

The Haves and the Have-Nots: The West, the Global South, and the Rest

Written by Francisco Lobo

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FRANCISCO LOBO, NOV 9 2025

This is an excerpt from *The Praeter-Colonial Mind: An Intellectual Journey Through the Back Alleys of Empire* by Francisco Lobo. You can download the book free of charge from E-International Relations.

De toda la vida is a common expression in Spain. It could be literally translated as 'lifelong', but that is not quite the way they use it there. They use it to convey the idea of something that feels immediately familiar. The closest English equivalent in that sense would be 'just like grandma used to make', whereas the opposite would be 'not your mother's' something or the other. One summer I found myself traveling with my father across Spain, a trip to the old country with the old man. When we asked our waiter about a dessert option that sounded strange to us, he shrugged and replied: 'Es el de toda la vida' ('It's just like the one grandma used to make'). Although he was waiting tables in Madrid, a major touristic capital of the world, we could not get him to understand that we were not actually from there, and that what grandma used to make for him was not something that would be immediately apparent to us. We did speak the same language, though – to be sure, us with our South American accents, him with his Iberian one. The whole interaction transpired in Spanish (Castilian, more precisely), the result of centuries of European imperialism that, nonetheless, rendered us befuddled by the unexpectedly unfamiliar on that hot August afternoon in the heart of la madre patria, Mother Spain.

What we were doing there was almost taken out of a book of great American clichés: father and son traveling across the old country to look for the origins of the family name. Only, as native Chileans the old country for us means not Ireland or England, but Spain. According to my father's research, our last name comes from a place located in the region of Asturias in northern Spain, a town called Cabañaquinta, the capital of Aller county. A small and eerie mining settlement up in the misty mountains of Asturias, Cabañaquinta wasn't really anything to write home about, its only road engulfed by the humid, green environs that to us felt like a most welcome change of scenery after the torrid landscapes of Andalucía in the south.

We immediately located some sort of civil registry ('City Hall' would be a bit of a stretch for the tiny office) where we inquired about records of family names from the area. The clerk looked at us unimpressed from behind the glass, even though I am quite certain a visit by two people coming all the way from Chile must have been the most exciting thing that happened to him that day. Still, he was as unhelpful as he was perplexed by our inquiry, which resulted in zero findings of the last name Lobo.

'I don't know what to tell you, this is not a history museum', he offered with dry Asturian compassion. I begged to differ. Armed with my 'liberal arts confidence' (a hilarious phrase coined by comedian Bert Kreischer), I tried to explain to him that to keep records of people's births and deaths, their names and their family connections, is indeed a way of doing history by using a primary source that contains the information of scores of humans who are, at the end of the day, the drivers of history. Still, no 'Lobo' on record; 'sorry you wasted a trip', his half-closed eyes seemed to express – 'but please come check again next year!' would have been the perfect punchline, I thought to myself. And so, our quest ended with an anticlimactic and unceremonious conclusion, after which my father returned back home with nothing but a keychain with our family name engraved on it as a consolation prize he got in some shop in Madrid. I stayed behind in Europe, my prater-colonial mind continuing to be bemused by the never-ending

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complexities of the post- colonial as I try to make sense of the many legacies of colonialism in our present.

South of the Border

After that trip, my father returned to the place our family comes from, a place where we are at least a matter of record. It is not just any place. It is a part of the world known these days as the 'Global South'. It is a magical land that defies geographic conventions, as not everything south of the equator, that is, not everything in the 'Southern Hemisphere' is included in the Global South, excluding most notably Australia and New Zealand, which are considered 'Western' countries. Conversely, many places found in the Northern Hemisphere are also a part of the Global South, not least China, India, Pakistan, the entire Middle East and Central Asia, as well as the northern half of Africa, and all of Central America.

The Global South is also a wondrous place where the preternatural meets the praeter-colonial, as Sanghera points out when contrasting the traces of British imperialism found in the streets of New Delhi with the chaos of Old Delhi (Sanghera 2024, 11). It is the land of magical realism, the literary genre famously developed by Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez, where all things northern have to be imported before they can be truly experienced, just like the ice that one of his main characters was taken to discover when he was a child. It is also a place of abject poverty, where some of the world's weakest economies are found. At the same time, the Global South is home to burgeoning economies boasting membership in the G-20, for example, China and India.

In short, and to use an old cliché, the Global South is a land of contrasts – perhaps so many as to render the label useless. Coming from such a space I often find myself wondering: As a Chilean, what do I have in common with someone from Pakistan or Angola? Don't I have more in common with an Australian who, just like me, only knew hot Christmases growing up? Or with a South Korean who has seen their country transformed and Americanized by decades of neoliberal reforms, not unlike my own narrow strip of land in South America? And don't I and the rest of my Latin American brethren have more in common with the US and Canada than China, seeing as we live in the same continent? Or with any European country, as we speak European languages, dress in European fashion and live and die under European institutions and forms of government?

Of course, I understand the need to lump countries together for all kinds of administrative, economic, and geopolitical purposes. In other words, for power. The original division of UN members into Regional Groups thus makes some sense, especially as it respects geography to the extent possible: it comprises five different categories, including the African Group, the Asia- Pacific Group, the Eastern European Group, the Latin American and Caribbean Group, and the Western European and Others Group (the geographic consistency collapses in this last category, as it includes Australia, Canada, Israel, and New Zealand). As the UN is the brainchild of American power, the US belongs to none of these groups, in a studied display of the old Roman adage divide et impera.

Although the South has always been there, there was a time when there was no Global South. It was a time of new initiatives, but also of new rivalries. The time when the UN was born, soon to become a forum for hot diplomacy during the Cold War. And it was around this time that a precursor to the Global South was also born: the 'Third World'. Today, the expression is used derisively to disparage a place that is considered backward and underdeveloped – just as no European wants to be called 'Eastern', no Latin American wants to be identified as 'tercermundista' – a 'third-worlder'. But it was not always so. Popularized by President Sukarno of Indonesia at the Bandung Conference in 1955, the concept of the 'Third World' was originally conceived as an answer to the geopolitical rivalry between the Western, capitalist 'First World' (or 'Free World') and the Eastern, communist 'Second World', as a new and improved synthesis or third way (like the French 'Third Estate') between the old thesis and antithesis descending from the North. It originally comprised Asia and Africa, later expanding to the rest of the world not under American or Soviet influence, under the telling label 'Non-Aligned Movement' (Bevins 2020, 51).

Although the term Third World has a bad reputation today, and despite the survival of its institutional crystallization as the Non-Aligned Movement, the search for alternatives to designate the 'Have-nots' of the earth is a continuous effort, as borne out, for example, by the economic bloc known as the G77 within the UN. Hence the appeal of new formulas as well, such as the 'Global South'. The main problem with the concept of the Global South, however, is its

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geopolitical overreach, attempting to cover too much ground, too many groups and nations that may in the end only have in common what they are not (the West). As one analyst has put it: “these countries can also have dramatically diverging interests, values, and perspectives. (...) The West must see these states as they are, not fall for the fallacy that they operate geopolitically as a single entity” (Ero 2024, para. 19). That is, they must demystify the magical land known as the Global South by exercising all the faculties available to the prater-colonial mind.

Latin America: Schrödinger’s West

One way to begin the task of demystifying the Global South is by pulling one of the many threads lumped together in this yarn ball sitting in the bottom half of the global drawer. As a Chilean, the one closest to me is, naturally, the one coming out of the South American end. Is South America, and by extension Latin America, part of the Global South? Or is it part of the West? After all, Spanish conquistadors have been dubbed by one American historian ‘Romans in a New World’ (Lupher 2009). Growing up in Chile you definitely get the impression that you belong in the West: you speak a European language, you dress in a European-American way, you consume content coming out of the US and Europe, and everywhere you see symbols and motifs that are a legacy of the Enlightenment, such as the red, white and blue national flag or the baroque and neoclassic buildings located in downtown Santiago.

It is no wonder then that the Chilean who happens to go abroad is shaken by the axiomatic truth held among Westerners that Latin America is, in fact, something other than the West. It is what Samuel Huntington famously concluded about Latin America when he theorized about the clash of civilizations, the ‘Latin American civilization’ being, in his view, one of the ones that stood a better chance at being incorporated by the West – alongside Eastern Europe (Huntington 1993), where Ukraine is located, another periphery forever orbiting around the West. This is also probably the reason why Latin America has been called ‘The Other West’ (Carmagnani 2011), insofar as the praeter-colonial mind can accommodate the thought of a place being the West, the Other West, and not-the-West all at once (a ‘Schrödinger’s West’ of sorts).

This ambivalence might also explain why Latin America tends to be so porous when it comes to imperial encroachments by Western countries in addition to Spain and Portugal. For example, the overgarments ‘Latin’, ‘Latino/a’, or (the increasingly unpopular) ‘Latinx’ (Torres 2025, para. 14) that shroud our contemporary American identity were once readily received by Iberian peoples, when the French pulled off one of the most successful ‘strategic communications’ operations in history during the nineteenth century, not without the help of US interventionism in Nicaragua (Grandin 2025, 287).

Indeed, not only did the French install a puppet regime in Mexico in the 1860s under Emperor Maximilian; they attempted, quite successfully, to rebrand the identity of ‘Hispanic’ and other Iberian descendants from Mexico to Cape Horn to substitute it for a term that encompassed all Mediterranean peoples and Romance speakers in order to expand France’s sphere of influence (Phelan 1968; Espinosa 1918) and at the same time contract Anglo Saxon (US) presence in America. We may not speak French today in Latin America, but French imperialists certainly managed to give us our most famous nom de plume: ‘Latin’ America.

Meridionalism is the New Orientalism

I believe one of the secrets to J.R.R. Tolkien’s success as a writer, and by implication to Peter Jackson’s as a movie director, lies in the fact that they tell stories about what it means to be human with the assistance of the narrative device of the non-human. Thus, *Lord of the Rings* is not only a story about elves, and dwarves, and hobbits, and orcs; although it is all these things, it is mostly a story about humans and their struggles with all the things that make them so, such as weakness, corruption, cowardice, and of course mortality. What all these other fantastic creatures provide to the narrative is a mirror of sorts into which humans can look and see what they aspire to become – for instance, wise as elves, tough as dwarves, or goodhearted as hobbits – or what they do not wish to descend to – for example, the viciousness of orcs, the brutishness of trolls, or the thirst for power of the ring wraiths. In other words, what *Lord of the Rings* provides as a narrative about humans is a sort of ‘folk anthropology’ through which we may understand ourselves better.

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The use of this kind of self-reflective technique is actually nothing new in the West – Tolkien himself becoming a master narrator of his own version of all things ‘Western’. Fearing, and at the same time wondering about what lies to the East are sentiments as old as Judeo-Christian views of the world, as reflected in the name ‘Gog and Magog’ included in the North-East of many medieval and early modern maps. Gog and Magog were the biblical names of monstrous cannibals once expelled by Alexander the Great himself into their eastern exile, constantly threatening to overrun the lands to the West and bring with them the end of days (Gow 1998). But what Gog and Magog really stood for was ‘Not-the-West’, namely ‘the Other’.

Skipping ahead a few centuries, one of the latest, most sophisticated ways of Othering comes to us in the form of ‘Orientalism’. As Edward Said, the creator of this concept, famously put it:

The Orient was almost a European invention (...). The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience (...); in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said 1994, 25–26).

If this is so, and if indeed both the ‘West’ and the ‘Orient’ are made up for political purposes, could we not say the same of the so-called ‘Global South’, that meridional (southern) space? Is this not the newest construct the West has come up with in its never-ending search for identity, positioning itself in contradistinction to this latest iteration of ‘not-the-West’? Is ‘Meridionalism’ (i.e. ‘Southerism’) the new Orientalism? And how should us modern-day dwellers of Gog and Magog feel about it?

Pride and Prejudice

Rudyard Kipling, a notorious imperialist poet, once prophesized about the West and the East that ‘never the twain shall meet’. These words were written over a hundred years ago. Today, there is one particular individual in the world who is going to great lengths to make sure Kipling’s prediction holds true. Like Gog and Magog, this bloodthirsty despot comes from the North- East. He may not be a biblical brute or one of Tolkien’s orcs (although some would beg to differ) (Sudyn 2022). However, there is no denying that Vladimir Putin is coming for the West.

In a speech delivered in Sochi in 2023, Putin lambasted the West for its arrogance and its belief that it can set rules and boss the rest of the world around. With an expression of derision and a shrug he asked of his Western counterparts: ‘Who are you anyway? What right do you have to warn someone?’ (Reuters 2023, para. 26) which elicited spontaneous applause among the audience, many of whom appeared to come from the Global South. Further, this pharisaical invader and imperialist in disguise reminded the West that the era of colonial rule ‘is long gone and will never return’, the irony lost on the audience but certainly not on those whose borders are currently being occupied by Russian troops – his troops.

Hypocritical and manipulative as they may be, Putin’s words nevertheless resonate among Global South audiences who have grown resentful after centuries of Western hegemony. This resentment can be found, for example, in China’s view of the period between the mid nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries as the ‘century of humiliation’ resulting from the Opium Wars engineered by European imperialists (as we shall see in Chapter Eight). It can also be seen, more recently, in the scores of angry young men flocking to the cause of the Islamic State against Western desecration of holy places in the Middle East; or in the carefully choreographed rejection of American and French military assistance by a coalition of African countries in the Sahel, a situation that other foreign powers such as Russia and China have been quick to exploit for their own benefit.

Yet, there is more in the Global South than just resentment, and it is the task of the praeter-colonial mind to provide a more complex picture of the Have-nots that moves them away from the stigma of pure victimhood. In all fairness, arrogance and pride can also be found in the Global South, admittedly in smaller and less lethal doses. For instance, the controversial Egyptian tycoon Mohamed ‘Mou Mou’ Al-Fayed famously told a reporter once ‘I don’t need a British passport. When you were running around in an animal skin my ancestors were building the pyramids’ (Armstrong

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2006, para. 18). His words echoed those of Prince Faisal, leader of the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, who reminded the victors of the First World War as they carved the new face of the Middle East: 'I belong to a people who had been civilised when all the other peoples represented here were inhabited by barbarians' (Faisal 1919, para. 3).

Further, I always remember the story of Argentine paleontologist Florentino Ameghino, who in the nineteenth century came up with the bold theory that all mammals, homo sapiens included, originated in the pampas or plains of Argentina in South America. The thesis was meant to be debunked and suffer the fate of the phlogiston or the geocentric theory; yet, what I find fascinating is that Argentine society at the time was an environment that exhibited the kind of free-floating self-confidence that was conducive to producing such an individual with an outlandish idea built on little more than pure national pride (Argentina was at the turn of the century one of the richest countries in the world).

Would I chuckle in the same way if I was told that a British, French or American scientist once came up with a similar notion that humans evolved from a Garden of Eden located in the US, Europe or the British Isles? Probably not. Were scientists derided and mocked when they first suggested that humankind began its journey in Africa? Possibly. The scientific method is all about trial and error, so errors must be made, probably plenty of them, before hitting the mark. Ameghino's story is tragic and amusing at the same time, not because of its lack of scientific soundness, but because it reminds us that the Have-nots do not need to be defined solely by their suffering or their resentment, and that they are capable of just as much folly and genius as folks up North.

The Riddle of the Middle

Located at the gates of Europe, the archetypal 'borderland' between empires, Ukraine has been said to be situated in a 'liminal place within the global order as a post-colonial state straddling boundaries between North and South, East and West, Europe and Asia' (Labuda 2024, 274). Thus, Ukraine seems to be a case study of how all these overlapping physical and political categories can be stretched out almost to the extreme of futility. If one country can be all those things at once, then maybe those labels aren't something that real after all, and that includes those far, far away galaxies like the 'Global East' and the 'Global South'.

Is there an alternative to the concept of the 'Global South', then? The originally dialectic notion of the 'Third World' didn't really catch on, except as a marker of poverty, instability and underdevelopment. The 'Non-Aligned Movement' may sound as a better option, but it obviously begs the question of what it is that they are not aligning with; in other words, what are the alternatives that are considered unacceptable such that the identity of an entire portion of the globe, or huddle, is defined in contradistinction? Back in the time when it was adopted, the two evils were the West and the East, Capitalism and Communism. Today one of them is gone, and the other does not seem to be always inspiring – or welcoming, as we know the West will always need its 'not-the-West' to exist.

The British – those masters of all forms of power hard and soft – have recently come up with an alternative: the 'Global Middle Ground'. They first highlighted the geopolitical importance of 'global middle powers' in their 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (HM Government 2021, 27). In a 2023 update or refresh of that policy, they coined the name of this new geopolitical space: "An expanding group of "middle-ground powers" are of growing importance to UK interests as well as global affairs more generally, and do not want to be drawn into zero-sum competition any more than the UK does (HM Government 2023, para. 31)."

The aim is for 'Global Britain' to work with these middle powers in order to find common ground despite differences. In other words, the Global Middle Ground is the equivalent of the swing votes in an election, who need to be carefully cajoled and persuaded with finesse. Just like in chess, the players must strive to dominate the middle-ground of the board if they want to succeed, as we attend what Fareed Zakaria calls 'the rise of the rest' (Zakaria 2024, 282).

The problem is that this sounds more like old-fashioned great power competition, reminiscent of what the Athenians once told the people of the tiny island of Melos in order to 'persuade' them to join Athens instead of Sparta during the Peloponnesian War: "in human disputation justice is then only agreed on when the necessity is equal; whereas they that have odds of power exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get

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(Thucydides 1989, 365–366).” Melos was thus the original middle-ground power caught in the midst of a big dog fight. It did not end well for the Melians, and their story should serve as a cautionary tale before we rush into toppling one hegemon only to replace it with another that might turn out to be worse.

Another glaring problem with the British concept of the ‘Global Middle Ground’ relates to propaganda purposes: it is simply not an effective brand if it does not easily translate into other languages – the Brits (and the Americans) used as they are to the rest of the world accommodating to their linguistic preferences. Thus, while ‘Third World’ and ‘Global South’ can be easily translated (and therefore promoted) into, say, ‘Tercer Mundo’ and ‘Sur Global’ in Spanish, or ‘Tiers Monde’ and ‘Sud global’ in French, ‘Global Middle Ground’ simply sounds strange in other languages – like a shoehorned sports metaphor (‘Mediocampo Global’ in Spanish, or ‘Milieu de terrain mondial’ in French).

Perhaps, then, it is time to retire the ‘West versus the rest’ framework, as Matias Spektor has suggested (Spektor 2024) and in a similar way that some have advocated to drop the ‘post-Soviet’ label (Kuleba 2021), in order to find something better that reflects a universal standard of truth instead of the many huddles we are sometimes grouped into against our will. Regardless of whoever happens to be on top at a given time – that judge of the nations that is history won’t spare anyone – maybe it is better to focus on the common challenges that unite us as humanity living on this speck of dust in the canvas of the universe, the ‘Cosmic Middle Ground’ that we call home and that we are now learning to share for the first time with another intelligent entity. The rise of AI and its meaning for the greatest huddle of them all, humanity, is what the next chapter is about.

About the author:

Francisco Lobo holds a PhD in War Studies from King’s College London. He also holds an LLM in International Legal Studies (New York University), an LLM in International Law and an LLB (University of Chile). He has worked as a legal practitioner in the private and public sectors. He has more recently worked as an advisor for an international development project to train the Armed Forces of Ukraine in IHL and military ethics standards. His research focuses on international law, human rights, the laws and ethics of war, legal theory, moral philosophy, and history.