (costs) to the new higher level (benefits)," says Richard E Michod, in his book about John Maynard Smith, considered the leader of modern evolutionary biology. Interactions do not occur under any circumstances, triggered only by necessity or purely by chance, but they are common in physical and human space and often generate the most interest, to the extent that different people react confidently in different ways. Under the combined effect of energies (movement and interactions) the current theme should be the global coordination and something even more: the cultural evolution.

Concerned about the effects of climate change, we must remember that every action in a global system depends, for its success, on a cooperative

behaviour. Cooperation is not a solution: it is the only solution. The historian's perspective brought by Anthony Grafton, author of the excellent work "Worlds made by words" is the following: "Knowledge that lie at the basis of our world of things.... have been discovered over the centuries, by trial and error, two steps forward and one step back. It has been produced and improved collaboratively: the work of talented, largely anonymous groups, one generation after another, rather than identifiable individuals." Moreover, I believe that the attitude conducive to cooperation is part of our innate caution in the face of the unexpected. Prudence creates a reserve for action. For example, there are still dramatic gaps between the reality of unpredictable climate dynamics and people's expectations and confidence. Thomas Kuhn concludes, in his famous work "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions," that "the significance of crises is the indication they give, that an opportunity has come to reform and renew the tools." Since we cannot control the timing of a crisis, we risk going beyond the edge of chaos when we stop organizing ourselves as humanity as a whole, but unconsciously "flee" with nature's "flights" and forget about the implacable need for global human cooperation. Behavioural strategies should ignore exaggeration and histrionism and focus instead on hypothesis testing and sound science. Finally, if we reach a consensus, it is not uncritical. We condition benefit on truth, not truth on benefit. Indeed, truth, that is, order, represents the source of usefulness. Error, that is, disorder, is not.

And I would add a less obvious aspect, namely that cooperation includes negotiation. The difference is that cooperation is always the basis for success. Negotiation is not. Both, however, take place under the roof of interest. Cooperation under that of common interest, negotiation under that of finding it.

"No matter how hard things get, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Sometimes in the least expected way," said Mathew Reum, after surviving six days, stuck and unbeknownst to anyone, in his truck, which fell one night off the highway under a bridge due to a large unmarked oil stain.

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The first sentence of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina goes like this: "Happy families are all the same, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Tolstoy says it takes many different things for a marriage to be happy - financial stability, partner chemistry, shared values, healthy offspring. However, it only takes one of these aspects to not be present for a family to be unhappy. It was popularized as Anna Karenina's principle - "a deficiency of any of a number of factors condemns effort to failure" (Moore, 2001).

The problem is how expectations respond to new information. We need to understand the behaviour of economic choices, especially the relationship between expectations of future returns and choice behaviour. Obviously, one of the main problems is establishing causality. We need to know how information affects expectations. Another point is the potential impact of the wording and formulation of the question. What seems to work well at some point might not hold up later as technologies and the modes of inquiry change and also the composition of the responding population changes.

The mechanism of expectation is, I think, akin to containment, that is, containment, discouraging chaos. dramatic quality // unexpected tragedy or happy ending // The hidden cost of it all // A great rebalancing // Like everyone else, Americans remain hostages of luck, focusing on their stable future and keeping their habits. But they can miscalculate the speed of obvious transitions.

Recently, a new vision of the development of behavioural economics has emerged in recent decades in which mainstream economists have struggled to determine the importance of various "irrationalities" (fear, prejudices, anomalies, etc.) in economic analysis, which is consistent with John Maynard Keynes' "animal spirits" or "unconsciousness," "instincts" or "impulses" in Freudian psychology. These "irrationalities" have always been considered distinct from human reason or "rational thinking."

"However, another long-standing view emerges, namely that 'irrationalities' are actually types of rationality" (Li, 2022). Thus, says the author, one can evaluate more rationally and minimize the price of economic reform. For

example, “computational or thinking costs prevent a thought process from achieving the desired optimality” (Li, 2022). When the thought process moves away from optimality, it is likely to produce a wrong result, out of touch with reality, different and unrelated to the objective information received from the outside. Simply put, information does not work by itself, as economic literature often claims. “Clearly, the highlighted ‘irrational’ tendencies reflect the imperfection of accumulated knowledge” (Li, 2022). The bottom line is that imperfection needs to be researched and proven to be more rationally acceptable.

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“I am interested in a political art, that is, an art of ambiguity, contradiction, unfinished gestures and uncertain endings. An art (and politics) in which optimism is kept in check and nihilism at bay,” says William Kentridge, an artist well-known for animated films (Tallman, 2023). Perhaps this explains how artists are still drawn to disruptive, awkward, inconsequential movements like Dada, and at the same time successfully coordinate the undertaking required to produce their art.

Innovation means finding a better way every day. That’s when you meet your expectations.

Incredible skills and incredible luck // Require the meeting between rigorous science and imagination.

Waiting is also an illusion, based on a mechanism of betrayal.

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#### Perspective 1: A probabilistic world.

Random variations exist in nature and in the social and political world and can never be eliminated. Even if we measured all variables without errors, conducted a census (rather than just a sample of data), and included every explanatory variable imaginable, our analyses would never generate perfect predictions. A researcher can divide the world into seemingly systematic and seemingly unsystematic components and can often improve predictions, but nothing a researcher does to analyse the data can have any effect on reducing the fundamental amount of unsystematic variation existing in different parts of the empirical world.

#### Perspective 2: A deterministic world.

Random variation is just that part of the world for which we have no explanation. The division between the systematic and stochastic variation is imposed by the analyst and depends on what explanatory variables are available and included in the analysis. Given the right explanatory variables, the world is completely predictable.

Open, non-deterministic complex adaptive systems exist and extend into the natural and social world. Chaotic systems and complex systems have certain key qualities. Both complex and chaotic systems are nonlinear, meaning they cannot be “broken down into [their] parts and each part solved separately to construct the complete solution” (Rickles et al., 2007). In addition, many complex systems are similar to chaotic systems in their sensitivity to initial conditions, which means that even tiny changes in initial inputs or relationships will, over time, produce different drastic results (often referred to as the “butterfly effect”). Such sensitivity increases the importance of contingency and measurement issues, creating a significant barrier to prediction, even when certain parameter adaptations can be anticipated. Whether it is economics, physics, chemistry, biology or natural systems, discerning the behaviour of a complex system means being able to find some sufficiently correct (consistent) rules in how the complexity of the system is born. It is not enough to know that something is true, and/or confirmed. We still need to know the historical context of the appearance of that something. One thing is normal until the accident occurs that contradicts and overturns normal. The slow evolution that signals accumulation towards a time when the resilience of the system fails irreparably.

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“That desire is not enough, that talent is not enough, that ambition is not enough, that being a good writer is not enough, that being well read is not enough, that being famous is not enough, that being highly cultivated is not enough, that being wise is not enough, that commitment is not enough, that patience is not enough, that getting drunk from the purity of life is not enough, that it is not enough to withdraw from life, that

believing in your dreams is not enough, that dissecting reality is not enough, that intelligence is not enough, that heart palpitation is not enough, that strategy is not enough, that communication is also not enough, that even having something to say is not enough, nor is working tirelessly; and the voice also says that all of these could be, and often are, a condition, an advantage, an attribute, a power, of course, but then the voice adds that, essentially, none of these qualities are ever sufficient when it comes to literature, because writing always requires something else, something else, something else (Mbougarr Sarr, 2021).

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“Nobody Wants the Current World Order,” Shivshankar Menon, *Foreign Affairs*, August 3, 2023, is the headline of a recent article about the state of world politics (Menon, 2023). He starts from the realization that all the major powers of the world, even the United States, have become revisionists. A kind of anarchy creeps into international relations – not anarchy in the strict sense of the term, but rather the absence of a central organizing principle or global leader. None of the world’s great powers can dictate the terms of the current order; Moreover, they are unable to promote a clear set of principles and norms of conduct. It is hard to establish such rules when there are so many countries that say they want to go their own way. All that remains is for the states to learn to cope with this world of revisionist powers, a world emerging in a chaotic transition, and to prepare for a future that appears increasingly uncertain.

As the old order disintegrates and the new one struggles to emerge but does not have a clearly defined direction, the advantage would be on the side of the states that discern the new balance of forces as well as the tendencies towards imbalance and do not ignore the decisive importance of a future order based on cooperation in the service of all. Richard Wagner was convinced that once history is recovered, proximity is everything, it is salvation. Our world shows us that the ubiquitous proximity, as we see it in global interconnectivity, is not enough. We need more, we need cooperation. Unfortunately, many of today’s leaders show little interest in crisis management through

preventive diplomacy or in solving transnational problems, precisely when revisionism makes crises more likely and dangerous. As a consequence of the controversial domestic policies, with some notable exceptions such as China or India, the powers have become sharply revisionist, wanting to change the international system but without offering a convincing vision of what a beneficial global change should and could be. Rapid and unexpected changes do not allow to achieve a balance of power on the basis of a more stable order over time. Instead, the powers are more likely to sink, from crisis to crisis, into pernicious distrust, “as their discontent with the international system and with each other grows, in a form of movement without movement,” says the author.

Its components are constantly moving and transforming, with a lot of information encoded in the collective mentality, in psychology, in perception, especially related to the national identity and religion (the civil war in Yugoslavia, the war in Ukraine). We are looking for our own stability that can trigger an unstable dynamic and/or the emergence of a critical threshold. Beyond it lies a world without reins.

Thierry Lavabre-Bertrand, after examining chance and then necessity, starting from Jacques Monod but from a current perspective, states quite courageously: “Today, chance and necessity share their explanation of the living. The part attributed to chance does not stop growing, at least at first glance, and seems paramount in complex structures such as those of neural circuits. The prevalence of chance opens up the possibility of freedom and thus, objectively, grounds metaphysics.”

Andy Clark in his new book, “The Experience Machine: How Our Minds Predict and Shape Reality,” shows that the traditional bottom-up view of visual perception, for example, means that our brains analyse incoming signals, find patterns of increasing complexity, and make sense of what exists by matching observed patterns with internal representations (Clark, 2023). He proposes the theory of predictive processing, which overturns these notions. The brain compares the generated data with the data received, identifies any errors, and updates its internal patterns as needed so that it can predict

and thus perceive more accurately the following time. Errors can be more or less trusted, depending on the context. It's all about minimizing uncertainty. This way of thinking about the brain hides something deep: in order to generate sensory data, the brain needs to know something about how the world works and how bodies move in this world. But no one feeds them with textbooks.

Therefore, when the brain creates precise internal models - over evolutionary time periods or over an organism's lifetime - it's akin to understanding the physical world. "To understand chaotic inputs, the brain makes educated assumptions about what generates them." Unlike what we might expect and what scientists used to think, the way in which we perceive the outside world isn't just based on raw data coming through our senses. It's a combination of our brain's predictions combined with that new data.

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 Einstein's conception of God has been the subject of considerable conjecture. On several occasions, he has quite clearly expressed his conviction in this matter. "I believe in the God of Spinoza who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and actions of human beings." In one place, Einstein explicitly stated his conception of religion in general. There, he talks about three conceptions, each differing in essential respects. Firstly, he distinguishes the most primitive conception of religion with its anthropocentric God. Secondly, "... at the higher levels of social life, the religion of morality prevails." Thirdly, there is what Einstein calls "cosmic religious feeling." It is this last conception of religion that Einstein believes in, or rather, it is this type of religion that he experiences. "It is not enough," he continues, "for us as individuals to play a role in the cultural development of the human race, we must also deal with tasks that only nations as a whole can perform. Only in this way can Jews regain their social health."

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 "It is the complaint of the Global South against Western criteria of moral superiority," noted Le Monde's Sylvie Kauffmann. "It calls into question

an international order established by the defendant's most powerful ally, the United States. It is also a challenge to a collective memory dominated by the Holocaust, which is openly opposed to that of colonization." And South Africa is not alone. Lining up behind it are a cast of countries from the so-called Global South - from Brazil to Turkey, Colombia to Bangladesh. Countries like Chile and Mexico have also referred alleged Israeli crimes for investigation by the International Criminal Court. According to a tally by Sarang Shidore and Dan Ford of the Quincy Institute, governments that represent some 60% of the population of "Global South" countries are now either leading or backing international legal action against Israel. When Germany signalled that it would present a third-party defense of Israel at the ICJ, claiming that South Africa's case had "no basis," it triggered an outraged objection from Namibia - a former German colony that experienced what's now recognized as the 20th century's first genocide at the hands of German colonial authorities. It speaks volumes of the global moment that a war in the Middle East can stir historical animosities continents away. "Few conflicts in the world have such global reverberations as this one. ... All over the world people have a position on this," Dahlia Scheindlin, a Tel Aviv-based political analyst, told the Financial Times. "So, I can imagine that any decision taken by the court is going to inflame both sides in one way or another."

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