

# GLOBAL DIALOGUE

10.1

3 issues a year in 17 languages

Talking Sociology  
with Raquel Varela

Christine Schickert

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Hermílio Santos, André Salata, Emil Sobottka,  
Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro,  
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IV ISA Forum  
in Porto Alegre

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- > **The Migrant Caravan as a Mobility Strategy**
- > **Buffalo, NY: Good Practice in Refugee Resettlement**

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# > Editorial

**I**n this issue's interview, labor historian Raquel Varela looks back at Portugal's Carnation Revolution of April 1974. She discusses why it is important to tell world events "from below," taking up working people's perspectives and contributions and addresses the lasting impacts of the revolution left in Portugal's social and economic fabric.

In July 2020, sociologists and social scientists from all over the world will participate in the IV ISA Forum of Sociology in Porto Alegre, Brazil to discuss their research and perceptions on social transformations in light of four main challenges of the 21st century: democracy, environment, inequalities, and intersectionality. In his article Geoffrey Pleyers, President of the Forum stresses the importance of analyzing the interconnectedness of these social developments. Jacob Carlos Lima, President of the Brazilian Sociological Society (SBS) gives us a brief insight into the Society's history and calls upon the support and solidarity of the sociological community in the face of the recent political developments in the country and the related social struggles. Hermílio Santos, André Salata, and Emil Sobottka, from the Forum's Local Organizing Committee, as well as six young Brazilian scholars give us some insights into Brazilian history and sociology.

Due to the systematic dismantling of European welfare states in recent years, new forms of social policies have been set in place, challenging not only different countries in specific areas but the social pillar of Europe and the European Union. In our first symposium of this issue scholars present their research on current trajectories and the challenges faced by some European countries.

The second symposium takes up one of the big issues of our times: the digitization of society, looking at its impact on labor, financial markets as well as sustainability. The symposium also addresses how research can contribute to maintaining or creating workers' rights and fair working conditions in the platform economy.

In her article, Donatella della Porta maps out the current challenges for social movement studies. In her view, ongoing protests around the world have brought new issues onto the agenda, but also demand new ways of analyzing them. She argues for bringing capitalism and class as analytical categories back into social movement studies.

With Samir Amin (1931-2018) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1930-2019), two leading social scientists and political thinkers have passed away. Amin's strategic conception of delinking and critique of Eurocentrism influenced Marxists and social scientists around the globe. With his notion of world-system analysis Wallerstein enriched sociological theory in profound ways. As former President of the ISA, he established a flourishing exchange between old and new members that resonates to this day. Colleagues and friends of these two outstanding members of our community remember and honor their work and life.

The two articles featured in the Open Section deal with migration to the United States: Veronica Montes examines the so-called "migrant caravan" as a strategic choice for people wanting to migrate from Latin America to the north. Ayşegül Balta Ozgen introduces us to the challenges as well as the benefits refugee resettlement means for a mid-size American city like Buffalo, NY. ■

**Brigitte Aulenbacher** and **Klaus Dörre**,  
editors of *Global Dialogue*

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The **IV ISA Forum of Sociology** will be held in July 2020 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Its President Geoffrey Pleyers, along with Jacob Carlos Lima, President of the Brazilian Sociological Society, and members of the Local Organizing Committee as well as six young scholars give us insights into current Brazilian sociology.



Due to the systematic dismantling of European welfare states, **social policies in European countries** have been a prominent topic of sociological research and political action. In the articles included in this symposium researchers present their work on the trajectories and challenges European welfare states face today.



**Digitalization** will change society fundamentally, and is already doing so. These articles examine its impact on labor, financial markets and sustainability and address how research can contribute to maintaining or creating workers' rights and fair working conditions in the platform economy.



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“Welcome to the IV ISA Forum in Brazil. We count on you in this struggle for freedom, democracy, and social justice. Without freedom, there is no sociology possible.”

Jacob Carlos Lima

# > The Legacy of the Portuguese Revolution

## An Interview with Raquel Varela



Raquel Varela. Credit: Veríssimo Dias.

**Raquel Varela** is a historian based at the NOVA University of Lisbon in Portugal. Her work focuses on labor history, the welfare state, the history of Portugal and Europe in the twentieth century, as well as the history of social movements. She is the co-founder of the Network for Global Labor Studies and president of the International Association Strikes and Social Conflicts.

In her book *A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution* (2018) she tells the history of Portugal's 1974 Carnation Revolution from below. To do so, she explores the role of the anticolonial movement in Africa, as well as those of Portuguese workers, women, and artists in the process.

Here she is interviewed by **Christine Schickert**, the administrative director of the DFG Research Group on Post-Growth Societies at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, Germany and assistant editor of *Global Dialogue*.

**CS:** 46 years ago, in April of 1974, the dictatorship in Portugal ended with a military coup. The immediate reason for the coup was the military's dissatisfaction with the war Portugal was waging in its colonies. Could you tell us about the situation in the Portuguese colonies in Africa at the time of the war? What

were the reasons the military became disappointed with the political leadership?

**RV:** Portugal was an extremely backward country at the time. It was the last of the old empires and a chronic empire that fought bitterly against the anticolonial revolutions for

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thirteen years in a terrible colonial war that mobilized more than one million young men between 1961 and 1974. In 1974 alone, 150,000 men were mobilized for the war. The defeat of the colonial war was mainly due to the liberation movement, especially in Guinea-Bissau which was led by a great forgotten Marxist called Amílcar Cabral.

The strong liberation movement and the prolonged fighting made it clear to some of the army officials, mostly officers from the middle ranks, not generals, not soldiers, that the war could not continue, and that a political solution was necessary to end it. So they organized a coup d'état on April 25, 1974. The commander of the coup d'état was Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho. They defeated the regime and removed dictator Marcello Caetano, but they told the people to stay at home. But the people didn't listen and invaded the streets.

What makes the revolution in the colonies especially interesting is that for the first time what the Third International said would happen, did happen: Unrest spread from the colonies to the center, to the metropolis. After 1975 it spread back to the colonies. The liberation from the dictatorship started with a bloody war in the colonies and then turned into a party in the streets of Lisbon. It was 19 months of the most radical revolution of the post-war era in Europe – it was the last revolution of the post-war, much more radical than May of 1968, and it was the last revolution to question private property.

**CS: Let me first take up the point that the military told the people to stay at home but they didn't. Can you tell us more about that and the situation of the people at the time? Why did they join the army in this revolution?**

**RV:** For 48 years Portugal was a dictatorship and one of the most backward countries in Europe. Between 1961 and 1974 a colonial war on three fronts mobilized more than one million men. Proportionally, the war with the colonies killed more Portuguese than American soldiers in Vietnam. To escape war and poverty many people emigrated – especially to other countries in Europe. About 1.5 million people left the country from 1960 onwards. Portugal had one of the highest rates of child mortality, and women could have their correspondence opened by their husbands.

Portugal was a country of 9.5 million people and on May 1, 1974, one week after April 25, two million people came out celebrating the first of May, demanding not just democratic changes like the end of the dictatorship but also voicing revolutionary social demands like a minimum wage, not working on Saturday and Sunday, being paid for night shifts, or an equal pay for men and women. During the Portuguese revolution three million people were organized in either workers' commissions, neighborhood commissions, city commissions, or students' commissions. This

was a revolution which happened not just in the industrial sector, which was the most important sector that led the process; workers from all sectors joined in, for example public service workers. So hospitals were occupied by doctors, schools were occupied by teachers. The Carnation Revolution was a late revolution of the twentieth century, so Portugal had already had a very strong service sector employing large numbers of workers. And these people were part of the revolution.

**CS: Let me take up a second point you mentioned: you said that the Portuguese Revolution was the last one to address questions of property...**

**RV:** Six hundred companies were occupied and became either self-managed or cooperatives of some form, workers' control processes were introduced in large companies, and banks were nationalized and expropriated without any compensation to the banking sector. The bourgeoisie actually left the country after some months, escaping to Brazil after being expropriated. In my opinion, although that is a counterfactual analysis (in history we don't say "if" – this is against the facts), this led to postponing by ten years the introduction of neoliberal policies. Neoliberal politics were not introduced after the revolution because the American president at the time, Gerald Ford, and his administration were really afraid that Portugal could be the start of a red Mediterranean. So what the Portuguese revolution shows is that an economic crisis, as Marx actually pointed out, is not necessarily a disaster for the working class but can be used by them to turn it into a political crisis of the state and against the main ruling classes.

**CS: Talking about the people, you called your book A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution. What was the impulse for that? Why did you want to tell it this way?**

**RV:** Obviously, there is an influence of the 'history from below' and the social history from Britain in the 1960s, and more directly it is influenced by Howard Zinn, the American historian and socialist thinker. There is this idea that we have to chronicle the history of the resistance, of the people who struggle, of the people who fight. So we need to include in history not just the history of institutions and governments but history from below, the peoples' history, anonymous masses that play a role, the resistance of workers. This essential part of history is necessary to a comprehensive understanding. Because the working classes frequently don't have a notion of what they can do, it is important to write a history of the people, of their actions and show these special moments in history when the working classes are extremely strong and they change the world, they change themselves. We are speaking of a country that until 1974 had been for 48 years the most backward country in Europe and that within the next 25 years went on to become the twelfth country with the best

national health service in the world. This is only possible with immense collective strength.

What is also very interesting about the Portuguese revolution is that for the first time the Stalinist approach was really questioned on the left. The May 1968 movement had already questioned the hegemony of Stalinists in big factories in France, but in the Portuguese revolution the questioning was more profound. The so-called extreme left, or the left of the Communist Party, had a huge power in the leadership of struggles, workers' commissions, in big unions, in both industrial and service sectors.

**CS: Let us talk about the legacy of the Portuguese revolution: Is the challenging/questioning of property relations and the reorganization of companies still reflected in today's political landscape whether at the level of movements or parties? And does it somehow tie into the way Portugal handled the aftermath of the financial crisis/debt crisis after 2008?**

**RV:** One of the last changes in property relations that lasted until the post-troika era was in housing, with controlled prices. One of the demands of the International Monetary Fund and Germany/the EU when negotiating the Economic

Adjustment Programme for Portugal during the Portuguese financial crisis (2010-4) was to liberalize the housing market, which has had devastating effects on the working classes (poor and middle). The most lasting effect of the revolution was the confrontation of the far right, which still endures today.

**CS: Yes, this is indeed another point that strikes me: following the financial crisis of 2008, in Portugal, unlike in other countries in Europe, no strong right-wing party developed. Could you explain how this is tied to the Carnation Revolution?**

**RV:** That is definitely a consequence of the revolution. The revolution was not solely a transition to democracy but a revolution that made purges in the state apparatus and turned the leadership of the right-wing regime out of the state apparatus. There was a clear break with this leadership. There is no culture and *savoir faire* of the extreme right in Portugal. This can change, of course, but until now, while the generation of the revolution is still alive I don't believe it is possible to have a strong extreme right. That, of course, means that in ten years we don't know what will happen. ■

Direct all correspondence to Raquel Varela  
<[raquel\\_cardeira\\_varela@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:raquel_cardeira_varela@yahoo.co.uk)>

# > Interconnected Challenges of the 21st Century

by **Geoffrey Pleyers**, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, President of the IV ISA Forum of Sociology and ISA Vice-President for Research (2018-22), past-president of ISA Research Committee on Social Classes and Social Movements (RC47), and member of ISA Research Committees on Sociology of Religion (RC22), Sociology of Youth (RC34), and Social Movements, Collective Action and Social Change (RC48)



In January 2001, 20,000 activists and public intellectuals from all continents gathered in Porto Alegre for the first World Social Forum. They were united by the hope that the 21st century would be more democratic and that international solidarity and global struggles could shape globalization toward a fairer and more equal world.

Almost two decades later, in July 2020, 5,000 social scientists from all continents will take part in the ISA Forum of Sociology in the same city to analyze social transformations, and share their research and perspectives on four main challenges of our century and how the social sciences may contribute to dealing with them. The context and general mood will be quite different this time, as the optimism of the millennium has faded and the challenges we face for living together on a limited planet are even more urgent.

Four challenges have become increasingly salient in these two decades, and particularly in the last five years: democracy, the environmental crisis, inequalities, and intersectionality.

At the turn of the millennium, the expansion and the deepening of *democracy* was taken for granted. The color revolutions and the 2011 Arab Spring were analyzed as the “fourth wave of democratization.” However, while the 2010s opened with an unprecedented spread of movements for democracy in all continents, it ended up with the spread of illiberal leaders who threaten democracy, the environment, tolerance, and economic and gender equality. Meanwhile, hopes for a more democratic global governance able to tackle global issues such as climate change, migration, and rising inequalities have faded. It has now become clear that to face global challenges, democracy needs to be re-invented within and beyond the representative system.

The decade has also been shaped by a widening gap between the super-rich and the rest of the population, with rising rates of poverty in so-called “developed” countries, both those that have experienced one of their longest periods of economic growth (notably the USA and Germany) and those whose economy and welfare state have been devastated by austerity plans. In the second half of the decade, two issues once more became major concerns: the environmental disaster, and gender violence and racism. While women from the Global South are at the forefront to defend democracy and denounce the patriarchal dimensions of oppression, feminist mobilizations such as the March 8 strikes, #NiUnaMenos, and the #MeToo campaign have put the spotlight on sexual harassment and femicides in global news headlines as much as in daily life and university campuses. In the meanwhile, teenagers’ school strikes have made climate change and environmental damage major global concerns. They push an integral vision of ecology that is deeply inspired by movements of the Global South and require a systemic change. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report shows frightening figures for climate change in the 21st century while a mass species extinction is underway.

### > Interconnected challenges

What social movements and social sciences have taught us in the first two decades of this century is how deeply intertwined these four challenges are. The increasing connections between democracy, the environmental crisis, inequalities, and intersectionality oblige us to revisit and reconceptualize each of these concepts with interconnectedness as the starting point.

For instance, taking into account the environmental crisis, inequalities, and intersectionality leads us to *rethink democracy* in a different way. On the one hand, democracy is threatened in an increasing number of countries by illiberal leaders who deconstruct its fundamental values of human rights, diversity, and equal respect for all citizens, while supporting an accelerated destruction of the environment by transnational companies, and strengthening patriarchy, racism, and inequalities. On the other, progressive movements also challenge institutional democracy as they require both deep political, cultural, and social change and action at levels for which our democratic system centered on the nation-state is not best equipped: the global scale to tackle global warming and environmental devastation; intimacy and daily life in a patriarchal culture to tackle sexual abuse and femicides.

The rise of *inequalities* is a major threat both to democracy and the environment. The level of global inequalities is such that the “top 1%” and global corporations have major political power at the national and global scale. Far from Michael Walzer’s democratic ideal of the “separation

of the spheres,” the last decade has seen the rise of billionaires to the presidency in a number of countries, while collusion between political and economic elites and the dominant power of lobbies have become a core feature of many contemporary political regimes.

Together with the climate justice movement, sociologists have shown us that *climate change and the devastation of nature* are fundamentally a social issue and that they cannot be limited without a deep change in society. The causes lie in the current global capitalist system and its increasing voracity for natural resources. While the Earth is our common home, we have very different responsibilities in the environmental disaster. Oxfam calculated that the average footprint of the richest 1% of people globally is 175 times that of the poorest 10%. The intersectional approach and the environmental justice movement show us that while women, minorities, and the less well-off contribute less to the devastation of the planet, they pay a much higher price for it, with significant losses in life expectancy and the rise of climate refugees.

Overcoming the lasting and interconnected economic, racial, colonial, and gender discriminations and the violence that perpetuates them is another major challenge of our time. Black feminist activists, indigenous movements, and social scientists have shed new light on the interconnected nature of race, class, and gender that create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. The intersectional perspective leads to revisiting the democratic challenge, inequalities, and environmental justice. The current representative democracy system has shown its limits in dealing with racism and patriarchal oppression. Inequalities are deeply connected to gender and racist discriminations, and so are sufferings caused by environmental disasters and global warming. The increasing consciousness of intersectionality is both a result and a trigger of the rise of subaltern actors and movements. Indigenous communities, minorities, feminists, and small farmers have resisted injustice by combining practices, social struggles, and alternative worldviews.

Gender has long been considered as a side issue by progressive actors who focused on social policy and economic growth. It is today at the core of the battle for global democracy. In 2020, women of color and of minority backgrounds are the first victims of illiberal and authoritarian regimes. They are also at the forefront of the defense and reinvention of democracy in the 21st century. They pave the way for a world where inter-subjective relationships, compassion, solidarity, and care (for oneself, for other humans, and for nature) reshape our experience and our understanding of living together on a limited planet.

It would however be misleading to associate all oppressed actors with a renewal of ecology. While feminist and indigenous movements are at the forefront of the

ecological battle, the studies by Arlie Hochschild among victims of environmental disasters in Louisiana show how such victims may also become the political bases for a renewal of reactionary and racist stances that pose a direct threat to our democratic system and the environment. It reminds us of the deep connection between the way environmental challenges will be tackled and the future of our democracies.

Connecting these four challenges tells us how deeply they are rooted in power relations, in our social structure, as well as in our modern culture, subjectivities, worldviews, and social sciences. It has become clear that there is no way to deal with them as separate challenges, sectorial demands, or isolated research fields. There is no way to solve one of them without tackling the other three. Together they draw the coordinates of what Latin American scholars have called a “civilizational crisis.”

### > **The 2020 ISA Forum: An opportunity to share analyses**

The 2020 ISA Forum will be an opportunity to share our analyses on these four global challenges and on their in-

terconnections. It is also an invitation to discuss the epistemological questions they raise, our relations with the actors who confront these challenges, and the contributions of sociology in tackling them. How has our discipline been transformed by these challenges and by the actors that have surged from them? How does taking into account actors as producers of knowledge invite us to adopt new epistemologies? How can innovative sociological analyses contribute to grasping and dealing with our common challenges in the Global Age? What are the main obstacles we face in tackling these problems? How have the concepts of democracy, ecology, inequalities, and intersectionality been revisited based on recent experiences, actors, and challenges? How have they become the major frontlines of the battlegrounds between reactionary and progressive actors of the 21st century?

Two decades into the century, hard sciences and social sciences show us that we are at a crossroad for most of these challenges. The way humanity collectively tackles these challenges in the next decade will shape the lives of human beings for the rest of the 21st century. ■

Direct all correspondence to Geoffrey Pleyers <[Geoffrey.Pleyers@uclouvain.be](mailto:Geoffrey.Pleyers@uclouvain.be)>

# > The SBS Greets the ISA Forum

by **Jacob Carlos Lima**, Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil, President of the Brazilian Sociological Society, and member of ISA Research Committee on Sociology of Work (RC30)



**I**n 2017, the Brazilian Sociological Society (Sociedade Brasileira de Sociologia, or SBS) completed 70 years of existence. Founded in 1937 as the Paulista Society of Sociology, it was only effectively organized as the Brazilian Sociological Society in 1950, joining the newly founded International Sociological Association.

The period from 1937 to 2017 was not continuous, due to the political and organizational features of a small professional category that was almost exclusively linked to the university. After its reorganization in 1950, the SBS held in 1954 the first Brazilian Congress of Sociology in the city of São Paulo. With the military coup of 1964, sociology was hit hard, involving the compulsory retirement of numerous university professors and researchers. The SBS was only reorganized after the democratization of the country in 1985. Since then it has had a regular existence, with biannual congresses, holding in 2019 its nineteenth congress in the city of Florianópolis.

The erratic trajectory of the SBS in its early decades was accompanied by the establishment of the first undergraduate courses in sociology and politics or social sciences, initiated in 1933 in the city of São Paulo. Until 1964, nineteen additional courses were set up in different regions of the country, as well as two graduate courses, also in São Paulo.

During this period, sociological production was on the rise, as well as the defense of sociology as a science; however, research was still mainly restricted to São Paulo. The military dictatorship and its concern about scientific and technological autonomy inadvertently contributed to the expansion of sociology and the social sciences. The structuration

of a research and postgraduate system led to the expansion of undergraduate and graduate education across the country, enabling in the 1970s the emergence of social science associations and conferences and the diffusion of scientific knowledge. The evaluation system implemented by CAPES (the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education) in graduate programs, the establishment of a doctoral degree as a requisite for teaching in public universities, and access to research funding, led to the creation of national quality parameters.

After democratization, this expansion was boosted by an increase of incentive policies that enabled the consolidation of sociology as a discipline and a field of research. Internationalization accompanied this expansion, with Brazilian sociology standing out worldwide. Starting in 2006, the discipline became compulsory in high school, expanding the labor market for sociologists. It is important to stress that this labor market is mainly found in higher and high-school education. In other sectors it is almost invisible, since sociologists are for the most part employed as social and planning technicians in public institutions, NGOs, and private companies, functions which are shared with graduates from other humanities subjects.

These achievements, however, have been threatened since the so-called parliamentary coup of 2016. Sociology has become a target of rulers who have come to question its usefulness and relevance, whether in universities or high schools, its access to research funds, and more. Recently, sociology was accused of preaching an obscure “cultural Marxism” that would threaten the Brazilian family.

These attacks are on the rise, with worrying results, and sociology is not the only target. In 2017, in the course

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Porto Alegre at sunset. Photo by Felipe Valduga/Flickr. Some rights reserved.

of a hasty high-school reform sociology was downgraded to an optional discipline, as was philosophy. The extreme right-wing government that took office in 2019 attacked the two disciplines arguing that the public university should prioritize “useful” or in other words applied courses, like veterinary, and that those willing to study sociology and philosophy should attend private universities. The attacks have gone further and are now more generic, stating that the public university, where sociology and philosophy undergraduate courses as well as graduate programs are concentrated, is a useless expense and the locus of resistance of the political opposition.

The SBS, along with other social science professionals, such as the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA), the Brazilian Association of Political Science (ABCP), and the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), have joined efforts to resist these policies of dis-

mantling the country’s public structure in the name of fiscal adjustments. Since the 1990s, such policies have resulted in social and political disasters in most countries where they have been applied, as in Argentina in 2000 or Greece in 2010, among others.

In this context, holding the IV ISA Forum in Brazil represents an additional space for resistance, not only for sociological knowledge, but also for the fight of knowledge against barbarism. Such barbarism is accompanied by a narrow-minded religious fundamentalism, and an authoritarianism that has the complicity of institutions of the Republic that were supposed to defend democracy but that apparently do not have much conviction about it.

Welcome to all. We count on you in this struggle for freedom, democracy, and social justice. Without freedom, there is no sociology possible. ■

Direct all correspondence to Jacob Carlos Lima <[jacobl@uol.com.br](mailto:jacobl@uol.com.br)>

# > Inside Brazilian Sociology: A Short Appraisal

by **Hermílio Santos**, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), Brazil, Chair of the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) of the IV ISA Forum of Sociology, and President of the ISA Research Committee on Biography and Society (RC38), **André Salata**, PUCRS, Brazil, and Vice-chair of the LOC of the IV ISA Forum of Sociology, and **Emil Sobottka**, PUCRS, Brazil, and Program Coordinator of the LOC of the IV ISA Forum of Sociology



*The Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul is the venue for the IV Forum of Sociology. Photo by Marcelo Träsel/Flickr. Some rights reserved.*

**T**he current situation of Brazilian sociology is paradoxical: on the one hand, a high level of institutionalization, productivity, and diversification; on the other hand, explicit attempts, especially from government officials, to delegitimize the contribution and relevance of the discipline to the development of society. This is the sensitive context in which Brazil will be hosting for the first time a major event of the International Sociological Association (ISA): the IV ISA Forum of Sociology, taking place on July 14–18, 2020 at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), in Porto Alegre. The commitment of Brazilians to the ISA is not new, and has been consistently growing over the last decades, as shown by the

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presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the first and only Latin American to chair the Association since its foundation in 1948. Against this complex background, the Forum gains even greater relevance for engaging local sociologists.

Brazilian sociology first came on to the scene by framing the question of national identity through different fields of expertise. Ethnical and racial issues were particularly addressed in consequence of the diverse composition of the local population: white Europeans, enslaved black African people, and the indigenous natives. Even if ethnic-racial and modernization questions remained ever-present discussions among sociologists, the influence of classical authors and the growing support for empirical investigations helped to diversify and develop national sociology in the last decades. Under the military regime (1964-85), while a young generation of sociology professors was forced into exile, unexpectedly, several sociology postgraduate programs were established, and scientific journals were conceived and made public.

The problem of social inequalities has continuously drawn the attention of most Brazilian sociologists as a central issue. For instance, Gilberto Freyre, one of the founders of the social sciences in Brazil, raised the question of how it was possible for a social order to balance itself on antagonisms as striking as those that characterized the Brazilian society since its formation. Similarly, Florestan Fernandes, whose contribution is inestimable, carried out – along with sociologists such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso, his student at the time – solid and voluminous research on how apparently archaic forms of inequality and stratification could survive processes of modernization. The significant attention given to these subjects was undoubtedly justified, given that high and persistent levels of inequality could be considered the main historically enduring attribute of Brazilian society.

The democratization period after 1984 entailed an explosion of social movements demanding rights to citizenship and political participation. Democracy and social justice became intimately connected. These themes were particularly assimilated by sociologists often involved as participant actors in their field of study. Thus, it is not surprising that Brazilian reality demands a careful sociological analy-

sis that goes beyond the benign narratives on inequalities which characterized the dominant readings over most of the second half of the twentieth century. Events such as the 2013 protests mostly led against the government's economic policy, and all the political demonstrations that followed, indicate that Brazilian society is far from the balance of antagonisms once used to describe it, challenging sociologists to understand this continually changing reality.

Social reality in Brazil also requires attention from multidimensional and intersectional perspectives, calling for increasingly sophisticated analytical tools. For instance, blacks still earn approximately 40% less than whites within the Brazilian labor market, and empirical research shows income also varies along with gender, region, class and so forth. Considering how different principles of stratification interact, Brazilian society is undoubtedly a very interesting case for analyzing the growing complexity of inequalities in modern society. The urgency of such social matters might also be related to the only recent interest of Brazilian sociology in environmental issues.

In a global sociology such as the one we practice nowadays, the enormous challenges faced by Brazilian society must be investigated as part of a broader reality, in a worldwide collective project. Similar questions as those described above have been recently highlighted in many other countries, and recent political events, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement, show that society is currently drawing more attention to the issue of democratization, participation, and inequalities. We have no doubt that Brazilian sociology can make a huge contribution to this debate, and that our reality provides a very stimulating frame for analyzing these empirical questions.

The present selection of six articles from young researchers from different regions of the country is a sample of the fruitful ongoing national scientific production in the sociological field. Although not an exhaustive collection, it indicates the quality of the available work and the variety of thematic, theoretical, and methodological approaches. These and many other engaged social scientists will take part in the discussions to be held during the ISA Forum, organized in partnership with the Brazilian Society of Sociology (SBS) and PUCRS. ■

Direct all correspondence to:  
Hermílio Santos <[hermilio@pucrs.br](mailto:hermilio@pucrs.br)>  
André Salata <[andre.salata@pucrs.br](mailto:andre.salata@pucrs.br)>  
Emil Sobottka <[esobottka@pucrs.br](mailto:esobottka@pucrs.br)>

# > Narratives of an Institutionalized Childhood

by **Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro**, University of São Paulo, Brazil and member of ISA Research Committee on Biography and Society (RC38)



*The Agricultural Institute for Minors, Batatais, São Paulo State, Brazil. Credit: Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro.*

**D**uring the military dictatorship (1964-1985), Brazil not only witnessed political persecution, detention, torture, censorship, and disappearances, but also coercive practices to control marginalized and abandoned children. For that, the government had created the National Foundation for Minors' Wellbeing (FUNABEM) which was responsible for all public policies regarding infancy and youth. FUNABEM incorporated the already existent Disciplinary Institutes and intensified the internment of poor children and adolescents. A secluded childhood in a total institution followed by a stigmatized adulthood marked the life of these former inmates. After decades, some of them reunited and weaved together a relationship network via social media and annual gatherings in order to remember their past experiences of rural life, institutionalized coercion, uncertainty about the future, child labor, male socialization, and discipline.

We adopted a theoretical framework that articulates sociological theories of memory to understand the dynamics of the processual mnemonic practices established by

former inmates of Disciplinary Institutes to deal with time and identity. For four years, we have collected data from their multi-domain interaction in order to investigate the processes of remembering woven in a relational way by intertwining minds, social relations, and artifacts. The data collection ranged from in-depth interviews and traditional ethnography, to netnography. We undertook hermeneutic work on this set of narratives, following the time passing to procedurally interpret how they make sense of their past experiences.

We concluded that the time passing and the changes in their interactions are determinant of the interpretation they draw on for defining who they were/are and how they understand their past. The narratives widely acknowledged among them sugarcoated their interpretation of events. The narratives usually conceal tough events and new meanings were drawn in order to integrate these events into an overarching plot driven by life's achievements. Along with their narratives, three negative elements were interpreted as positive: parents' abandonment as an act



A former inmate revisiting the Institute for Minors. Credit: Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro.

of altruism; institutional violence as legitimate; and forced child labor inside the Institute as an uplifting experience.

Being in a mnemonic community creates a *network of validations* in the sense that some interpretations tend to prevail over others. The senses made of the past become more or less convergent because outlier understandings are undermined over time, once they are not validated by others within the network. Although autobiographical narratives are based on personal remembrances, the effort of understanding them through a common lens led former

inmates to adjust their accounts into an overarching, positive, and integrated life story. The numerous sufferings in this life story (family's detachment, institutional violence, secluded childhood, and stigmatized life, just to mention some) are presented as steps towards a successful path. The Institute imprinted on them the values promoted by the dictatorship's institutions, especially character building via discipline, which often meant following rules uncritically. Within this mnemonic community, building a common narrative provided a sense of belonging to a past that existed, and others' acknowledgement of that. ■

Direct all correspondence to Veridiana Domingos Cordeiro  
<[veridiana@uchicago.edu](mailto:veridiana@uchicago.edu)>

# > Social Assistance as a Policy Sector in Brazil

by **Gustavo Conde Margarites**, Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil



*Members of the Constituent Assembly celebrating the promulgation of the Brazilian Federal Constitution in 1988.  
Credit: Agência Brasil/Archive.*

Since the structuring of the modern Brazilian state, social assistance has been administered erratically and with little state involvement. Initiatives in this area have been oriented by the ideas of philanthropy and charity. In addition to this, social assistance actions were applied as social security measurements by the Brazilian government, blurring the boundaries between those two sectors. This article, based on my PhD research, analyzes the institutional change that enabled the transformation of social assistance into a policy sector guided by the concept of social rights. This process can be divided into two different stages: first, the formulation of the Federal Constitution (1986-88) and second, the Social Assistance Organic Law (1991-93). In each of these moments, there were different collective actors that advocated changes in the historical pattern adopted by the state regarding this issue, resulting in the formation of a new policy sector.

In the first stage, the main contributions to the institutional change came from the social security field, through the participation of an expert group formed by federal bureaucrats interested in reformulating the Brazilian social protection system. Their goal was to create a new system based on the notion of social protection as a right of all citizens and guaranteed by the state. Their perception was that social assistance would play an important role in the new proposal by ensuring that citizens outside the scope of social security would be covered by other types of social protection.

The second phase was characterized by the inclusion of a group formed by professionals and specialists from

the academic and professional field of social work. Until the promulgation of the Federal Constitution, these professionals were not involved in the process. The gradual integration of actors from the academic field and from the profession of social work is explained by a theoretical transformation that modified the way individuals from these sectors saw their relationship with the state. For a long time, the idea disseminated by a structuralist view of Marxism, that state actions were instruments of reproduction of bourgeois society, was preponderant. This theoretical understanding began to loosen in the late 1980s, with the strengthening of the Gramscian perspective that saw the state as one space for counter-hegemonic struggle. This redirection changed the way professionals and researchers in the area related to public policies and social work, previously viewed with a wary eye. As a consequence of this theoretical framework transformation, academics and social work professionals composed the main advocacy group for the separation of social assistance and social security as different policy sectors.

The research results show that the constitution of social assistance as a policy sector in Brazil was only possible due to the combination of factors external to the dynamics of Brazilian social policies, such as the end of the military dictatorship and the formulation of a new democratic order, and the action of groups related to fields such as social security and social work. ■

Direct all correspondence to Gustavo Conde Margarites  
<[gustavo.margarites@gmail.com](mailto:gustavo.margarites@gmail.com)>

# > Women's Struggle

## for Urban Housing in Porto Alegre

by **Priscila Susin**, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil



*Priscila Susin looking over the rooftop of a squatted building mostly managed by women, in the city center of Porto Alegre, 2019.*  
Credit: Priscila Susin.

**T**he housing deficit in major Brazilian cities affects significant sectors of the impoverished population, having greater impact on black women. The rise of housing social movements (squating movements) in urban areas has evoked new political repertoires since the 1980s, exposing the high number of properties with no social function by occupying abandoned buildings in city centers. Notably, women are the majority living in these spaces, pointing to the multidimensional segregation they experience in both normative and everyday lives. My PhD research aims at building a temporally grounded dialogue with these women, trying to understand interpretations and lived experiences of their

struggle for housing before and after engaging in politically mobilized groups and moving to squatted buildings.

### > Interpretative and biographical approach

Field research was carried out between 2015 and 2018 in Porto Alegre, capital of Rio Grande do Sul. Pursuing synchronic and diachronic biographical data, participant observations and biographical interviews were conducted with women living in two squatted buildings in the city center. Empirical work included almost weekly commitment to the social movement agenda in order to uphold a continuous understanding of political and everyday routines.



Graffiti saying “the city center belongs to the people” on the wall of a squatted building in the city center of Porto Alegre, 2018.  
Credit: Priscila Susin.

The applied methodology was epistemologically supported by Alfred Schütz’s sociology, especially his concept of the “relevance system,” and a well-articulated set of notions (drawing also on Berger and Luckmann) regarding how it is possible to have access to the typicality of the mundane social construction of reality. The biographical method as developed by Gabriele Rosenthal provided practical instruments for reconstructing the biographical experiences of the 23 interviewed women in interaction with socially and historically given frames.

### > **Between “traditional” and “politicized” symbolic fields**

Among the main findings, an intersectional acknowledgment of the problem between housing and gender was conceived, offering an empirically grounded perspective as a solution for some of the methodological limitations within these studies. Reconstructing the interviewees’ relevance system made it possible to capture elements of constraint, resistance, and coping not usually available from pre-conceived analytical categories.

By addressing hierarchical culture in everyday life, it was found that the nature of the social movements’ organization can also obliterate the chances of equitable political participation of women in the “struggle” processes. The ongoing development of new political performances is, however, fundamentally connected to the recent confrontations and changes in the traditional regulatory principles of gender relations as observed during fieldwork.

The latent interpretational overlapping of “traditional” and “politicized” symbolic fields was also repeatedly present during biographical analyses. In order to justify their staying on the verge of urban illegality, interviewees brought to light recurring conflicts between following expected gender roles (maternity and domestic work) and incorporating emergent political understandings (adequate housing and access to the city as rights). Both types of self-presentation resources were found to be generating moral capital, although the first mostly connected to external and widely legitimized class values, and the second to the internal politics of struggle, resulting in the possible generalization of housing struggle as a “means” and as an “end.” ■

Direct all correspondence to Priscila Susin <[pri.qsusin@gmail.com](mailto:pri.qsusin@gmail.com)>

# > Informal Governance of Violence in Recife, Brazil

by **Ricardo Caldas Cavalcanti**, Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil, and member of the Latin American Sociological Association (ALAS)†



Recife, Brazil, 2019. Credit: Ricardo Caldas Cavalcanti.

The issue of governance or (formal and informal) regulation of violence in disenfranchised territories in Latin America has been the subject of sociological research for many years. This study, which was the subject of my master dissertation, was developed with the objective of analyzing and understanding how violence is regulated in a community in the southern part of Recife, Brazil without the mediation of state institutions. In practical terms, non-state regulation of violence means the formation of agreements between local actors allowing them to produce understandings and resolutions (outside or against the state).

The central hypothesis of the study is that the performance of police organizations and the lack of legitimacy of the criminal justice system in the Brazilian context are creating a demand for alternative forms of governance of violence. Other important variables whose dynamics directly affect the regulation of local violence are the functioning of drug markets whose fragmentation precludes the consolidation of monopolizing regulatory practices, and the existence of informal networks of local actors capable of affecting homicide statistics. The data collection strategies employed in this research were: an ethnography (I lived for five months in a low-income community in Recife), dozens of formal and informal semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observation.

The central finding of this ongoing research leads me to argue that the mode of action of the Military Police in the community in question is the main explanatory mechanism for the need to search for alternative forms of order en-

forcement. In the community, the Military Police acts with little accountability, changing routines through unpredictable actions that, as a rule, involve the disproportionate use of force and a series of constraints for residents. As for the judiciary, it is an institution with low legitimacy and little effectiveness in mediating conflicts.

Possibly the most relevant finding of this research is that the pattern of regulation of violence in the community is commanded or authorized by local actors with a relative stock of legitimacy among residents. This is a process where there are no regular prescriptive systems of fixed social actions or roles, as for example in the Mafia cases (Gambetta, 1993), or those of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) (Feltran, 2010). There is also no role of local gangs, as in the cases researched by Bourgois (2003) and Venkatesh (2009).

Although these actions do not promote lasting transformation by reducing the number of violent episodes, they exhibit an apparent functionality, as such actions would achieve, more legitimately than police action, some control over violence. They may function as a more or less intentional mechanism for conflict mitigation rather than as a permanent framework for contention reduction. The fact that the protagonists of regulation usually act discreetly makes their actions not clearly visible to most residents. Thus, such initiatives do not become a model of action whose adherence gains more supporters, hence preventing them from becoming a viable way to meet the existing demands in the field of violence regulation. ■

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Direct all correspondence to Ricardo Caldas Cavalcanti  
<[ricardocaldas13@gmail.com](mailto:ricardocaldas13@gmail.com)>

# > Professional Inequalities in Brazil

by **Lucas Pereira Wan Der Maas**, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil



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*In Brazil, climbing the professional ladder and acquiring high credentials no longer give you a clear advantage on the labor market.*

**D**ue to the expansion and democratization of higher education in the country, the professional world in Brazil has changed. Between 2000 and 2010, the population with university credentials more than doubled, including more people with traditionally low participation in higher education, more particularly women, people who identified themselves as black or brown and low-income people.

While in high-income countries the expansion of university access began in the 1960s, reaching over 50% of the Net Schooling Rate, in Brazil it only began in the 1980s. Between 2000 and 2010, the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds eligible for higher education increased from 28.4% to 48.5%. However, the proportion of people who

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effectively accessed higher education ranged from only 9.1% to 18.7%. The Net Schooling Rate went from 7.4% to 14%, still a low rate compared to some countries in Latin America like Chile and Argentina, which registered values above 30% in 2010.

In addition, the entry of new university-educated professionals into the labor market did not meet a corresponding demand. There is now a scenario of credential inflation, i.e. a combination of higher education requirements, insufficient absorption of professionals into the labor market, increased competition for professional positions, and economic devaluation of credentials. Credential inflation relates not only to the imbalance between supply and demand but to the reduction of society's ability to produce advantages through credentials, which are devalued as a mechanism of social distribution.

My PhD research aimed at understanding how the extension of the social base of professional groups and the concurrent devaluation of credentials affected the processes of social stratification based on professionalism, especially in terms of conservation and acquisition of positions linked to the middle class. My study focused on the trajectories of two professions in the health field—medicine and nursing—empirically analyzing inter- and intra-professional inequalities between 1991 and 2010.

Demography, higher education, and labor market data from public sources was used in addition to primary data collected through an online survey to a sample of 217 doctors and 222 nurses. Trajectories were constructed through multiple correspondence and cluster analyses, aiming to empirically organize the professional space around variables that describe the different individual paths from the family of origin, through professional training, to job insertion. The analysis allowed interpreting the professional

space from the positions, divisions, and displacements of its agents.

At least four findings should be listed: (i) a significant rise in diplomas and graduates as a result of the increase in vacancies in higher education between 1991 and 2010; (ii) an expansion in the social base of recruitment, especially among women, low-income students, and those self-identifying as black or brown; (iii) a depreciation of credentials within the middle class in a context of increasing competition for salaried positions in the professional markets; and (iv) an increase in the horizontal hierarchy within the undergraduate population, with disadvantages for women, black and brown people, youth, and members of the less prestigious professions.

The trajectories identified (although not the only ones possible) demonstrated the importance of family inheritance and higher education pathways in accessing prominent positions in the professional space. The period of graduation and the age of professionals also contribute to inter- and intra-professional differentiation. Gender segmentation also plays a role, as women's participation is higher in less capitalized trajectories. Inter- and intra-professional differences both reproduce and reinforce inequalities within the professional space. Such differences are also expressed in the class perception of respondents.

In short, openness to professionalism in Brazil between 1991 and 2010 has redefined the professional space, which has become less capitalized and more unequal. Nevertheless, its internal structure has not changed in terms of inter- and intra-professional divisions, with professionalism being maintained as a mechanism for the reproduction of high positions, although the movements of social ascension have expanded. ■

Direct all correspondence to Lucas Pereira Wan Der Maas  
<[lucaswander@hotmail.com](mailto:lucaswander@hotmail.com)>

# > Trajectories of Rio de Janeiro's Middle Class

by **Izabelle Vieira**, PPCIS/UERJ (Rio de Janeiro State University), Brazil



| Illustration by Arbu.

In the 2000s Brazil experienced a favorable economic moment, when the population experienced an increase in income and consumption levels. In 2014, a serious political and economic crisis broke out in the country, felt mainly through the loss of jobs and the devaluation of money.

Aiming to understand the processes of social mobility and the effects of the recent crisis on the life of the middle class, a qualitative research study was conducted, consisting of participant observation and in-depth individual interviews with 28 residents of a condominium in the Pechincha neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro.

Participants in the research identify themselves as belonging to an intermediate stratum in the social structure, often referred to as “middle class,” or in related terms.

Respondents recognize their rising and falling process. As Igor (42, driver) points out: “*Look, I’ve been to middle school. And I’ve been, I won’t say at the top, but it’s almost there, and today I’m at the bottom.*” The general perception is that the boom period was a fantasy because it did not have a solid political, economic, and social basis.

In the ascension years, reflected the group studied, the dimension of consumption was the engine of the process of social differentiation. Nowadays, facing the economic crisis, they need to reduce their consumption patterns, so that goods have become an unsatisfactory symbolic fron-

tier: “*Consumer goods give an inappropriate view that a person has grown up in life*” (Arthur, 46, air force military); “*I think the middle class is very much about advertising. This encourages traveling, but once you travel, you come back to your reality [laughs]*” (Gilmar, 64, seller).

The interviewees report that in their families there is a high expectation from parents that their children will be more educated than themselves. These parents make a real “sacrifice” for their children to attend elementary and high school in private institutions. The transmission of values and behaviors is one of the main factors for rejecting public schools: “*[...] it is a matter of living with other children of such different educations, right?! This is the biggest concern*” (Ilza, 47, unemployed, security guard).

The interviewed people feel deeply insecure about maintaining their social position and, in this sense, private school is both a symbol and a tool of class belonging: “*It may be that my child needs to study in public school, and already I’ll see myself in another class. It will be weird!*” (Lara, 42, unemployed, security guard).

Since they have no accumulated wealth, the middle class has only knowledge and working skills. These “capitals” need to be renewed with each generation, which is something that requires effort and commitment. Unable to glimpse a horizon of improvement for themselves in the current context of crisis, this middle class bets on their children as guarantees of their social ascension project. ■

Direct all correspondence to Izabelle Vieira <[representar.mg@hotmail.com](mailto:representar.mg@hotmail.com)>

# > Austerity:

## Compromising Universalism in Healthcare?

by **Maria Petmesidou**, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece, **Ana Guillén**, University of Oviedo, Spain, **Emmanuele Pavolini**, University of Macerata, Italy

**A**ny changes in the scope of collectively provided services and the conditions establishing entitlement to them can significantly alter the contours of universalism and the underlying pattern of solidarity. Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece have had universal healthcare systems in place since the late 1970s-early 1980s. But the latter two countries stand out for their “incomplete” universalism, as a mixed type of care sustaining inequalities in service provision persisted until lately. This combines a national health system with social health insurance coverage for distinct social groups and high out-of-pocket spending. The financial crisis took a heavy toll on all four healthcare systems, most profoundly and for a longer time span in Greece.

Have the crisis and austerity set the four healthcare systems on a path towards a noticeable transformation in the scope and content of universalism? The short answer is that so far the evidence does not point towards this direction in an unequivocal way. In the last decade, an array of similar policies was implemented in all four countries, such as rising cost sharing (mostly for pharmaceuticals), changes in the range of provisions, and reduced material and human resources. However, the extent to which these measures have shifted the cost of care to the patients and increased inequality in access to services varies considerably among the four countries. Moreover, in Greece and Portugal, which faced the most serious sovereign debt crisis (and came under bailout programs), a confluence of external and internal pressures catalyzed significant changes aimed at tackling system fragmentation, improving transparency, and promoting the equalization of provisions, albeit of a leaner basket of publicly provided services.

### > Declining public expenditure and unmet need

At the height of the crisis (2008-2013) per capita public health expenditure (measured in Purchasing Power Standards for reasons of comparability, and at constant 2010 prices) plummeted drastically (by about 30%) in Greece. It

dropped by 12% in Portugal, 8% in Italy, and 3% in Spain. Subsequently, it almost stagnated in Greece and Italy, but resumed a moderate upward trend in Spain and Portugal. However, in all four countries the gap vis-à-vis the EU15 average (that is, of the 15 member countries before the EU’s eastern enlargement) widened. In 2017 per capita public health spending in Greece dropped to as low as a third of the EU15 average and to a half of it in Portugal. It stood closer to this average in Spain and Italy. Conversely, particularly since 2013, private spending has been on the rise in all four countries, recently covering between 40% (in Greece) and 24% (in Spain) of total health expenditure.

Greece exhibits by far the highest rates of unmet need for medical care due mostly to unaffordable healthcare costs. In this country, even middle-income households, particularly those with children and elderly people, face financial barriers to healthcare. Hence, the risk for private payments to be “catastrophic” for the household budget remains high. In Spain and Italy, increasing waiting times for specialist treatment and hospital care during the crisis constitute the main impediment affecting people’s satisfaction with different healthcare levels. Nevertheless, the prevalence of unmet need has stayed lowest in Spain. However, in these two countries there are considerable regional disparities in the distribution of health resources. This is starkly evident in Italy, with southern regions lacking sufficient resources compared to northern/central regions.

In Greece (and to some extent in Portugal too) reforms embracing thresholds to and stricter monitoring of physicians’ activities (such as limits in the number of referrals for diagnostic/laboratory tests, ceilings on the monthly amount of prescribed drugs, etc.) make the system more transparent and contribute to cost containment. But at the same time, they impact upon system permeability and navigation. This is compounded by the still (more or less) fragmented care pathways between primary and specialty hospital care in these two countries. Moreover, in all four countries comparatively high prevalence of avoidable hos-

**“In Greece even middle-income households, particularly those with children and elderly people, face financial barriers to healthcare”**

pital admissions for some chronic diseases (like diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and others) reflects inefficiencies in the prevention-primary care interface, with adverse implications for equity.

**> Points of concern**

Some foremost points of concern are the following. First, adherence of health policies to squeezed public sector resources is here to stay. This is reflected in the steady rise of per capita private health spending, and the rather slow increase in (or stagnation of) public spending. Second, eligibility of coverage remains comprehensive in principle, but in practice access is a challenge for a number of vulnerable groups (due to varying combinations of reasons – such as unaffordable cost, long waiting times, distance, etc. – in each country). Third, private health insurance (on an occupational or voluntary basis) is expanding: between 2005 and 2015, it has almost doubled in Spain and rose noticeably in Portugal. It is also on the increase in Italy, while in Greece the crisis stalled an incipient upward trend. But in this latter country, out-of-pocket payments are steadily high. So far, private health insurance is sought mostly for speedier access to specialist care and covers mainly employees of some large enterprises.

How this trend will unfold in the future and the likelihood of its compromising universal coverage very much depend on a number of factors, such as policies redrawing the public-private mix, workers' preferences, taxation policies, etc. If occupational health insurance becomes comprehensive (i.e. covers the majority of the working population and is closely regulated, as happens for instance in some North European countries), it may sustain equality in access. It can lift some pressure on public finances but at the same time maintain universal coverage. Yet, if occupational insurance covers only some (privileged) groups of the working population, it can potentially transform solidarity into an occupational-mutualist type that could eventually erode universalism.

Finally, in the foreseeable future, the public system will be further challenged by a raft of serious financial strains accompanying the rapid technological advances in the health sector and the growing need for both “upstream” preventive services (on account of which all four countries underperform) and “downstream” social (but mostly long-term) care services due to population ageing. These may act as further triggers for rearranging the public-private interface, shifting the dynamics of social solidarity in healthcare. ■

Direct all correspondence to:

Maria Petmesidou <[marpetm@otenet.gr](mailto:marpetm@otenet.gr)>

Ana Guillén <[aguillen@uniovi.es](mailto:aguillen@uniovi.es)>

Emmanuele Pavolini <[emmanuele.pavolini@unimc.it](mailto:emmanuele.pavolini@unimc.it)>

# > Unemployment Benefits

## in a New Age of Casual Work

by **Daniel Clegg**, University of Edinburgh, UK



*Zero-hours contracts have been a constant topic of labor protests in the UK. Photo by Christopher Thomond.*

**T**he provision of replacement incomes to adults who are physically capable of work has always been among the most controversial questions in social policy. Intended to protect against income loss due to involuntary exclusion from paid work, unemployment benefits have long been criticized by some as a subsidy to voluntary withdrawal from it. Such criticisms have become particularly audible in media discourse and political debate in recent decades. Policies that have tightened so-called benefit conditionality – increasing the requirements placed on jobseekers to prove their efforts to get back into work, backed up with sanctions in the form of benefit reductions or suspensions for non-compliance – have been perhaps the most prominent feature of un-

employment benefit reforms in European countries over the last quarter century. Such measures have sought to respond to heightened public concern about abuse of unemployment benefit provisions, while paradoxically reinforcing a general perception that such abuse is widespread.

### > **Fragmentation of work and uncertainty of employment**

This long-standing concern with abuse of unemployment benefits, and the related discourse around the responsibilities of jobseekers, elides the key challenge that unemployment benefit policy faces in the early 21st century, however. Unemployment benefits were conceived in labor

markets where dependent work was increasingly being reorganized to provide (male) workers with longer hours and more continuous employment. “Decasualization” of the workforce was occurring as a result of the growth of manufacturing, but was also being actively pursued as an objective of both public policy and collective bargaining. Today, by contrast, the service-dominated economies of rich democracies are seeing an explosion of varying types of non-standard employment relationship, and especially the return of short-time and discontinuous (e.g. on-call) work, sometimes disguised as self-employment. New technologies have further facilitated the fragmentation of work tasks, hastening the arrival of a “gig economy.” Governments are at best reluctant to counter these trends, and often actively promote them as a route to growth, competitiveness, and increased employment. Weakened trade unions have proved relatively powerless to resist. We are slipping into a new age of casual work.

For many today, and particularly those with low skills, unemployment is thus a very different type of “social risk” to the one unemployment benefits were established to compensate. No longer an occasional period of absence of work between stable, long-term engagements, unemployment has increasingly become a recurring feature of laboring lives characterized by a succession of more-or-less short-term, irregular, and insecure periods in work. The boundary between unemployment and employment has grown distinctly unclear. Should a worker employed for the first and last weeks of a month, but without work between times, be considered to be employed or unemployed in that month? Is the economic status of a worker who held two part-time jobs concurrently but lost one defined by the job they still have or by the loss of the other?

### > In-work benefits: making work pay?

The policy trend that is truly symptomatic of the complex challenges facing unemployment benefit policy in this new labor market context is not the pervasive turn to stricter conditionality, but rather the more fitful and uneven development of in-work social security benefits. Introduced and expanded in a number of European welfare states in recent years, whether as new stand-alone entitlements or through modifications to the eligibility criteria for unemployment insurance or assistance benefits, in-work benefits give lie to the belief that the key reason for people being out of work might be their lack of effort, motivation, or responsibility. In-work benefits exist simply because in contemporary European labor markets the reemployment opportunities available to many jobseekers frequently provide lower rewards and less security than out-of-work benefits, despite the modest value of the latter.

Supplementing earned incomes through the social benefit system is a policy approach fraught with difficulties of its own, however. If they are to offer meaningful incentives to the unemployed to re-enter work, in-work benefits need to provide workers not only a supplement to their work income but also reassurance that should the new job be quickly lost they will not find themselves worse off than if they had not taken the job in the first place. This opens the door to a situation where periods of work and non-work can be almost indefinitely alternated, potentially institutionalizing short-term, intermittent employment relationships through a permanent implicit subsidy from the benefit system. Proposals for a universal basic income share precisely this flaw. Where in-work benefits are targeted on lower incomes to limit their cost, they tend to produce very high effective tax rates for workers seeking to increase their hours or earnings, locking workers into low-paying employment even more strongly still.

### > Flexicurity or generating stability?

Faced with these real policy challenges, some governments in Europe have recently – as with the 2019 reform of unemployment insurance in France – announced significant restrictions to in-work benefits, again placing their faith mainly in conditionality to move the unemployed into stable employment. Where in-work benefits are maintained, “in-work conditionality” has also been introduced in an attempt to use tighter behavioral controls on in-work benefit claimants to promote progression within employment, as under the new Universal Credit system in the United Kingdom. In both cases this seems to place the responsibility for the realities of contemporary low-end labor markets on the shoulders of those whose economic opportunities are most directly limited by them.

The real crux of the matter is that it is simply very difficult to adapt the cash transfer systems at the heart of modern European welfare states, with their attendant logic of compensating risks, to a labor market context in which work has become predictably insecure for so many. “Flexicurity” – the recently fashionable policy ideal of combining labor market flexibility and social security – is a neat portmanteau, but offers little practical guidance for how an income maintenance system can protect the casually employed without generating spiraling costs, unintended consequences, or both at the same time. Unemployment protection will continue to make sense only if European labor markets can again generate a basic level of stability in working lives. This requires better regulation of employment, not stricter controls on the behavior of vulnerable workers. ■

Direct all correspondence to Daniel Clegg <[Daniel.Clegg@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Daniel.Clegg@ed.ac.uk)>

# > Subjectifying Social Policies, Polarizing Societies

by **Roland Atzmüller**, Johannes Kepler University, Austria

**T**he evolution of welfare regimes not only, but particularly, in Europe has been dominated by a shift from so-called passive welfare activities tied to wage-led growth models (Fordism) to so-called austerity states and the dominance of supply-side oriented social policy activities. These have been implemented by nationally varied neoliberal reform projects since the 1980s and 1990s and radicalized after 2008. These reforms demand increased self-responsibility from individuals and their families concerning social protection against the risks of capitalist markets. The privatization of social protection (pensions, health) in many countries is paradigmatic of this development and leads to an increase of insecurity and inequality.

However, the self-responsibilization of individuals is closely linked to activities aimed at permanently adapting subjectivities (attitudes to work, skills, and competencies) to changing market dynamics and social crisis. Individualized and subjectified social policies are mainly geared towards securing, multiplying, and flexibilizing exchange options between labor power and capital through the mobilization of all able-bodied adults. This includes activities such as the expansion of childcare as well as the (permanent) improvement of the employability of individuals in the formal economy. Given their articulation with austerity, the shift to human capital oriented social policies came at the expense of wider demands for social protection and care meant to ensure social cohesion and the integration of vulnerable social groups. This has led to increased levels of poverty and social exclusion in many countries as groups such as elderly people, people with disabilities, and chronically ill people were becoming increasingly understood as non-productive cost factors.

These changes have led to the growing importance of so-called welfare services, whose main task is the processing of people through the contentious and contradictory merging of social work and social pedagogy with active labor market policies, vocational education and training (VET), etc. Welfare service activities are increasingly contracted out to voluntary sector organizations or even transferred

to the private sector and tightly controlled through new funding regimes (output-related pay, performance-related pay, short-term contracts, etc.). These developments not only subject recipients of welfare services to increasingly fine-tuned and hard-to-resist activities which promise to develop their abilities to govern themselves according to the demands of the market. They also create new tensions and demands for employees in welfare services as they have to balance austerity-related scarcity of funds, professional demands on the quality of their work, and the expectations as well as resistance of clients.

This raises new challenges for critical research as the individualization and subjectivation of welfare regimes and social policies transcends the focus on de-/commodification in welfare regimes. These analyses focused on the different ways welfare regimes shielded workers at least partially from the socially negative effects of accumulation and capitalist labor markets (decommodification) and stabilized traditional family forms based on male breadwinners, or enabled women to acquire social rights on their own and to participate in gainful employment. Well aware of the ambiguities of social policies in capitalist market societies, these analyses could also show how so-called Keynesian welfare states were supportive to the emerging models of economic growth and consumption in the Global North from 1945 to 2008. From this perspective, neoliberal welfare reforms could be depicted as strategies to re Commodify labor power through flexibilization and liberalization of labor markets and welfare regimes and to marketize social protection.

Even though the shift to austerity and supply-side oriented social policies shows how far the latter have become subjected to economic dynamics, more than three decades of neoliberal attempts to retrench welfare regimes and cut social expenditures did not really succeed in bringing down overall expenditure levels in most countries. This, however, does not tell us anything about whether individual entitlements to social transfers and services are sufficient. Rather, far-reaching reorganizations and reconfigurations of social policy regimes are taking place which aim at alter-

**“Given their articulation with austerity, the shift to human capital oriented social policies came at the expense of wider demands for social protection and care”**

ing the rights and duties as well as attitudes and activities that are expected from individuals and their families concerning gainful employment, child rearing, VET, productive and healthy lifestyles, cultural norms, etc. At least from a European perspective, the outlined individualization and subjectivation of social policy activities brought about – albeit certainly nationally varied – fragmenting polarizations in, and also between, welfare regimes which emerged from international economic imbalances and the crisis of financialized accumulation as well as austerity-dominated strategies to tackle subsequent sovereign debt crises.

The fragmenting polarization in and between welfare regimes oscillates between workfare-oriented activation policies for those on the lower end of labor markets on the one hand, and so-called social investment strategies, on the other. Workfare focuses on activities to integrate the unemployed and the poor who are able to work, as well as other economically inactive people who have no legitimate reason (e.g. motherhood) for non-participation, into the labor market at any cost. On the other hand, the growing importance of so-called social investment strategies aims at re-legitimizing the role of public policies through the enforcement of so-called productive expenditures and activities which improve the dynamics and competitiveness of the economy. Social investment activities focus on the permanent adaption and re-composition of the skills and

competencies – i.e., the human capital – of individuals as well as the expansion of childcare facilities. The latter however is less aimed at changing the gender division of labor in the household than at mobilizing women for the labor market.

Thus, instead of changing the economic structures to tackle the destructive and crisis-prone effects of accumulation and marketization, these policies are focused on subjecting and adapting people to the demands of globalized competition and increasingly flexible and precarious markets. These developments constitute a form of subjectified crisis management which demands from individuals the willingness and ability to adapt and improve their skills and competencies as well as other subjective characteristics deemed necessary for flexible and globalized markets. Thus, the necessity to tackle the destructive effects of the crisis of the financialized economy and structural change is shifted onto the individuals and narrows their possibilities to develop their capabilities. Furthermore, as a kind of post-Polanyian social policy these developments transfer the task of socially embedding the economy and of tackling its impacts on society onto individuals. This is undermining social cohesion and integration, therefore posing a threat not only to national societies but to the European Union as a whole. ■

Direct all correspondence to Roland Atzmüller <[roland.atzmueller@jku.at](mailto:roland.atzmueller@jku.at)>

# > Support for Family Policies in South Europe

by **Sigita Doblytė**, member of ISA Research Committee on Poverty, Social Welfare, and Social Policy (RC19) and **Aroa Tejero**, University of Oviedo, Spain

*The influence of cultural values on public support for better family policies differs across Southern European welfare states.*



One of the challenges both individuals and welfare states face today is the need for more balanced work-life trajectories. While welfare states try to encourage women's labor participation as a protection strategy against poverty, households encounter difficulties in combining care responsibilities and employment. Childcare provision can be externalized to the market – although creating a financial burden on parents – or to state-financed and/or state-provided childcare services that might be considered as more equitable and align with the logic of social investment.

## > Cultural values and provision of care

Yet, welfare states in Europe differ in the extent of these work-family reconciliation policies. Southern European societies, in particular, are often characterized by the domi-

nance of conservative cultural values and the central role played by families in the provision of care. These countries spend substantially less on family benefits than the Nordic or Continental European countries and seem to place lower priority on family policies than on other fields of social protection. When measured as a percentage of total expenditure on benefits, public spending on family benefits in all these countries is lower than the EU average, with proportions in Greece, Portugal, and Spain ranking among the lowest five in Europe in 2016. The European Social Survey of the same year nonetheless shows that the Mediterranean welfare states covered by the survey – Italy, Portugal, and Spain – are among those that are most supportive of extending work-family reconciliation policies even if it means higher taxes for all, i.e., even when individuals are reminded that additional public services imply additional financing.

Diverse empirical studies have found that public attitudes towards social policies are often shaped by the needs or self-interest of social groups. For instance, families with small children or age groups of potential parenthood might show more support for better services for families. Some studies also stress, however, the importance of cultural values as drivers in attitudes towards the welfare state and its policies. In her article “Welfare state policies and the development of care arrangements” (2005), Dr. Birgit Pfau-Effinger, professor of sociology at the University of Hamburg, argues that cultural ideas towards care and the responsibilities of the state, the family, and the market are embedded in public discourses and shape care arrangements and policies in a country.

### > Divergences across Southern European countries

Our research, therefore, seeks to raise precisely these questions about the influence of needs and cultural values in shaping public willingness to pay higher taxes for better services for families in Southern European societies, where care provision was traditionally provided by the family but where increasing female participation in the labor market might require the participation of other actors. Using data from the European Social Survey, we highlight that there are unmet care needs in Southern Europe, which are evidenced by high levels of support for better services for families. However, the findings show divergent patterns of how self-interest and cultural values influence these attitudes across the different countries. Although Southern European welfare states are often considered to be similar in terms of the role of traditional gender and family values, the findings of our study contribute to the evidence that there are important differences between them. We believe that there is more room for extending services for families in some of these countries than in others.

In Portugal, exceptionally high and normalized levels of labor market participation of women in general, and of mothers in particular, result in high and consistent levels of solidarity in welfare support among women and men from different social classes and educational backgrounds. This is accompanied by the absence of significant effects of different cultural values and an even higher solidarity among older generations. All of this seems to indicate space for more generous state policies for families in the country.

In Italy, however, support for better services for families differs more across social groups. Economically less privileged and lower social classes are significantly less supportive of family policies, which might be shaped by the relatively high tax burden in Italy. A clear impact of cultural values is also found, although its direction is not entirely as expected: both individuals who place higher priority on tradition and conformity and those who embrace values such as social justice, equality, or welfare for all show less support for extending work-family reconciliation policies.

This unexpected effect of values that *a priori* align with the logic of the welfare state might be related to the higher tax burden in Italy, where further extensions could be seen as threatening household income and, therefore, as playing against the mentioned values. In other words, the family might still be seen as the most adequate care institution in Italy, and embracing social justice or equality might result in support for family income protection policies rather than for public childcare services. Indeed, the 2017 European Values Study suggests this dominance of traditional family values in Italy: 52% agree or strongly agree that children suffer if their mother works, as compared to 26% in Spain.

As the latter might already suggest, Spain seems to have moved more clearly away from traditional gender and family culture than Italy: individuals embracing values of social justice, equality, and welfare are more willing to pay higher taxes for better services for families, but tradition and conformity do not affect welfare support significantly. Further, the higher support of parents with small children and the lower share of children under three in formal childcare signal unmet care needs in families with dependent children, whereas individuals struggling economically or those who live in big cities tend to show lower levels of solidarity.

To conclude, while the results in Portugal hint that families might be becoming relatively strong and their demands for better services might be successful, this is not necessarily the case in Spain and, particularly, Italy. Other social institutions such as employers nevertheless might start playing a more substantial role in providing childcare or flexible work arrangements, which are still limited although increasing in importance in Southern Europe. Yet, inequalities in access to these benefits threaten principles of social investment. ■

Direct all correspondence to:  
Sigita Doblytė <[doblytesigita@uniovi.es](mailto:doblytesigita@uniovi.es)>  
Aroa Tejero <[tejeroarora@uniovi.es](mailto:tejeroarora@uniovi.es)>

# > Volunteering in Germany:

## Doing Good or a Shadow Economy?

by **Silke van Dyk** and **Tine Haubner**, Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, Germany



*Necessary social services are far too often delegated to volunteers.  
Credit: Matthias Zomer/pexels.com.*

**W**e are currently experiencing a crisis of care and social reproduction caused by the dismantling of welfare states, new needs due to demographic change, and changes in gender and family relations. In times when less and less women are available full-time as a resource for social policy, the caring potential of unpaid work – also and especially beyond the family – is becoming increasingly important and has been receiving growing state support. Citizens are increasingly called upon to commit themselves to the common good. Civic engagement and volunteer work are seen as new (re-)productive resources and volunteers are hailed as heroes of everyday life.

Against this background, we are conducting an empirical research project in East and West Germany to investigate how volunteer work is used and exploited by the state for the provision of services and care. We are also interested in how this constellation is experienced, interpreted, and shaped by both the engaged individuals themselves and the beneficiaries of their help. While numerous and predominantly affirmative studies on different fields of engagement and charities are available, a political economy of volunteering that systematically illuminates and critically reflects upon the political, social, and economic implications of this practice has not yet been developed. We use the term “shadow economy” to describe this context, be-

cause we are dealing with an area of informal work that represents a welfare factor and contributes to the creation of value (through unpaid working hours) – beyond regular employment with social insurance contributions. In concrete terms, therefore, we want to know to what extent the promotion, demand, and use of voluntary work by the state becomes a vehicle for processes of substitution, informalization, and de-professionalization of regular employment.

Herein, *substitution* sometimes means that activities that were previously regular jobs are shifted into the context of voluntary work. There are examples of this in our study, as in the context of full-day care in schools when voluntary “youth companions” compensate for the teacher shortage or volunteer family helpers replace state family support. We also find examples of newly emerging needs not being met by expanding regular employment, but by creating new fields and forms of engagement – for example, in elderly care. In addition to these forms of direct substitution of regular employment or the prevented expansion of regular employment, our study shows further substitution effects, as eroding family care and the lack of skilled workers (e.g. in nursing, crafts, or legal advice) are also compensated for by volunteers.

While volunteering and civic engagement is usually highly praised throughout the country, we observe a *de-professionalization* through these developments. Poorly trained laypersons actually take on professional tasks in the areas of education, family help, elderly care, German classes for refugees, or legal advice. These non-professional services are primarily aimed at those who lack the resources to compensate for gaps in state provision or new needs through private purchase of professional services. Therefore, the use and exploitation of voluntary work by the welfare state does not affect all citizens equally: rather, one can observe the emergence of “poor services for poor people” who cannot afford professional aid.

However, it is not only the quality of the services provided which can be problematic, but also the circumstances for the volunteers, who in some areas turn into quasi-employees – without the related social rights. Particularly in areas in which volunteers are expected to be reliable, steady, and experienced – such as elderly care, work with disabled people, or all-day school care – so-called “voluntary contracts” and expense allowances that go beyond the reimbursement of costs play an increasingly important

role. These allowances are usually well below the minimum wage, while at the same time labor and collective bargaining standards are being undermined. In this way, the highly praised engagement also contributes to the precarization and *informalization* of work, at least in some areas of social services of general interest.

In East Germany in particular, civic engagement and volunteer work are closely related to the labor market, meaning that they are often carried out by unemployed people hoping to return to the labor market. In interviews with volunteers and experts we also find statements that frame engagement as a symbolic substitute for paid work. Another important empirical result of our research is the work of the job centers, which sometimes send long-term unemployed people into civic engagement. Moreover, there is another interesting difference between the new (East German) and old (West German) federal states. While the monetization of engagement is viewed rather critically in West Germany, since – according to the widespread view – it damages the character and originality of volunteering, the situation is different in East Germany: The monetary compensation for engagement is regarded as unproblematic and legitimate in the sense of a fair wage for daily work. Here, the aftermath of the German Democratic Republic’s strong labor character becomes apparent, in which there was state-directed volunteer work as well as informal neighborhood help and solidarity, but no concept and practice of typical civic engagement.

Our research focuses on very different areas of engagement and voluntary work: refugee and neighborhood aid, elderly care, involvement in schools, the voluntary fire brigade, engagement in multi-generational homes and local transport services, just to name the most important fields. In all areas there are problematic, but also completely unproblematic developments. In terms of problematic developments, we are observing a new era of social reproduction, which we call “community capitalism,” in which social communities beyond the family are increasingly used as a new resource to overcome reproductive crises. Our critical view of the state’s use of voluntary work does not imply, however, that the state should take on all (social) tasks without exception. When it comes to shifting public services and infrastructure to the area of voluntary work, our criticism is rather directed at those areas where fundamental opportunities in life depend on voluntary support instead of guaranteed social rights. ■

Direct all correspondence to:  
 Silke van Dyk <[silke.vandyk@uni-jena.de](mailto:silke.vandyk@uni-jena.de)>  
 Tine Haubner <[tine.haubner@uni-jena.de](mailto:tine.haubner@uni-jena.de)>

# > Will the EU Keep its Social Pillar?

by **Beatrice Carella**, Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Italy



*The European Pillar of Social Rights signed in November 2017 represents the flagship social initiative of the European Commission. Credit: European Commission website.*

**O**n November 17, 2017, the Presidents of the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the European Council jointly signed a political declaration enshrining the social principles that the European Union (EU) embraces and fosters, titled the European Pillar of Social Rights (the Pillar or EPSR). This represented the flagship social initiative of the Commission led by Jean-Claude Juncker, who brought ‘Social Europe’ back into the debate around the future of European integration. Since his appointment in 2014, President Juncker had placed the issue of the European social dimension within a different discourse from the past: while the productive side of welfare states and social policies was still accounted for, the new Commission openly recognized the need to rethink future policies in terms of their social implications, in relation not only to

the economy and labor markets, but also to objectives of social equality, fairness, and inclusion.

## > The long and contested process of formulation

It was within this renovated narrative and the willingness to break with previous policy patterns (at a time when the effects of austerity had fully revealed themselves) that the Pillar initiative was presented during Juncker’s State of the Union address in September 2015. The announcement was followed by a two-year long formulation phase: in March 2016, the Commission published a preliminary outline of the document and then opened a particularly long and broad public consultation process that lasted until the end of the year. While the peculiarities of the consultations show an effort to foster a larger and more bottom-up involvement

of different stakeholders in the formulation of the text, the public availability of position papers and reports of the hearings and debates organized by the Commission allow us to investigate how the various preferences were reflected in the final document. This is key to understanding possible future developments of the initiative.

What emerges from an analysis of the outcomes of the public consultations is a high variability in the demands put forward by the various participants in the formulation process. More often than not, we can detect a divide between two main groups of actors: on the one hand, civil society organizations, confederations of trade unions, and the European Parliament stressed the need to ensure a “social protection floor” to guarantee citizens’ and workers’ rights in case of economic shocks and to strike a better balance between flexibility and security within labor markets, beside calling for a variety of policy instruments to implement the Pillar, including new EU legislation and supranational funding. On the other hand, employers’ and business associations, together with several Member States, were concerned about the emphasis on social inclusion and protection per se (with no direct links with labor market functioning) and strongly opposed the adoption of new legislation or funding mechanisms in the social field. This group of policy actors promoted further integration exclusively through “soft” policy coordination tools and with respect to the principle of subsidiarity.

**> A balancing act of symbolic value**

By looking at the final version of the document, we can see that the Commission managed to balance the diverging views as follows: On a discursive level, EU institutions showed a changed narrative around the social dimension, abandoning not only austerity-oriented positions but also the notion of “social investment” (as in the Social Investment Package of 2013) to turn to the realm of rights protection and considering social inclusion and equality as stand-alone objectives, thus following the lines suggested by civil society organizations and trade unions. However, as regards the instruments proposed to put the Pillar into practice, they embraced the position advocated by the business sector and some Member States, by relying only on non-binding coordination and monitoring measures. While the final product was generally well perceived by the variegated universe of policy actors, the outcome of the EPSR initiative was a political, declaratory document enlisting a number of principles and aspirations recognized by the three main EU institutions. The only policy innovation was a new set of social indicators (the Social Scoreboard) to be loosely integrated in the overall macroeconomic coordination architecture. The added value of the Pillar rests

so far in its symbolic nature, while the realization of its inherent potential to stir changes in the EU social dimension depends on the political will of the actors who will be involved in its implementation.

The results of the European Parliament (EP) elections and the appointment of the new College of Commissioners in 2019 provides a picture that is only partially promising in this respect. At the EU level, it seems that both bureaucrats and political groups recognized the importance of addressing social issues from a supranational perspective. In their manifestos for the EP elections, all European parties considered the social domain to be either as relevant as or even more important than in 2014, particularly the Party of European Socialists, the Greens, and the European Free Alliance (the former two also directly mentioning the Pillar). Moreover, the newly appointed President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, made explicit reference to the EPSR in her introductory speech and political guidelines and mentioned the adoption of an “action plan” for its implementation. However, the role of individual Member States will be as crucial in the follow-up of the Pillar initiative as it was in its formulation and adoption and it is therefore important to consider also developments at the national level.

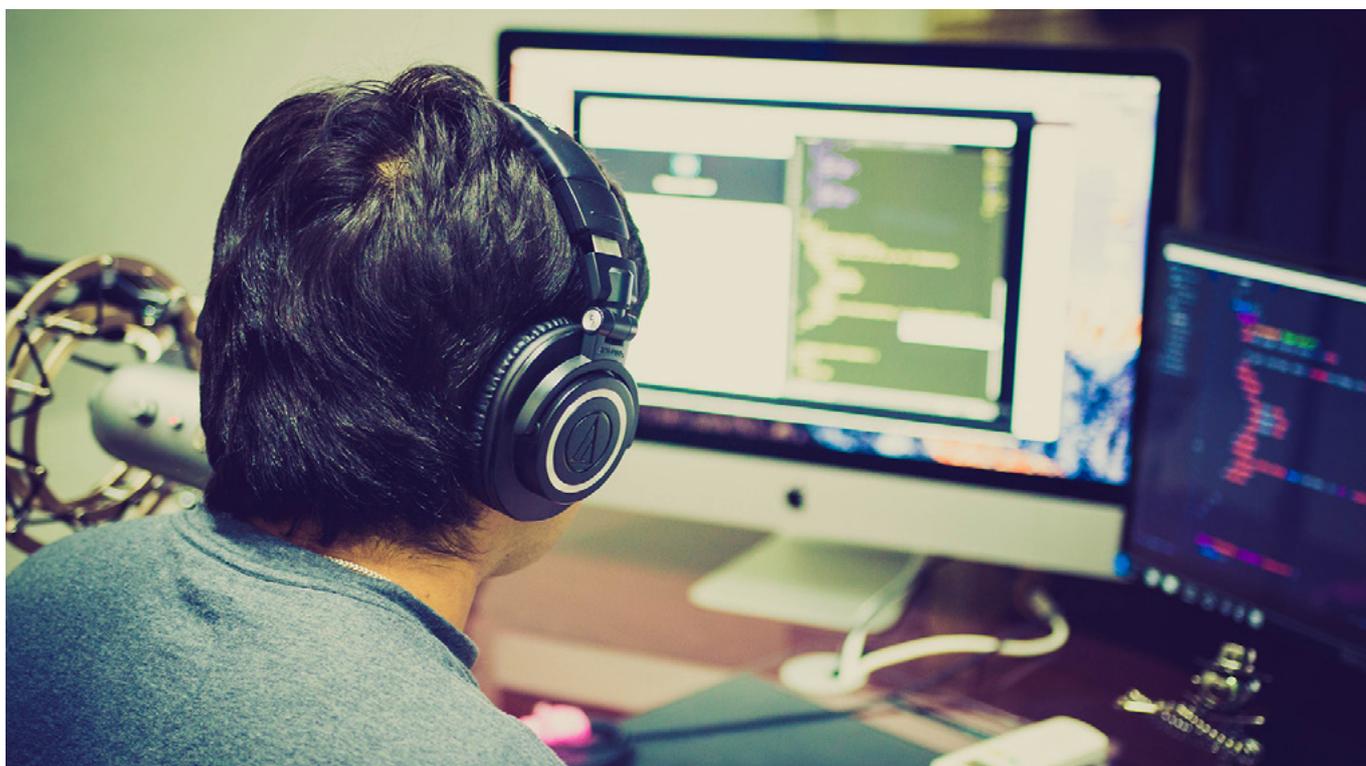
**> The role of Member States: The case of Italy**

In the run-up to the EP elections in Italy, the European Pillar of Social Rights was absent from manifestos and public discussion, and the parties in favor of strengthening the EU social dimension (such as +Europa/ALDE, Europa Verde/Greens, and la Sinistra/GUE/NGL) suffered electoral defeats. These were also parties that framed their programs closely in line with their respective EU party family and in their electoral campaign addressed issues that were relevant both at national and supranational level. Even though the last EP elections were scarcely “Europeanized” but rather influenced by domestic political agendas, not only in Italy but across all Member States, the Italian case might not be the most representative one as regards the final electoral results. In fact, both ALDE and the Greens/EFA, with their pro-EU integration stance, overall managed to gain new seats in Strasbourg, potentially countervailing the votes for nationalist and Eurosceptic parties. However, in a policy area such as the social one, where the role of Member States is still predominant, the high political fragmentation emerging from the European Parliament makes the future of the EU social dimension even more uncertain. At the same time, this could create an opportunity for supranational actors, the new Commission in particular, to foster stronger integration in the social area, building on the foundation – the Pillar – laid by their predecessors. ■

Direct all correspondence to Beatrice Carella <[beatrice.carella@sns.it](mailto:beatrice.carella@sns.it)>

# > Whose intelligence is artificial intelligence?

by **Paola Tubaro**, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Université Paris-Saclay, France



*Only with real people does artificial intelligence become 'intelligent.'*  
Credit: Hitesh Choudhary/pexels.com.

**T**he extraordinary successes of present-day artificial intelligence (AI) rest on the “micro-work” of a multitude of real men and women. They tag objects in images, transcribe commercial receipts, translate bits of text, and record their voice while reading aloud short sentences. Simple and repetitive, these tasks generally require low qualifications and are paid as little as a few cents. Workers, who are not formally employees but sub-contractors paid by piecework, execute them remotely from their smartphone or laptop, through specialized websites.

How does this shadow army of workers support AI? Take the example of vocal assistants powered by AI technology, like Alexa or Siri. Before they can recognize users’

requests, vocal assistants must be exposed to many examples of human speech, such as people asking about the weather. The machine will thus “learn” that they all mean the same despite differences in vocal timbres and intonations, regional accents, or presence of background noises, and it will later be able to recognize similar requests by new users. Micro-workers are therefore needed to produce these examples, recording their voice while asking about the weather. AI producers also rely on micro-workers to test their “smart” assistants and check that they function as planned.

It was Amazon that popularized micro-work in the early 2000s with its “Mechanical Turk.” Initially an internal service through which its employees contributed to cleaning

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up product listings, Amazon opened it to outside clients who could post HITs (Human Intelligence Tasks) for outside micro-workers to execute. Amazon aptly called its device “artificial artificial intelligence” to stress that it is best to outsource to humans when they can carry out tasks more efficiently than computers. Today, many more websites and applications have followed Amazon’s example and proposed variants: for example the Australian Appen, the German Clickworker, the American Lionbridge and Microworkers, to name but a few.

Where are the micro-workers who make this happen? Because some tasks can be done online and do not require physical presence in any given place (for example, identifying tomatoes in pictures of salads), some workers live in countries where labor costs are low. In this sense, the geographies of micro-work revive well-known patterns of outsourcing. However, other tasks require local knowledge or skills, and cannot be done offshore. For example, recording sentences for a vocal assistant requires workers who speak the language, with the accents and dialects, of the country where the assistant is sold. Indeed, most of Mechanical Turk’s workers are US-based. With a team of colleagues, we set up a study called “Digital Platform Labor” (DiPLab) last year in France, another highly-industrialized country, and found many micro-workers.

Who are the people who micro-work in a country like France? Not just students or millennials, our survey reveals. Over 60% of French micro-workers are between 25 and 44 years old, and have a primary job in addition to online tasks. They work (for example) in the health, education, and public services sectors, and use micro-work as an extra source of income. Ironically for tasks that require limited qualifications, micro-workers are better educated than the general population: in France, over 40% have at least an undergraduate university degree. Slightly more than half of all French micro-workers are women, often with family. More likely to work part-time than men, more frequently depending on their spouse for income, and devoting more time to household chores, they use all their breaks between work and home activities to do online micro-tasks. Additional earnings from micro-work are welcome, but the cost is the extra burden in addition to formal employment and care work – leaving them with little time for leisure.

Micro-work reveals a broad, albeit hidden, problem of economic insecurity. Over 20% of French micro-workers

live below the poverty threshold, computed as half the median income of the country, while less than 10% of the general population is in this situation. Against this background, online micro-tasks are an attempt to cope: our survey respondents overwhelmingly said that one of the reasons why they micro-work is need of money. However, the average monthly income from micro-work in France (all platforms combined) is very asymmetrically distributed. The large number of “occasional” micro-workers who connect sporadically lowers the average to about 21 euros per month, while some “very active” people manage to earn up to 1,500-2,000 euros per month by micro-working full-time (or almost so).

If micro-work has the potential to at least partly support people who have fewer alternatives in standard job markets or who need flexible working arrangements (for example owing to care duties as hinted above), it also entails specific risks. Micro-work provides no form of social protection, healthcare, or retirement benefits. There is currently no way of leveraging the micro-working experience as part of a professional career: for example, the reputation earned on one website does not transfer to another. Psychologically, micro-work can be distressing. When, as often happens, micro-workers do not know the clients and/or the purposes of the tasks they perform, their activity loses meaning. For example one of our respondents, unaware of her contribution to AI, wondered “why on earth am I asked to draw circles around tomatoes in pictures?” Further, when tasks are rejected by a client (and are therefore not paid), micro-workers have no means to appeal the decision or at least to know why it was made. What’s more, they operate in isolation from one another. They micro-work from home and have no such thing as the office coffee area; nor do micro-working websites make available digital spaces for them to meet, at least online. The initiative of activists or trade unions is often necessary to create such infrastructures.

Because micro-tasks serve the development of cutting-edge AI industries, and because these tasks are mainly done by people in situations of vulnerability, it is important to start thinking seriously about possible solutions. Micro-working websites and apps can do their part, by improving their transparency and by offering networking and support services. Policy-makers and unions have a lot more to do to devise new forms of protection for atypical workers. ■

Direct all correspondence to Paola Tubaro <[paola.tubaro@lri.fr](mailto:paola.tubaro@lri.fr)>

# > A Museum of Great Novelties

by **Lévio Scattolini**, State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), Brazil



Cryptocurrencies brought high hopes for a more democratic financial system. Credit: Worldspectrum/pexels.com.

**T**hose that are a bit skeptical about what capitalism is still able to deliver in terms of civilizational achievements tend to receive with suspicion the promises surrounding technologies like those of the so-called Digital or Information Age. Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, Big Data, Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, cryptocurrencies, and even smartphones, new extensions of our body and soul, are perceived not as a sign of new times to come, but as closing mechanisms of the future. Finding evidence to corroborate this hypothesis or even proving that it is going to happen does not answer a greater and much older question: *why do we constantly see new solutions and structures moving away from the ideals that brought them alive*

*and ending up essentially reconstituting the past under a new guise?*

There are several dimensions when addressing this issue; I would like to stress a quite concrete and urgent one, which makes explicit the social roots usually neglected in this kind of debate. In the realm of ideas, the first widely spread cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, would be an insurrectionary measure against the inconceivable abuses perpetrated by the financial system – with permission and support of states all over the world – which culminated in the 2008 economic crisis. In fact, as a sign of protest, a *Times* report announcing the intentions of the United Kingdom government to release a second bailout for banks on January

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3, 2009 was inscribed into Bitcoin's source code as a timestamp proof of its launching day. But not only that, the technology's architecture was indeed designed to take the power that comes from controlling the financial system out of the hands of "intermediaries" and distribute it to ordinary people, the general public.

The problem diagnosed with the traditional financial system is that it depends fundamentally on trust in centralized institutions for both transaction validation and currency issuance. In other words, it is precisely the financial institutions, such as private and central banks, who guarantee that A has possession of a certain amount of money and, after transferring such amount to B's possession, cannot use it again. We delegate authority to the financial institutions to perform these relevant tasks and hope they will do their best. Although nowadays this does not appear as a problem for most since it remains occult and distant from daily life, it is a crucial factor for the government of the *polis*, especially in a social formation in which everything is produced for exchange – at the end, then, for money.

In this sense, the possibility of creating a decentralized network of ledgers, open to everyone who wishes to engage in it, where transactions are recorded and validated through a consensus coordination mechanism among all participating nodes, seems a quite adequate and interesting idea. Even more so if we consider that this network is fault tolerant (able to operate properly if one or some of its nodes fail), has a built-in unalterable currency issuance (limited to 21 million coins), allows people to transact almost instantly from anywhere with internet access, and has been working under massive attack attempts, without major structural damages, for more than eleven years. As a matter of fact, the architecture of distributed systems coordination behind Bitcoin was so beautifully done that it became a stand-alone technology, with a range of other implementations, called blockchain.

In 2019, Bitcoin peaked at \$225 billion dollars in market value and had over 120 million transactions recorded in its native digital network over a one-year period. Should we conclude then that it has been revolutionizing the financial system and giving power to ordinary people? Not so fast. After a turbulent and reluctant beginning, from 2014 onwards, financial institutions, corporations, and big market players shifted their approach towards cryptocurrency and started to massively invest in and research the technology. The ideal that common users with their

personal computers would be a majority in the network and have control over it was overwhelmingly challenged by reality. Nowadays, Bitcoin "mining" is controlled by huge "farms," which is the term for big complex-companies that have machinery, energy, and resources – or, differently put, Capital – to better process the "proof of work" needed. Finally, it is worth mentioning Facebook's recent announcements that it intends, in partnership with some of the largest corporations in the world, including financial institutions, to create its own cryptocurrency – wisely called Libra – with the aim of doing what Bitcoin and other cryptos failed to do, that is, to popularize it. That means we are on the verge of witnessing the biggest social media platform in the world, which has been improperly appropriating data from billions of people for more than ten years, allying with major corporations in order to create for the first time a truly global central bank, privately owned and omniscient about its users.

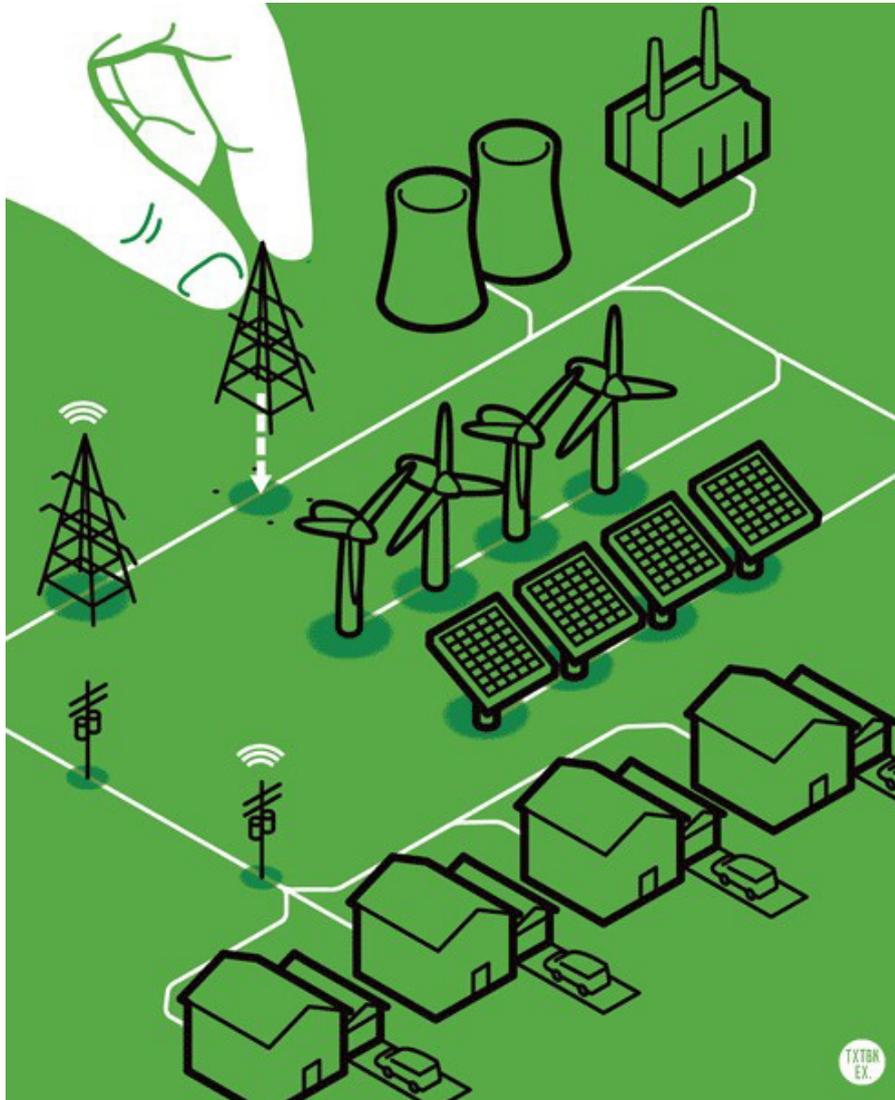
Here we may attest to the importance of critical analysis as a means to adequately orientate our action in the world. As pointed out before, from a pragmatic diagnosis that the problems of the current financial system are eminently related to a dependency on trusting centralized institutions as "intermediaries," emerges a pragmatic solution to reform it and implement an open decentralized "network of trust." However, what if the problems of our financial system come not from its *form* but from its *content*? What I mean is, how can one try to make a "disintermediated society" by relying on the most prominent social mediating figure of our time, money? Wasn't money in the first place what made it necessary for centralized institutions of verification to develop and grow? Isn't it the intrinsic logic of endless accumulation of money that generates concentration and centralization?

My claim is not that Bitcoin or the thousands of new cryptocurrencies are worthless, but rather that if the capitalist form of social organization is taken for granted, if the implications of a sociability through money is not put into perspective, these new technologies will be doomed to constantly reconstitute the past, the necessary social conditions without which Capital cannot reproduce itself. By making explicit the contradictory movement of valorization of Value – money that needs to become more money – we may have better diagnoses of the problems and, from there, perhaps may emerge better solutions, structures, or technologies for a different future: a new material process of production of life. ■

Direct all correspondence to Lévio Scattolini <[leviosj@gmail.com](mailto:leviosj@gmail.com)>

# > What Does a Sustainable Digitalization Need?

by **Felix Sühmann-Faul**, Germany



Renewable energy sources entail digitalization for smart distribution. Credit: James Provost/Flickr. Some rights reserved.

**M**any things show us what digitalization means. Take a record store for instance. We used to hear something on the radio that we liked, or a friend gave us a tip, and then we went to a record store and bought a medium with music. A material thing, which became our property. This once ordinary act is hardly seen nowadays. Streaming services, based on a platform business model, deliver access to millions of songs and substitute the record store of yore. The music industry has changed considerably. One big cause of this change is data as the central means of production. The platform business model works in most cases by gathering lots of information about their users. For instance, what genre of music we listen to,

when, how often, and where. In addition: What is our gender? Do we have kids? Where do we live? What is our household income?

This information is what makes most of the platforms enormously successful: They know our preferences and attitudes and can predict our behavior. Their services are attractive because they adapt to our individuality. Platforms also sell this gathered information to advertising agencies, which can now offer personally targeted possibilities of consumption. This is one big part of what digitalization means today: A strong connection between capitalism and technology.

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This links directly to the fact that digitalization can often not be reconciled with sustainability. The well-known 1987 Brundtland report to the United Nations states: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Therefore, we, our children, and their children should have the chance to live “a good life.” What does this mean? This is of course a cultural question. In western society, which is influenced by ideas of humanism and enlightenment, it surely consists of values like democratic basic rights, self-determination, diversity, privacy, a sound environment, and “freedom” – whatever this means. Nevertheless, most of these points are influenced by digitalization, which is driven by economic interests to a big degree. Privacy, for example, cannot be ensured by platforms whose success is based on the need to know everything about us. Moreover, a sound environment has never been the goal of economic interests and this has not changed in the digital age.

Digitalization requires the construction of devices and infrastructures, the mining and transport of raw materials. The mere use of digital devices creates an energy consumption of about 10% of the global demand of electricity. If this trend keeps its pace, it will rise up to 20% in 2025. Consequently, the production and use of information and communication technologies is responsible for 3.7% of the man-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and it will rise to about 8% in 2025. The mining of raw materials produces massive problems concerning sustainability in the countries of origin. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a very dire example in this regard. Congo is one of the most important supply countries for tungsten, tantalum, tin, cobalt, and gold. These minerals are irreplaceable for the manufacturing of digital hardware. Of course, mining causes the usual ecological problems like erosion, poisoned groundwater, and the extinction of species. However, the problems on the social level are even greater: A bloody civil war shakes this country. Responsible for the millions of civilian casualties are various rebel troops that have waged this war for 30 years. The mines – which deliver the irreplaceable minerals for digital hardware – are in the hands of these rebel forces that finance their weapons through the sale of these minerals. This is why they are called “conflict minerals.” The bitter consequences: hunger, sexual violence, diseases, modern slavery, child soldiers.

Nevertheless, there is also good news: Some areas of sustainability are only achievable by using tools of digitalization. The first example is the shift towards the use of renewable energy. To use renewable energy sources efficiently, there is no way around digitalization because the

energy production is decentralized, hard to predict, happens during different times of the day, and sometimes only tiny amounts are produced. Storing and distribution must happen very fast to make the most of this volatile energy. In addition, this is only achievable through the support of self-learning computer technology.

Another example is sustainable transportation. The shift away from fossil-based transportation, traffic jams in city centers, and fine dust pollution requires a massive reduction of passenger cars. However, there is often a big information gap as well as problems concerning the comparison of alternative modes of transport. There are different providers, different pricing models, different journey times, etc. It is hard to gather a spontaneous overview. But there is an easy fix to this problem now that smartphones are ubiquitous. Many research projects in Germany address these issues by enhancing the apps from local public transportation providers and adding all the relevant information for other suppliers in the region into this app. Now one can compare car-sharing providers, bike rental companies, buses, trains, and so on. One can see how much time their journey will take, which mode is the cheapest, how to combine different modes with each other, and also book and pay through these apps. Digitalization can make it much easier to travel sustainably.

### > Where does this leave us?

Countless studies show that sustainability is thought of as being important in society. However, acting sustainably is a completely different thing. People tend to avoid getting rid of their car or stopping traveling by plane. Here lies the imperative of politics. There are many easy steps like lowering taxes on repairs of digital devices or legislation that all electronic devices must be repairable. But the biggest step would be paying a fair price for raw materials. There must be a financial compensation for the ecological and social devastation mining creates. Severe consequences would come out of this but it also would pave the way towards a post-growth economy through higher taxes on resources.

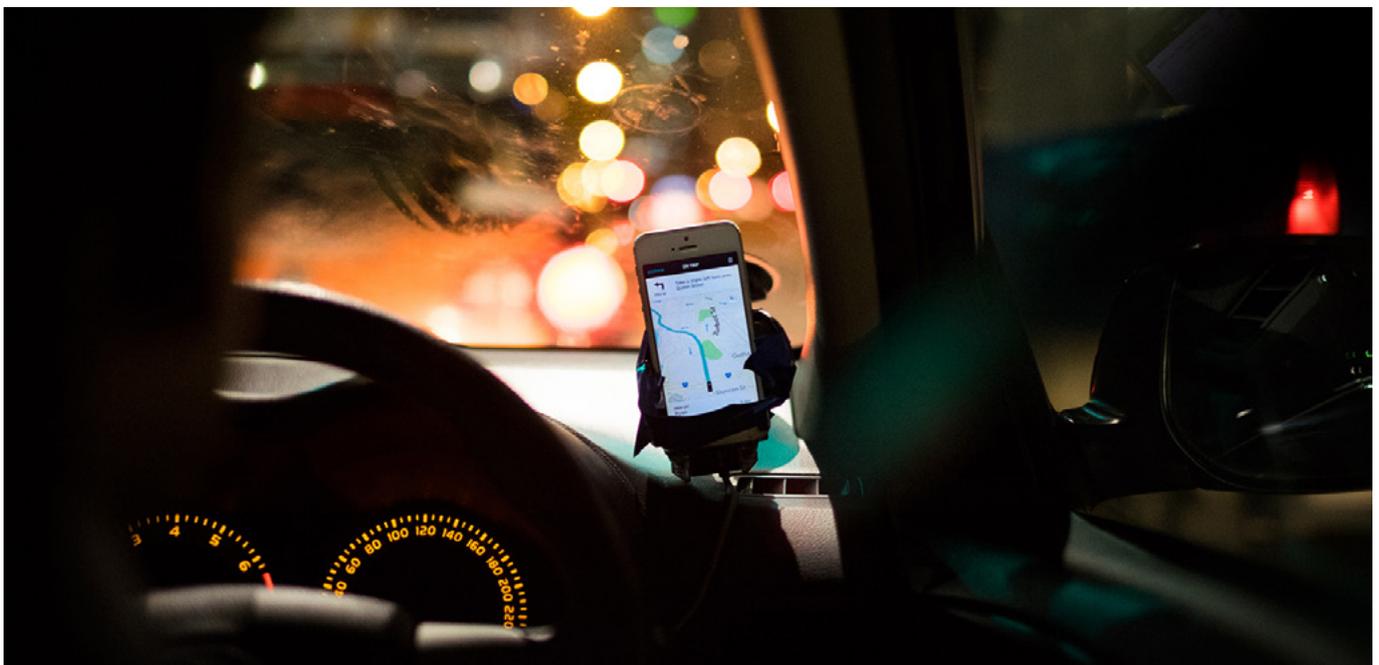
A digitalization that uses its chances to create a more sustainable way of producing and living and avoids the risks of ever greater energy consumption and destruction of nature is a joint effort, however. Smart legislation is one part. Individuals must support this through political engagement, voting, and by adapting their lifestyle. Sustainability is rooted in sufficiency, but digitalization lowers the threshold for consumption. We have to keep a watchful eye on this fact. ■

Direct all correspondence to Felix Sühmann-Faul  
<[kontakt@suehlmann-faul.com](mailto:kontakt@suehlmann-faul.com)>

# > The Fairwork Foundation:

## Action Research on the Gig Economy

by **Srujana Katta**, **Kelle Howson**, and **Mark Graham**, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK



*Commercial peer-to-peer ridesharing has become over the last decade a popular means of transportation. Credit: Noel Tock/Flickr. CC BY-NC 2.0.*

**O**la Cabs, the Indian ride-sharing firm, is one of an increasing number of companies around the world whose business model relies on using a digital platform to match the supply and demand for labor. Specifically, Ola's mobile application allows passengers in need of transportation to connect with a nearby driver. Digital labor platforms like Ola comprise what is commonly referred to as the "gig economy," where companies – by way of a digital platform (often underpinned by a closely-guarded algorithm) – contract jobseekers to perform short-term "gigs" on a casual and piecemeal basis. The gig economy's model of algorithmically apportioned and managed employment has made massive inroads into a wide array of economic activities, from ridesharing and delivery, to domestic work and general freelancing.

Ola, a typical gig economy firm, deploys narratives of freedom and flexibility in order to recruit "driver-partners" to drive

their cars for the company. In keeping with the foundational mantras of the gig economy, on its website Ola guarantees aspiring drivers "flexible working hours," "freedom of work," and the ability to "earn respect." In addition to allowing people to drive their own cars under Ola's banner, the company also leases cars to those who don't own one, for \$10-16 per day. Aspiring drivers can "drive a car at zero-risk" after a non-refundable down payment (around \$56) and security deposit (between \$293 and \$432).

In Ola's narrative, driver-partners are self-empowered go-getters who are freed from the constraints of traditional work, and are bouncing between interesting tasks. Gig work ostensibly offers the attractive prospects of self-management, capitalizing on existing assets, and more time for family or other pursuits. Its allure hinges on offering workers greater control over many aspects of their work and personal lives. The reality, however, is often far from the promise. Overt

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management by a human boss is replaced by more hidden and pervasive forms of algorithmically-enabled control.

In December 2019, *The Economic Times* reported that Ola suspended a driver-partner in Mumbai after a passenger complained that he fell asleep at the wheel, and nearly caused them to crash. The driver said he had been behind the wheel for over twenty hours. On the surface, Ola's action to suspend him is a reasonable measure to ensure passenger and driver safety. However, the episode is illustrative of a range of underlying structural issues characteristic of the ridesharing sector, and the wider gig economy – namely, poor pay, unsafe working conditions, and an absence of due process. The report quotes a representative from a workers' organization: "If they don't drive for long periods, like 14-15 hours, they cannot give the daily lease amount to Ola, Uber, etc."

Gig economy platforms often contend that they are merely technology companies that connect those who want to sell their labor with those who want to buy it. By this logic, across jurisdictions, platforms classify gig workers as "independent contractors," "self-employed," or equivalent, rather than employees. This classification belies the relationship of control that exists, whereby platforms dictate terms of work and payment, and deploy highly effective methods of network governance. The result of this contractual sleight of hand is that growing numbers of gig workers are not covered by labor laws and therefore ineligible for protections and benefits, such as sick or holiday pay, and pension contributions. Platforms outsource costs to workers, such as for vehicle rental or maintenance, insurance, and fuel. Workers are responsible for calculating and paying taxes. The supposed flexibility to choose working hours is undermined by a trend of decreasing pay (driven by platforms rapidly expanding their workforce), and a gamified digital interface that rewards those who work longer. Moreover, platforms are under no obligation to guarantee a minimum amount of

work, with an oversupply of labor power leading to periods of lower job availability, and longer unpaid wait times between jobs. This same oversupply of labor power means that customers rarely have long to wait for the services they desire. Combined, all of these factors constantly push workers to work longer shifts, as a result taking on greater risks and potentially endangering themselves and others, as in the case of the sleepy Ola driver.

Neither Ola, nor the Indian context, is unique – similar issues of low pay, overwork, and exposure to risk regularly surface across the gig economy globally. These conditions can and are being addressed in a variety of ways, including through regulation targeting the employment status of workers and obligations of platforms. Underpinning this has been bottom-up collective action and worker organization, and third-party efforts to raise public awareness and incentivize fairer practices.

It was in the latter spirit that the Fairwork Foundation, an action-research project based at the University of Oxford, was founded in 2018 as a collaboration between social scientists and labor lawyers working to address unfair practices in the gig economy. Drawing on evidence gathered from over 300 gig workers across countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe, we have developed five principles of fair platform work: fair pay, fair conditions, fair contracts, fair management, and fair representation.

We carry out research (including interviews with workers and platform management) on a yearly cycle to evaluate gig economy platforms against these principles. We then award them scores out of 10, and display their scores both in individual scorecards and comparatively in a league table of "fairness." To do this, we set thresholds for each of the five principles based on local circumstances (for example, "fair pay" is interpreted differently in different places). Platforms that score well are allowed the use of our kite mark to signal that they are a fairer employer.

**Principle 1: Fair pay**  
Workers, irrespective of their employment classification should earn a decent income in their home jurisdiction after taking account of work-related costs.

**Principle 2: Fair Conditions**  
Platforms should have policies in place to protect workers from foundational risks arising from the processes of work and should take proactive measures to protect and promote the health and safety of workers.

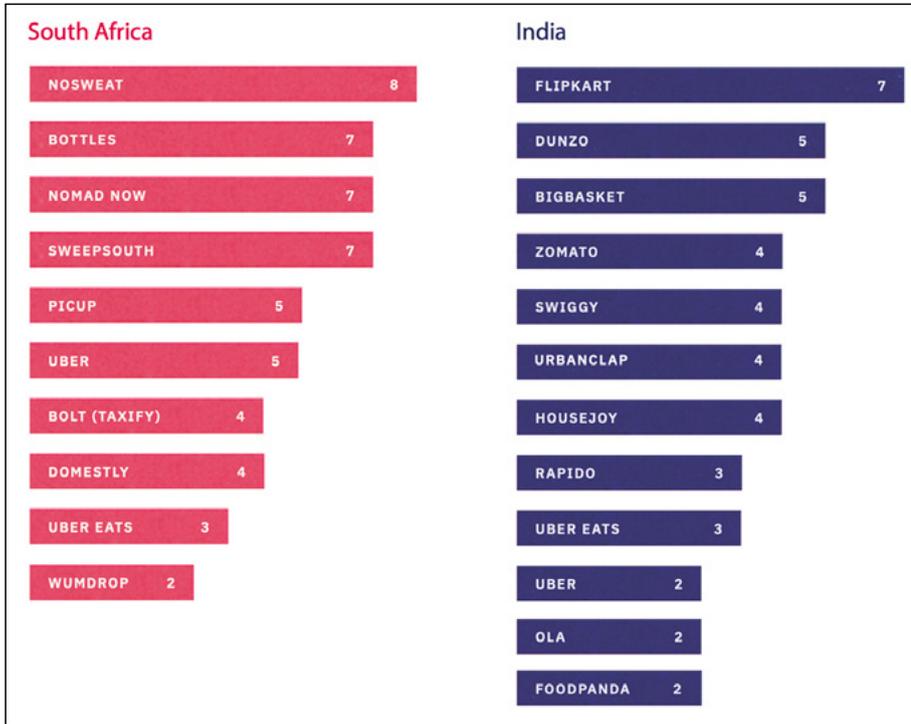
**Principle 3: Fair Contracts**  
Terms and conditions should be transparent, concise, and provided to workers in an accessible form.  
The party contracting with the worker must be subject to local law and must be identified in the contract. If workers are genuinely self-employed, terms of service are free of clauses which unreasonably exclude liability on the part of the platform.

**Principle 4: Fair Management**  
There should be documented processes for workers to be heard, to appeal and understand decisions affecting them.  
Workers must have a clear channel of communication to appeal management decisions or deactivation. The use of algorithms must be transparent and result in fair outcomes for workers. There should be an identifiable and documented policy that ensures equality in the way workers are managed on a platform.

**Principle 5: Fair Representation**  
Platforms should provide a documented process through which worker voice can be expressed. Irrespective of their employment classification, workers should have the right to organise in collective bodies, and platforms should be prepared to cooperate and negotiate with them.

*The Fairwork Principles.*  
Credit: The Fairwork Foundation.

Fairwork's 2019 League Tables in South Africa and India. Credit: The Fairwork Foundation.



Through this work, we aim to provide a framework for workers, firms, consumers, and regulators to imagine a platform-based economy that delivers on its promise of expanded employment opportunities, sustainable livelihoods, and worker empowerment.

Following the passenger's complaint, Ola took immediate disciplinary and corrective action against its fatigued driver, including requiring that he attend counselling. But perhaps not all the blame should be laid at the driver's feet. It is not possible to counsel somebody to be less tired, or less dependent on a precarious source of income. If Ola, and platforms like them, were instead to proactively incorporate the Fairwork principles into the ways that workers are managed, we might see safer and fairer outcomes for workers in the gig economy. Drivers paid a fair net wage (*pay*) and working for platforms that do not have built-in bonus structures that reward overwork (*conditions*) would likely choose to log off instead of accepting another job at the tail end of a hard day's work. In cases where payment obligations are clearly communicated, workers would likely

weigh their options carefully before signing up (*contracts*). Workers at platforms with responsive due process procedures (*management*) would be able to appeal disciplinary action and have their case heard by a human. And workers who are able to have an independent collective body recognized by platforms (*representation*) would likely be able to demand a fairer deal on their own terms. Instead, Ola and most other platforms have succeeded in outsourcing not only costs and risks, but responsibility for unsafe working conditions to workers.

Fundamentally we want to reinforce through our principles that insecure, unsafe work is not a natural, necessary, or acceptable condition of a modern platform-based economy. Hard-fought and -won labor rights are being undermined by smart workarounds in ever more sectors. While the sense that there is no alternative is deeply entrenched and platforms may appear untouchable, they are highly sensitive to public perception. Platform users (both workers and consumers) have much more power than we may imagine in envisioning and realizing a fairer future of work. ■

Direct all correspondence to:  
 Srujana Katta <[srujana.katta@oii.ox.ac.uk](mailto:srujana.katta@oii.ox.ac.uk)>  
 Kelle Howson <[kelle.howson@oii.ox.ac.uk](mailto:kelle.howson@oii.ox.ac.uk)>  
 Mark Graham <[mark.graham@oii.ox.ac.uk](mailto:mark.graham@oii.ox.ac.uk)>

# > Capitalism, Class, Contention

by **Donatella della Porta**, Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Italy



Protests in Hongkong in 2019. Credit: Studio Incendo/Flickr. Some rights reserved.

**T**he fiftieth anniversary of the “Hot Autumn” of 1969, which had made sociologists like Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno talk of a “resurgence of the class struggle,” has been marked by the emergence of a global wave of massive protests, including millions’ marches and civil disobedience, erupting contemporaneously in places as far apart as Lebanon, Chile, Catalonia, and Hong Kong. In the “Hot Autumn” of 2019, the struggles against extreme inequalities and corrupt elites resonated with the anti-austerity protests of the beginning of the decade, as well as with the Global Justice Movement of the beginning of the millennium.

As protests against austerity periodically reemerged, towards the end

of the 2010s, mobilizations against violence against women or global warming took over some of the frames of the previous waves, locating those issues within a critique of existing social and political relations. Fluid networks connected groups, often mobilizing citizens for the first time. While Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and Ni Una Menos bridged issues of violence against nature and women with capitalist exploitation, the massive mobilizations of the Hot Autumn of 2019 were rooted in national cleavages but also expressed rage at a global capitalist development that increased social inequalities and constrained civil rights and political freedom. The at times brutal repression of civil disobedience in the streets and in the courts fueled further protests in a

spiral of politicization, with moments of radicalization.

While neoliberalism and its crisis brought about much discontent, often expressed in disruptive forms of protest, in social movement studies capitalism as a concept and research topic had been marginal. So too had been concern with the analysis of classes and class conflict. Since the Great Recession of 2008, however, there has been a growing attention to the structural bases of social conflicts and their expressions in institutionalized politics but also (and especially) in contentious politics. Well-established assumptions about the role of political opportunities, resource mobilization, and framing processes emerged as needing to be updated by taking into consideration the socio-economic conditions for protests. As I argue in what follows, in order to bring capitalism back into the analysis of protests we need to bridge the literature on social movements with critical contributions to the political economy of neoliberal capitalism.

### > Transformations in capitalism and new social movements

Research on labor movements pointed to the long-term transformation of capitalism leading to the decline of industrial workers and of their class consciousness as well as organizational capacity. In consonance with this, empirical research in social movement studies addressed the spreading of cleavages outside of factories, the forging of new collective identities, and the resistance to the hierarchies of society and the market. Especially since the 1970s, assessing the class cleavage as pacified, some social movement scholars had in fact pointed to the post-industrial and post-materialist character of the new movements they focused upon.

Theorizing the so-called new social movements, the works of social movement scholars like Alberto Melucci and Alain Touraine singled out some of the

characteristics of social movements in a programmed (or post-industrial) society. As the control of information constitutes the principal source of social power, conflicts were expected to move from the workplace into areas such as research and development, the elaboration of information, science and technology, and the mass media. The central actors in the new conflict were no longer linked to industrial production but rather to the use and control of cognitive and symbolic resources. In contemporary societies, investment in the creation of individual autonomous centers of action was expected to enter into tension with the need for closer integration through increasing control over the very motives for human action. While both Touraine and Melucci adopted a sophisticated vision of the main social conflicts and their carriers, giving weight to the development of what one could call class consciousness, empirical research on the social base of “new social movements” focused on the class positions of protestors. With a tendency to generalize from a few movements and a few countries, studies pointed at some middle-class positions – such as white-collar workers in the public service – as more likely to participate in contentious forms than, for example, blue-collar workers.

### > The resurgence of class conflicts

While these theorizations and empirical analyses were useful to illuminate some characteristics of contentious politics in a specific area of the world in the particular moment of expansion of the welfare state, the predictions of an end to labor conflicts and of protest as a middle-class arena proved inaccurate.

First, not only did the Western form of capitalism prove not to be the model toward which other economies and societies moved, but even in the West capitalism developed more exploitative forms than predicted by the theoreticians of a programmed society. The decline of industrial workers

did not result in the decline of labor exploitation. Rather, together with the precarization of workers' conditions, a proletarianization of the middle class has been noted, with a decline in autonomy as well as in salary in many professions as well as in white-collar work in the service sector. As David Harvey pointed out, referring to Karl Marx's analysis, profit-making through financial speculation grew as an alternative to profit-making through production in order to address the problems of over-accumulation. Together with forms of accumulation oriented towards expanded reproduction, with part of the surplus value reinvested in production, there has been a growth of accumulation by dispossession, reminiscent of the original accumulation of capital through the expansion of special relations with non-capitalist social formations.

Resurgent conflicts around working conditions targeted connected problems, with what Michael Burawoy classified as social movements against recommodification (the lifting of social protections that had been achieved); social movements against commodification of new areas of activity; and social movements against ex-commodification, defined as the expulsion of former commodities from the market, as e.g. the expulsion of former workers from the labor market. As the logic of accumulation impacts the forms of collective mobilization, we can expect protests to follow different logics given the specific characteristics of a financial capitalism that increases class fragmentation.

### > Class conflicts in late neoliberalism

Besides the debate on the broad trend in the succession of societal formations, mid-term cyclical processes in capitalist evolution must also be considered when looking at the conditions for a resurgence of class conflict in a moment of crisis of neoliberal capitalism. In his major work *The Great Transformation* Karl Polanyi singled out, in capitalist development,



Protests in Chile in 2019. Credit: Diego Correa/Flickr. Some rights reserved.

a double movement between social protection and the free market. As a second great transformation, neoliberal capitalism is based on the ideology of the extreme dominance of the market over society, as against the social domination of the market.

Common trends in Polanyi's movements and countermovements are however embedded in different types of capitalism that coexist in the same historical periods. First of all, as the world system approach has pointed out, capitalism takes various forms at its core, semi-periphery, and periphery. Studies of the labor movement have criticized the tendency to generalize specific geopolitical trends at the global level, showing that while the industrial workers might indeed be in decline in the West, this is not the case in areas of the Global South. Second, Peter Hall, David Soskice, and others have singled out different varieties of capitalism, with free market economies, in which the market is

the main element of interaction and relations, opposed to coordinated market economies. Recent research has addressed the different adaptation of the varieties of capitalism in the second Great Transformation and its crisis during the Great Recession. Discontent took different forms, linked to the specific characteristics, timing, and intensity of the financial crisis and the political responses to it. At the core and in the periphery, what Beverly Silver described as Polanyi's type of class struggles in defense of old rights interact, in different mixes, with proactive Marx-type social movements that challenge the existing systems of production.

### > The agency of social movements

While these reflections within critical political economy provide useful insights for the analysis of the class bases of social conflicts, the capacity of the various social groups to build

autonomous organizations as well as occupy positions of institutional power are open questions that social movement studies might help address. Social movement studies can, that is, illuminate how antisystemic movements and/or countermovements are created through agency and in a broad relational context. In doing this, they might contribute to push the analysis of classes away from a structuralist approach, considering the role of resources for mobilization as well as the role of an autonomous, political dimension.

First of all, while New Social Movement scholars were talking of a different moment in capitalist development, they usefully drew attention to the structural determinants of conflicts, while at the same time highlighting the importance of identification processes. In this sense, they argued against the structuralist interpretation of Marxism, which neo- or post-Marxist approaches have con-

tributed in part to overcoming, without however investing much research on the specific development of organizational and ideational resources that explain the shift from structure to action.

On this, some elements pointed at by the New Social Movement approaches remain relevant for the understanding of contemporary conflicts. For instance, the importance of knowledge control as opposed to the decline of material ownership of the means of production, or the rejection of a hierarchical conception of the public in welfare states in favor of a definition of the commons, remain important in today's mobilization. Not by chance, recent Marxist analyses of social movements in neoliberal times, such as the one by Colin Barker, broadly refer to Melucci and Touraine, in particular when they stress the importance of knowledge for discourses of resistance based on the recognition of radical needs and the overcoming of the dominant common sense. Also, research on long waves in contentious politics underlines the role of the accumulation of symbolic and material resources of resistance to capitalism, the consolidation of specific repertoires of protest, and the stabilization of institutional channels as well as alliances and networks.

As is visible in recent studies, the conjunctural economic but also political developments of the crisis, its forms and intensity, have had relevant effects on the forms and intensity of contention. Comparative analyses of social movements in the European periphery have challenged widespread hypotheses in labor sociology and social movement studies that progressive movements flower in times of abundance, when workers are structurally strong, and economic growth implies higher margins for investing profits in increased salaries and taxes to support welfare expenses. Such analyses have shown that it was where the crisis was stronger, in particular in countries like Iceland, Greece, and Spain, that it triggered higher levels of activity, with new repertoires of action as well as organizational forms and claims which were even able to achieve political success. Nevertheless, the reflection on the different challenges for contentious actors in times of abundance versus times of crisis remains relevant. As some research on labor activism has pointed at, crises can indeed be overcome through the creation of resources of solidarity during protests. The long strikes or the factory occupations, as the camping in squares or the pickets of the unemployed that characterized the anti-austerity

protests, are indeed analyzed as a reaction to the crisis that then creates innovative ideas and practices. In Gramsci's "organic crises" as crises of hegemony of the ruling class, under some political and social conditions, local militancy can converge into a broader social movement.

### > Concluding remarks

To conclude, a structuralist vision of classes tends to overlook the ways in which political opportunities mediate the socio-economic effects as well as the processes of resource mobilization, which is what social movement studies have mainly focused on. Bridging social movement studies with (critical) political economy is crucial to grasp the variety, intensity, and timing of social movements that have mobilized in distinct regions of the world with different temporalities in opposition to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. In order to do this, social movement theory should engage more with critical analyses of capitalist transformation that investigate the current processes of accumulation and exploitation. At the same time, the analysis of capitalism's structural transformations can benefit from social movement theory: it draws attention to the mobilization of its discontents. ■

Direct all correspondence to Donatella della Porta  
<[donatella.dellaporta@sns.it](mailto:donatella.dellaporta@sns.it)>

# > Tribute to Africa's Leading Marxist, Samir Amin

by **Vishwas Satgar**, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa and member of ISA Research Committees on Economy and Society (RC02) and Labour Movements (RC44)



Samir Amin in Berlin, 2016.  
Credit: Flickr. Some rights reserved.

**S**amir Amin passed away on August 12, 2018. Africa's intellectual history in the twentieth century will not be complete without acknowledging his contributions. His intellectual itinerary intersected with key moments in the making of modern Africa: (i) the rise of Arab nationalism; (ii) the left turn in postcolonial Africa including the rise of African socialism and scientific socialism; (iii) neocolonial control through dependency; (iv) the defeat of Pan-Africanism in the context of structural adjustment and the Cold War; and (v) the making of a globalized Africa. Amin lived through these moments, studied them, and intellectually engaged with them.

Amin wrote as an independent Marxist, building on a research agenda rooted in his PhD dissertation (1957) which focused on underdevelopment and its mechanisms. This was later published as *Accumulation on a World Scale – A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment* (1974). Amin was a transgressive intellectual, never limited to disciplinary boundaries. He made pioneering contributions to Marxist theory, world-systems analysis, development theory, conjunctural analyses of global geopolitics, strategic proposals, and consistently revisited the case for socialism. Sociology has benefitted from Amin's contributions, which at the same time are claimed by economics, international relations, postcolonial theory, development

studies, and various other disciplines. In the African context, Amin co-founded the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), in 1973, and served as its founding Executive Secretary. This institution has made an imprint on at least three generations of social scientists and has made a crucial difference to the advancement of Africa's social science community.

As a Marxist, Amin was never captive to orthodoxy. His approach to Marx was about learning from Marx; Marx was a starting point but the Marxist method required giving "Marxist answers to present challenges." This required conceptual innovation on Marx's theory of capitalism and historical materialism. In this regard, Amin did not approach capitalism with an abstract definition that privileged the capital-labor relation. For Amin such an approach ended in economism and a "stageist" view on the evolution of the peripheries, which means the "backward peripheries" must catch up with the advanced centers. Instead, he believed it was important to think about capitalism as a world system, as the primary unit of analysis, and at the highest level of abstraction. This required historical understandings of capitalism, concrete analysis of contemporary imperialism, and conjunctural analyses. This led Amin to innovate on Marx's conception of value and to go further to locate it within global capitalism. He developed a conception of imperial rent, unequal development, and global polariza-

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tion as inherent to the world capitalist system. Central to his theory of imperialism is his conception of the global phase of monopoly capitalism with its five monopolies of weapons of mass destruction, technology, financial flows, planetary resources, and communications. From this perspective “catching up” by the peripheries was a delusion.

At a time when universities, in both the Global North and South, are grappling with the challenge of decolonization, Samir Amin’s contribution of a non-Eurocentric Marxism is crucial and pioneering. He also provides a bridge and a basis for dialogue to those who are keen, in their decolonizing zeal, to disavow all Marxism as Eurocentric thought. Amin challenged the Eurocentric moment within Marx, the historiography of capitalism, and western modernity. This he did by innovating on the idea of the “tributary mode of production” and historicized this category into a historical sequence that demonstrated how Europe was the periphery of pre-capitalist civilization. Europe was a latecomer to civilization and due to its variegated transition from feudalism to capitalism, which disrupted the centralization of surplus, it was able to develop in the way it did. Europe did not develop due to white genius and exceptionalism. There were historical contingencies implicated in the remaking of the world system from the sixteenth century. Amin also challenged Eurocentricism and its imbrication with economism, by arguing for the centrality of the worker and peasant alliance in the peripheries of capitalism. Marxist class analysis and politics should not reduce political agency to the industrial proletariat. Moreover, Amin’s prescient and early prognosis of the *Empire of Chaos* (1992), in which the US-led bloc of Europe and Japan would stop at nothing to reproduce and expand its capitalist markets, further underlines the imperative of decolonization.

Samir Amin’s strategic conception of delinking, which was not about autarky, also provided a basis for national-popular projects in countries and regions, to ensure the sovereign project was shaped by decolonizing imperatives. Thus, for Amin the central issue was control of the relationship between countries in the periphery and global capitalism. Amin did not support adjustment on the terms of global monopolies and the centers. So in his view, liberalizing exchange controls, private banking, and globalized agriculture, for instance, were all against national development.

In its essence, delinking is about a national-popular project shaped by three tendencies: statist, capitalist, and socialist. Amin envisaged these tendencies underpinned by a class alliance (and in the case of the periphery a worker and peasant alliance) that led this project. Each of these tendencies would collide, contradict, and contest each

other to shape the direction of the national-popular project. From his evolving perspective on delinking, he clearly staked out several necessary conditions for delinking.

First, a national project that privileges the needs of the people is crucial. This should not be compromised by the relationship with global capitalism. A crucial example in this regard is food sovereignty. Amin politically and intellectually supported an agrarian perspective in which peasants, small scale farmers, and consumers controlled the food system. Since 1996, La Via Campesina, the largest peasant movement on the planet with over 200 million members, has been at the forefront of advancing food sovereignty as a response to the dispossession associated with the global monopoly controlled food regime. Amin embraced food sovereignty as crucial to a delinking strategic approach. Such a position is also crucial for how we think about decarbonization in a heating world.

Second, delinking had to have a regional or sub-regional dimension. For Amin, while the country was a central locus for delinking, this had to be in a context in which large economic and political blocs built relations, for instance in Southern Africa or West Africa, but even at an Africa-wide scale. This harmonizing of regionalization was also about building the necessary power internally to control relations with global capitalism. This meant delinking was also about a different kind of globalization that was driven from below rather than by ruling classes, global monopolies, and the US-led triad.

Third, delinking was also about realizing a decentering of power in the world system. A concept conjoined to delinking and central to its realization is the idea of a polycentric world. Such a notion envisions power being redistributed through internationalism. In Amin’s time, between 1955 and 1975, the Non-Aligned Movement was crucial to realize such a polycentric world. However, after its defeat and the rollback of Third World solidarity, Amin in the last years of his life began making the case for a Fifth International of Peoples and Workers. Amin began critiquing the limits of the World Social Forum and was seeking a new basis for international solidarity, grounded in a critical appreciation of historical internationalism. His proposal is being seriously engaged with in various quarters, given the rising right-wing threat in the world and worsening systemic crises of global capitalism, including the climate crisis.

Those of us in the African context who knew Samir Amin and thought about the world in dialogue with his thinking are challenged in very profound ways by his loss. Issa Shivji, a leading African social scientist, captures this reality as follows: “A Baobab has fallen.” ■

Direct all correspondence to Vishwas Satgar <[Vishwas.Satgar@wits.ac.za](mailto:Vishwas.Satgar@wits.ac.za)>

# > I. Wallerstein: A Towering Sociologist and Intellectual

by **Sari Hanafi**, American University of Beirut, Lebanon and President of the International Sociological Association (2018-2022), and **Stéphane Dufoix**, University of Paris Nanterre and Institut universitaire de France, and member of ISA Research Committee on the History of Sociology (RC08)



*Immanuel Wallerstein at the European University at Saint Petersburg, 2008. Photo by Alexei Kouprianov/Creative Commons.*

**M**any events have troubled our sociological community in the last few months. Three prominent sociologists have passed away: Immanuel Wallerstein, Aníbal Quijano, and Erik Olin Wright. Yet, the International Sociological Association (ISA) is particularly indebted to Wallerstein, who was its president between 1994 and 1998. He is

the author of the much celebrated four-volume masterpiece *The Modern World-System*, which proposes world-systems analysis to unthink the dominant theory of modernization – an analysis that remains as compelling today as in the 1970s, when he started writing. By arguing that the economic, the political, and the sociocultural are not autonomous arenas of social action and by calling for all

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analyses to be simultaneously historic and systemic, he re-centered sociology around comparative history, political economy, and theories of capitalism, laying the foundation for anticolonial and postcolonial sociology.

His immense organizational contribution was to “open up” the ISA by establishing direct contact with its membership by starting a tradition of presidential letters to members, and by organizing regional conferences that cultivated new generations of sociologists who would later become leaders of their national sociologies as well as of the ISA.

Translated into many languages, Wallerstein’s books testify to his influence worldwide. In the Arab world, five of his books and many of his articles were translated, and his friendship with the dependency theorist Samir Amin made him one of the heroes of the Arab world. This situation is a complex one to analyze. At first sight, in important books such as *Unthinking Social Science* (1991) or the report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the restructuring of the social sciences that he chaired (1996), very few non-Western social scientists are cited (Samir Amin in the former, and Engelbert Mveng in the latter). However, a closer look shows that the Fernand Braudel Center that he directed at Binghamton University was a place where numerous Latin American social scientists from the Modernity/Coloniality group (such as Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, and Ramón Grosfoguel) found a haven or at least a place to present their analyses during the 1990s. Moreover, in his 1998 Presidential Address before the XIVth World Congress of Sociology in Montreal, his second (out of six) challenge to the traditional “culture of sociology” was one to Eurocentrism

and he quoted at length the work of Egyptian and French sociologist Anouar Abdel-Malek.<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1971, considering that the disciplinary divisions established in the late nineteenth century “no longer serve[d] any heuristic purposes,”<sup>2</sup> Wallerstein called for reuniting the social sciences with humanities and history. He pushed for their recreation by accepting that “rationality involves the choice of a moral politics and that the role of the intellectual class is to illuminate the historical choices we collectively have,” as he put it in *The End of the World as We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century*. Without this “substantive rationality,” he argues, social scientists will become socially irrelevant. In his last commentary on July 1, 2019 he exhorted us to be relevant: “[T]he world might go down further bypaths. Or it may not. I have indicated in the past that I thought the crucial struggle was a class struggle... What those who will be alive in the future can do is to struggle with themselves so this change may be a real one.”

He believed in a terminal crisis of capitalism, yet this towering intellectual left us long before a better world could be made possible. ■

1. Wallerstein, I. (January 1999) “The Heritage of Sociology, the Promise of Social Science.” *Current Sociology* 47(1): 1-37.

2. Wallerstein I. (November 1971) “There is No Such Thing as Sociology.” *The American Sociologist* 6(4): 328.

Direct all correspondence to:  
Sari Hanafi <[sh41@aub.edu.lb](mailto:sh41@aub.edu.lb)>  
Stéphane Dufoix <[stephane.dufoix@wanadoo.fr](mailto:stephane.dufoix@wanadoo.fr)>

# > I. Wallerstein: Giving Sociology a New Coherence

by **Frank Welz**, University of Innsbruck, Austria and member of ISA Research Committees on the History of Sociology (RC08) and Sociological Theory (RC16), and **Anand Kumar**, Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, India

**“He gave primacy to the need to be an engaged sociologist not only as a researcher but also as a sociology teacher”**

**R**electing on the 2018 ISA World Congress in the *Canadian Review of Sociology*, Frédéric Vandenberghe and Stephan Fuchs emphasized that “sociology is gone.” For them, a fragmented discipline has lost its core and identity. One of the strongest global voices against the fragmentation and specialization of sociology has been Immanuel Wallerstein. His death on August 31 of 2019, at 88 years old, is a big loss for the social sciences. The burden of responsibility that has now passed to us – the global community of sociologists – but fortunately also the scholarly heritage left by him, are immense. Having become inspired by the core ideas of Immanuel Wallerstein since the late 1970s (when Anand Kumar studied under his guidance in Binghamton) through a long series of meetings (in 1999 we jointly video-interviewed him in Paris<sup>1</sup>), we will try to present a few of his ideas that we think are most relevant for contemporary sociology.

First, regarding the unit of analysis: While international sociology debated sociology’s “methodological nationalism” at the turn of the new century (e.g. U. Beck, D. Chernilo), Wallerstein had already replaced the unit of social scientific analysis in the 1960s when he decided that he could not study postcolonial West Africa as national societies but only as a part of a historical world-system – the starting point from where he developed his four-volume book *The Modern World-System*. Second, targeting our method (epistemology) of making sense of the social, Wallerstein’s early call for a relational social science has become an important and promising challenge for the social sciences. Drawing on Ilya Prigogine’s science of complexity, in the 1990s Wallerstein began arguing that the natural sciences and the humanities would find a common new terrain in the social sciences (bringing sociology back again to the centre) by replacing the Newtonian world-view of repetition, stability, and equilibrium by the complexity studies’ new view of a historical world of instability, evolution, and fluctuation. Following this view,

neoclassical economics’ determination on a general equilibrium is wrong. Also, our traditional practice of separating the economic (for economics), the political (for political science), and the sociocultural (for sociology or the humanities) is wrong. Analyzing one phenomenon must necessarily also take into account its relational making by the others. For example, ethnicity cannot be simply considered as a cultural heritage from the past but at the same time as both a strategic mode imposed from the top within a society for organizing the (economically) lower strata and as a (politically) bottom-up mode of resistance.<sup>2</sup> Third, the hidden agenda behind Immanuel Wallerstein’s emphasis on sociology’s epistemological and ontological presuppositions was his commitment to strengthening the coherence and effectiveness of our discipline. Already in the 1990s, as president of the ISA, he criticized sociology’s continual split into increasingly smaller sections, one that could only be overcome by rethinking sociology’s commonly shared intellectual sources.

Finally, he gave primacy to the need to be an engaged sociologist not only as a researcher but also as a sociology teacher. He did it by being a consistent participant as an “organic intellectual” in the movements for justice and harmony – from the anti-war protests of the 1960s to the anti-apartheid resistance of the 1970s-1980s, and the World Social Forum assemblies from Africa to Latin America. In short, Immanuel Wallerstein will be remembered as a great master who not only confronted the limits of “western sociology” in the 1960s but also revitalized sociology in the next half-century by establishing a set of new concepts, theories and methods (the World System approach) to make better sense of the dynamics of human society – particularly between “the long sixteenth century” and the turbulent twentieth century. ■

1. Video interview with Immanuel Wallerstein by Anand Kumar and Frank Welz, 1999, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL49D592A64200367F>.

2. Kumar, A. and Welz, F. (2001) “Culture in the World-System. An interview with Immanuel Wallerstein.” *Social Identities. Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 7(2): 221-231.

Direct all correspondence to:  
Anand Kumar <[anandkumar1@hotmail.com](mailto:anandkumar1@hotmail.com)>  
Frank Welz <[frank.welz@uibk.ac.at](mailto:frank.welz@uibk.ac.at)>

# > The Migrant Caravan as a Mobility Strategy in Central America

by **Veronica Montes**, Bryn Mawr College, USA



Migrants staying at Jesus Martinez stadium in Mexico City. Credit: Veronica Montes.

**O**n a spring afternoon in May 2019, I saw Lucia and Hector once again. This was the third time I had seen them over a period of six months. This time they were at the US-Mexico border city of Tijuana. Lucia and Hector were part of the thousands of Central American migrants who in October and November 2018 crossed Mexican territory as part of the so-called Central American caravan. The migrants used this caravan as a mobility strategy to reach the US-Mexico border. The first time I met Lucia and Hector was in Mexico City on November 5, 2018, during my visit to the stadium that served as a shelter for the thousands of participants in the caravan who began arriving in the city on November 3.

The first caravan – there were four in total in 2018 – set off on October 12 from the city of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and arrived in Tijuana, Mexico, on November 12. Central American migrants crossing Mexican territory in a quest to reach the United States is nothing new. According to Marta Sánchez Soler, coordinator of the Mesoamerican Migrant Movement (MMM), around 800 to 1000 Central American migrants enter Mexico daily. It is estimated that in 2014, for instance, approximately 392,000 Central American migrants had crossed Mexican territory, with the number decreasing slightly to 377,000 in 2015. If the presence of Central Americans crossing Mexican territory is not a new phenomenon, why did the migrant caravan attract so much attention both nationally and internationally?

Human rights organizations have demonstrated that mass abductions have become a permanent, large-scale extortion

system against migrants in Mexico. In her book *Violencias y migraciones centroamericanas en México*, María Dolores París Pombo asserts that migrants are exploited in criminal and sexual markets along the migratory route between the southern and northern borders of Mexico. In this context, the visibility of thousands of Central American migrants was the mobility strategy that allowed them to travel the Mexican territory in a safe, economically accessible, and fast way to reach the border between Mexico and the United States. Thus, though forming a caravan as a mobility strategy to cross Mexican territory was not new, this time a combination of factors made it different. First, there was the massive number and heterogeneity of people – young families, single mothers with children, young single men, unaccompanied minors, LGBTQ people, and a significant number of elderly and handicapped people – who rapidly joined the caravan. Second, there was the swiftness of their organization. Third, there was the determination of thousands of Central Americans to travel main roads, demanding their right to free and safe transit through the territory.

Why were these people leaving their homes, risking their families' lives, and setting out for the US-Mexico border? The answer is complex and each country in the Central American region has its own historical backstory to tell. A recent report entitled "Disorder by design: a manufactured U.S. emergency and real crisis in Central America," published by the International Rescue Committee, sheds some light on the background that led up to the migration. The report states that Salvadoran asylum seekers who reached the US arrived with severe levels of psycho-

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*Trying to keep migrants informed about their rights and alternatives. Credit: Veronica Montes.*

social stressors that had been compounded through the generations, as families endured decades of civil war, state violence, poverty, natural disaster and, most recently, pervasive and indiscriminate gang violence. A similar history is shared by Guatemala with a history of a 36-year civil war – from 1960 to 1996 – with a death toll of approximately 200,000 people, mostly indigenous descendants. For Honduras, the tipping points were the high level of corruption, the 2009 coup d'état, poverty, and extreme gang violence that has led thousands of Hondurans to flee their country. Under these circumstances, life had become unbearably dangerous and impoverished for millions of Central Americans.

On November 11, the first group of about 300 people from the caravan began arriving in Tijuana. According to a report by the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF), a research institute located in Tijuana, it was estimated that about 6,000 people stayed at a sport complex facility which was enabled by the municipal government. In a report released on December 13, COLEF discussed five possible scenarios for those Central Americans still in Tijuana: (1) seek asylum in the US; (2) apply for refugee status in Mexico; (3) stay in Tijuana and find a job; (4) experience voluntary or forced repatriation to their countries of origin; and (5) cross the US-Mexico border surreptitiously. To this list, I add a sixth scenario: moving to another US-Mexico border town. This last possibility was the choice of Lucia and Hector. The second time I saw Lucia and Hector was in Tijuana in late November 2018, several weeks before they left Tijuana for Reynosa, Tamaulipas – a trip of 1,112 miles and to one of the most dangerous border cities in Mexico – in the hope, according to them, of getting a construction job in that city.

Several lessons can be drawn from the 2018 caravan. First, as a mobility strategy, the caravan represented the duality between the visibility it gave to the thousands of Central Americans crossing Mexican territory and the invisibility of these migrants once they were stranded on the US-Mexico border. Second, while the collective mobilization of people who joined the caravan was one of the decisive factors that helped them reach the border, today, that collective mobilization is gone as people have dispersed to Tijuana and other border towns in Mexico in search of their own survival. That puts caravan members in a highly vulnerable position. Third, this caravan revealed to the world the migratory crisis that exists in the Central American region. It is estimated that the number of Central American migrants arriving at the US-Mexico border could reach up to one million by the end of 2019. Fourth, the Mexican government faces a complex plight as a result of this Central American migratory crisis. Mexico's southern border does not have the infrastructure to take care of the thousands of migrants – Central Americans, Africans, Cubans, Haitians, and other transcontinental migrants – who are stranded there waiting to continue their way to the northern border. Meanwhile, at Mexico's northern border, the shelters for migrants are overcrowded with the thousands of migrants who have managed to arrive and are waiting to cross to the US either to request asylum or, in the worst-case scenario, to cross clandestinely to the United States. Lastly, today thousands of Central American migrants face uncertainty and vulnerability both in Mexico and in the US. In many cases they survive thanks to the empathy, solidarity, and compassion of individuals and civil society organizations that support and help people like Lucia and Hector in their search for a better life. ■

Direct all correspondence to Veronica Montes <[vmontes@brynmawr.edu](mailto:vmontes@brynmawr.edu)>

# > Buffalo, NY:

## Good Practice in Refugee Resettlement

by **Aysegül Balta Özgen**, Center for the Study of Ethnicity, Race and Immigration, University of Pennsylvania, USA and member of ISA Research Committee on Sociology of Migration (RC31)

### Erie County: Top 14 Countries of Origin for Immigrants and Refugees from 2008 to 2016

Country of Origin	Total Number (2008-2016)
Afghanistan	140
Burma	4,057
Bhutan	1,888
Burundi	79
Congo	56
Democratic Republic of Congo	958
Cuba	96
Ethiopia	77
Eritrea	321
Iraq	1,322
Iran	54
Somalia	1,851
Sudan	176
Syria	280

*Buffalo Brief, February 2018, Partnership for the Public Good (PPG).*

**T**he US has had a well-established refugee resettlement system since the Refugee Act of 1980. The Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State coordinate the admission of refugees into the country, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the Department of Health and Human Services coordinates provision of services after their arrival, together with nine voluntary agencies. Until President Trump's cuts in numbers in the last couple of years, the US had consistently been the largest resettlement country in the world, admitting about 90,000 refugees every year. Refugees are admitted permanently and are on a fast track for citizenship. Unlike other categories of immigrants, they are immediately eligible for cash and medical assistance, among other public benefits.

### > Why medium-sized and smaller cities?

The nine voluntary agencies mentioned above are in a cooperative agreement with the Department of State, and their representatives frequently meet to review each case of incoming refugees. They consider factors such as existence of family already in the US, availability of interpreters, housing, English classes, and employment services to decide where each refugee will be resettled. While big metropolitan cities such as New York and Los Angeles are typical immigrant destinations, recently more and more medium-sized and smaller cities are being preferred for refugee resettlement. Smaller cities are more affordable, have more available housing, and many of them need a population increase for economic purposes.

Buffalo, New York is one of the medium-sized cities where refugees have increasingly been resettled since 2006. Although the resettlement process was challenging in the beginning, now Buffalo has become an example of good practice. Moreover, refugees play an important role in the city's current revitalization.

Buffalo is a typical city of the Rust Belt – the region in the Midwest and Northeast of the US known for heavy industry, especially steel and iron factories, in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Because of deindustrialization, economic globalization, and automation, cities like Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis heavily lost population and declined economically. Having lost half its population since the 1950s, Buffalo has a population estimate of 256,000 and a high poverty rate of 30.9% as of July 2018. The Buffalo-Niagara Falls area is the eighth most racially segregated in the country, and there are huge economic inequalities between the city and the suburbs. Similar to many other Rust Belt cities, Buffalo is now undergoing repopulation largely thanks to immigrants and refugees. Without the growth in foreign-born population, Buffalo's overall population decrease between 2000 and 2014 would have been 4.7% instead of 3.3%.

Since 2002, more than 15,000 refugees have been resettled to Buffalo. However, the actual number of refugees is higher because of secondary migration: refugees who

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are initially resettled to other cities later move to Buffalo because of affordable housing and strong community support networks. The top five countries of origin are Burma, Somalia, Bhutan, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Immigrant and refugee populations concentrate in the city's West Side where the rate of foreign-born population increased to 16% in 2017.

### > Who are the actors?

Four resettlement agencies in Buffalo – Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Services, Journey's End Refugee Services, and International Institute of Buffalo – are responsible for reception and placement service for refugees in their initial three months in the US. Caseworkers find an apartment and furnish it before the refugees arrive, receive them from the airport, start utilities under their name, sign them up for public assistance and social security cards, enroll their kids in school, set up a bank account, schedule appointments for health care, and teach them how to use public transportation. They offer English language classes, employment and interpretation services, and legal counseling. However, resettlement agencies do not receive much funding from the government for services beyond 90 days, and the expectation is that refugees should be self-sufficient at the end of this period.

These four resettlement agencies are not the only actors who work with refugees in Buffalo. There are many other non-profit organizations including refugees' own ethnic/religious community organizations, the Mayor's office, schools and universities, and local media that create a welcoming environment for refugees in Buffalo. They specialize in different areas, collaborate with each other, and refer clients where they would be served better. This efficient collaboration of all stakeholders helps to make Buffalo a good case of resettlement.

Refugees are not just people with needs to be met; after they adjust to their new life they contribute significantly to their communities. They repopulate empty neighborhoods and schools, buy houses and fix them, set up new businesses, keep the workforce viable, and pay taxes. Similar to many other revitalizing Rust Belt cities, there is a widespread narrative among city leaders and media that refugees are good for Buffalo's resurgence. Of course, only refugees by themselves cannot save the city, and there is an increase in development projects such as a waterfront development project, a university-hospital consortium, and other urban and housing redevelopment. Nevertheless, refugees are celebrated for their role in the economic stabilization and redevelopment of especially the West Side of Buffalo, increasing the sense of diversity and multiculturalism in the community, and contributing to the economic resurgence with their local small businesses and entrepreneurialism. Therefore, Rust Belt cities compete with each other to attract more refugees.

### > What are the challenges?

Despite the collaboration to meet refugees' needs and the urban revitalization, also called "refugee Renaissance" in Buffalo, there are challenges in the integration process. These are structural problems both at the national and local level. First, the funding for the resettlement agencies is limited to the initial 90 days per case and the expectation that refugees become self-sufficient at the end of this period is unrealistic. The ceiling for the number of refugees who will be allowed into the US was lowered to 30,000 last year and to 18,000 this year, which leads to even more cuts in the budget. Last year, resettlement agencies engaged in huge fund-raising campaigns and New York State stepped in with \$2 million for resettlement agencies across New York, but the future of these programs is unknown. Faced with decreasing numbers of refugees and cuts in federal funding, city leaders warn that Buffalo's economic growth is threatened. Second, many of the Syrian refugees I interviewed in Buffalo expressed some fear and anxiety of deportation after President Trump's travel bans. While they reported that they don't experience any negative behavior from locals in Buffalo, the Islamophobia and anti-refugee rhetoric in the national news leads to a feeling of not belonging. When they don't feel welcome, refugees are less likely to integrate.

At the local level, challenges are more diverse. Buffalo is a highly segregated city and refugees are typically placed in the West Side by the resettlement agencies. However, the jobs they typically work at (such as dishwasher, janitor, cook, packager, assembler, and material mover) are not in the West Side. Until they can afford a car they depend on public transport, which is not widespread and reliable. Public assistance money is usually not enough to support themselves, so they may work at multiple part-time jobs at irregular hours, which prevents them from going to English language classes during normal hours. Child-care is not affordable for most refugee families, and unless they can rely on other family members, women who have young kids can't go to English language classes or to work. This leads to isolation of women inside their homes and prevents their socio-economic integration. Lastly, many community leaders note that Buffalo's native-born society doesn't know much about refugees. Since integration is a two-way street, it is not enough that refugees learn about the American way of life and try to adapt.

Resettlement not only offers a durable solution to a tiny minority of vulnerable refugees worldwide, but enriches and helps host cities as well. New York State resettles the third largest number of refugees in the country, and Buffalo resettles the largest number in the state. The experience Buffalo has accumulated in the last ten-fifteen years makes it an example of good practice for other cities. ■

Direct all correspondence to Ayşegül Balta Özgen <[aysegulb@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:aysegulb@sas.upenn.edu)>