

glophone world. However, economic growth has also been an enduring theme, rising very fast from the 1960s, and after the year 2000, it was equally as significant as the theme of inequality. Racism and sexism are also much less salient terms than in the English language, testifying to their distinctive profile within the anglophone sphere.

These simple comparisons reveal that inequality is also a geopolitical issue that plays out differently across the globe. It is most discussed in the United States in particular, as well as in Europe, rather than in those areas of the world where economic growth has been a key driver in recent decades. It is therefore, in certain ways a highly Western-centered discourse, even while it appears to be critical of the record of many Western nations. This is a paradox I will unravel further as my book progresses.

Let me pull these threads together. The inequality paradigm has come into prominence not just because inequality has somehow got inexorably worse. Or because a specialized field of research has matured. Instead, it re-positions social science research in a more powerful and compelling way. It offers the promise of linking specific identifiable topics (such as the prominence of the superrich) to a bold interdisciplinary social science that breaks out of disciplinary silos and disputes the progressive modernizing agenda that has dominated academic and policy thinking since 1950. It is the challenge to progressive futuristic thinking that is of particular note. Since the eighteenth century, the dream to look toward a bold new future when past problems are left behind has been persistent and pervasive. This way of thinking is bound up with the fundamental ordering of modern conceptions of time, in which past, present, and future are ontologically distinct, so that the future is unknowable on the basis of past experience. This assumption has been the vision undergirding such diverse groups as communist revolutionaries, neoliberal free marketeers, anticolonialist movements, religious fundamentalists, and technocratic reformers. In everyday life, it is also marked in the routine hold of therapeutic and self-help repertoires on our consciousness as we routinely strive to become “better” people. Teasing out the broader significance of inequality is to depart from this kind of mundane accelerationist thinking, because it sees the build-up and accentuation of historical inequalities as marking the return of older formations into the active life of the present. The more societies appear to modernize, the more their pasts actively confront them. Inequality matters, because it carries the weight of history with it. This is the overarching theme of my book.