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with Robert Kuttner

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MAGAZINE



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> Editorial

The section 'Talking Sociology' features an interview with the most renowned journalist Robert Kuttner, who reads Karl Polanyi's work for today. Starting from the political and economic situation at the beginning of the twentieth century the interview discusses current trends in globalization, the need for strong national economies to strengthen democratic decision making, and issues of inclusion and exclusion in times of increasing international migration.

Our first symposium takes up one of the pressing issues of our time: climate change. On the one hand, the articles discuss social effects of climate change that are not readily associated with ecological issues, such as questions of democracy and migration. On the other hand, contributions featured in this section sketch possible alternatives to further environmental destruction through capitalism.

As we write, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts still dominate much of the world, albeit in different ways. It is for this reason that we again included a section on COVID-19 to collect analyses from around the globe. With contributions from India and Europe on issues ranging from live-in care, charity, and migration to the possibilities of public sociology during lockdown this special section offers a glimpse into the current discussions in our field.

The COVID-19 crisis is also the starting point for Syed Farid Alatas' profound reflection on the role and impact of sociological thought and theory in the broader society.

This issue features a tribute to Yogendra Singh, a pioneer of Indian sociology who passed away this year. His research on modernization and tradition in post-colonial India was groundbreaking.

Three contributions aim at re-imagining society and reflect on the current developments as well as on the significance of sociology. S.A. Hamed Hosseini and Barry Gills take up a transformative perspective while Shelene Gomes and Scott Timcke discuss how to approach society from a sociological perspective.

Our regional focus in this issue highlights sociological research from Sri Lanka. Put together by Siri Hettige, this section highlights the vibrant discipline in this country, on issues ranging from the examination of violent conflicts in Sri Lanka to the question of unity and provides insights into the history of sociology and anthropology in the country.

The 'Open Section' comes back to the issue of globalization and ecological disasters by discussing the plastic waste crisis in China. ■

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

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Contributions featured in this section take up one of the pressing issues of our time, **climate change**, to discuss its social effects that are not readily associated with ecological issues, such as questions of democracy and migration, but also sketch possible alternatives to further environmental destruction through capitalism.



Global Dialogue continues its series on the ongoing situation and crisis people face in different countries due to **COVID-19**. With contributions from India and Europe on issues ranging from live-in care, charity, and migration to the possibilities of public sociology during lockdown this special section offers a glimpse into the current discussions in our field.



Focusing on **sociology from Sri Lanka** this section highlights the vibrant discipline in this country, ranging from issues of violent conflicts to the question of unity in Sri Lanka. The section also provides insights into the history of sociology and anthropology in the country.



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“The 2020s can be regarded as the most pivotal decade in the most critical century in human history where ‘demanding the impossible’ becomes the only ‘realistic’ option for emerging revolutionary forces”

S.A. Hamed Hosseini

> Surviving Global Capitalism

with Karl Polanyi

An Interview with Robert Kuttner



Robert Kuttner is co-founder and co-editor of *The American Prospect* magazine and Professor at Brandeis University's Heller School. He was a longtime columnist for *Business Week*, and for the *Washington Post* syndicate. He was a founder of the Economic Policy Institute and serves on its board and executive committee. Kuttner is author of twelve books, most recently *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?* and his new book on de-

Robert Kuttner. Credit: Robert Kuttner.

mocracy and the 2020 election, *The Stakes*. His other books include the 2008 New York Times bestseller, *Obama's Challenge: American's Economic Crisis and the Power of a Transformative Presidency*, and his 2013 volume on the financial crisis, *Debtors' Prison: The Politics of Austerity Versus Possibility*. His best-known earlier book is *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets* (1997). His magazine writing, covering the interplay of economics and politics, has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* and *Book Review*, *The Atlantic*, *Harpers*, *The New Republic*, *New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, *Mother Jones*, *Village Voice*, *Commonweal*, *Dissent*, *Foreign Affairs*, *New Statesman*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Challenge*. His previous positions have included national staff writer and columnist on *The Washington Post*, chief investigator of the US Senate Banking Committee, executive director of President Carter's National Commission on Neighborhoods, and economics editor of *The New Republic*. He won a number of awards, including the Paul Hoffman Award of the United Nations Development Program for his lifetime work on economic efficiency and social justice. Here he is interviewed by **Johanna Grubner**, a PhD researcher at the Johannes Kepler University, Linz, Austria and assistant editor of *Global Dialogue*.

JG: In your book *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?* published in 2018, you draw upon Karl Polanyi's analysis of the early twentieth century and argue that we are currently facing a similar situation, both economically and politically. Can you elaborate this argument for our readers and explain how Polanyi's approach is useful for your analysis of global capitalism?

RK: In the early twentieth century, financial elites and their political allies allowed raw capitalism to overrun other mechanisms of social resilience. This was exacerbated by the demands of the Treaty of Versailles, which combined laissez faire with a debt collector mentality and economic austerity. The result was that life became economically unbearable for ordinary people, especially in Germany and Austria, and masses of people turned to fascism. They did so because they had lost faith in parliamentary institutions, and because extreme economic and political nationalism seemed to promise a better path.

In Polanyi's telling, the three mechanisms of the nineteenth century economic system were the gold standard, laissez faire commerce, and the idea that labor had to find its price, as a commodity, on the market. The parallels with the present moment are exact, with budget balance and fiscal austerity in the role of the gold standard, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the ideology of neoliberalism promoting unregulated global commerce, and labor protections being extinguished in the name of free trade. Once again, laissez faire has produced economic catastrophe for ordinary people and political backlash has turned into ultra-nationalism.

What is even more appalling is that we learned in the post-war era that it is possible, as a matter of economics, to buffer pure capitalism with social protections. These make the system more productive as well as more equitable. But the period after 1973 showed that this is a very difficult balance to sustain as a matter of politics. Capitalists do not like the constraints, and resist them.

The consequence has been the same as in the 1920s and 1930s. When working people suffer dislocations, and the political center does not defend them, they turn to the far right. In the 1990s, many turned to the moderate left, but by the 1990s the moderate left had also embraced most of the neoliberal formula.

Now we have a neo-fascist leading the world's most powerful country, the United States; there is neo-fascism in both the old Europe and the new Europe and very little in the way of credible democratic socialists. All of this is pure Polanyi.

JG: Alongside these significant similarities, today's capitalist production is, for example, organized along global value chains frequently employing "just-in-time production." Does this not represent a consequential difference with the global economy of the

1930s? And why is Polanyi's analysis still fruitful?

RK: If anything, the shift to global supply chains makes Polanyi more relevant than ever. With large corporations outsourcing to Asia, where there are very low-paid and exploited workers, it becomes much harder to maintain social contracts in the democracies to protect workers from the vagaries of the market. Global supply chains are free markets on steroids.

JG: In the US as well as in Latin America and Europe, right-wing populism is on the rise. How do you link the rise of right-wing populism in places like Europe, the United States, and Latin America, as well as the rise of neo-fascism you described before, to the globalization of capitalism and the undermining of state regulation?

RK: The problem isn't the globalization of capitalism per se. We had a form of globalized capitalism under the Bretton Woods system of 1944 that was explicitly designed to give nations plenty of political and policy space to devise full employment economies protected from the deflationary pressures of global private capital. But the version of globalization imposed since the advent of the WTO and the Maastricht Treaty within Europe is expressly designed to use doctrines of free movement of goods, services, capital (and in the case of Europe, of people) to undermine the capacity of democratic polities to regulate, constrain, and buffer capital. Once again, the reaction of dislocated people is to turn to ultra-nationalists and right-wing populists (and infrequently as in Bolivia, to left-wing populists).

JG: In the past, movements resisting the inequalities of capitalism have aspired to be expressly internationalist. Do you see a relevance and space for such movements attempting to overcome the national level today, or are the strategic advantages of the nation-state the best option for this moment in time?

RK: As I've suggested, the nation-state is the locus of the polity and of democratic citizenship. But as the Bretton Woods agreement and the ILO conventions demonstrate, international citizen and labor solidarity is very important as a counterweight to the power of international capital. The problem is that the Bretton Woods period was exceptional. In most circumstances, internationalism in practice is the internationalism of capital, not of citizenship.

JG: In your work, you describe how "mixed economies" delivered unprecedented prosperity to post-WWII Europe and the United States. Can you describe the system of "mixed economy" and its relationship to democracy and the autonomy of states?

RK: The mixed economy was a phrase of the economist Paul Samuelson to refer to an economy that was basically capitalist, but complemented by a welfare state and in some cases by public planning and public ownership, as well as tight regu-

lation of the financial sector and other key industries. The mixed economy has also included regulation of agriculture, state empowerment of trade unions as legitimate social partners, and other uses of government to limit pure capitalism. Because citizenship is expressed at the level of the nation-state, most of these policies are implemented nationally. Europe's experience with a confederation, on balance, has weakened regulation of capitalism and strengthened capital. This was foreseen and welcomed by Hayek. For Polanyi, a mixed economy was not sufficient, as economics or as politics. What was required was democratic socialism.

JG: An old question for the left in many countries continues to be: How can democratic socialism in an individual nation survive and resist the pressures of global capitalism? Does Polanyi offer insights into this dilemma?

RK: It requires either left governments in the major countries, or explicit barriers against the power of global finance. Polanyi's cherished Red Vienna lasted about fifteen years. Then it was destroyed by larger forces. We had at least something like social democracy if not democratic socialism for two or three decades after WWII, and longer in Sweden. So if citizens are mobilized, democratic socialism in one country can survive for at least a generation or two. And as Keynes famously wrote, in the long run we are all dead. However, if the global system is sufficiently hostile to domestic social democracy, even consensual systems like those of Sweden or Denmark are at risk. Social benefits and decent wages are deemed globally uncompetitive. Globalism undercuts domestic regulations. The European Court of Justice, representing global neoliberalism on one continent, has deemed several aspects of Scandinavia's social contracts as incompatible with the European Union's basic law. Once neo-liberals got into power in Stockholm and Copenhagen, they began deliberately undermining the institutional logic of social solidarity. So we need to revise the global system as well as reclaim domestic politics country by country. The two things go together.

JG: To sustain democracy within global capitalism, you argue in favor of strong national economies. In your understanding, what is necessary to mediate the strengthening of the state with global inequalities maintained by means of citizenship?

RK: I think a just economy needs to be primarily national because democratic citizenship is national. However, citizens of wealthy countries that consume a disproportionate share of the world's resources also have a responsibility to work for environmental sustainability and greater global economic equity. Laissez faire is one way to try to equalize global incomes, but it does so by increasing political and economic inequality within countries, thereby degrading democracy, and also fails to address the climate catastrophe. As Nicholas Stern famously observed,

global climate change is history's greatest case of market failure. We achieve climate justice and greater global equality by constraining laissez faire, not by liberating it.

JG: In an age significantly shaped by migration and flight, the concept of citizenship with its inherent inequalities is not without contradiction. How do you see demands such as decoupling democratic rights from citizenship status?

RK: Yes, this is tricky. If you are going to have a democracy, that irrevocably brings up the issue of membership. Members of a democracy are known as citizens. That said, a decent democracy extends basic human rights to non-citizens, even if they are not able to vote. And while non-citizens are considered aliens, nobody should be considered alien from fundamental human rights. That's the purpose of basic treaties and conventions on human rights. In general, the more robust democracies such as the Scandinavian nations tend to be more supportive of basic universal rights even for people who are not their citizens.

But these treaties and conventions are only as good as their acceptance and enforcement by national signatories. The 1951 Convention on Refugees, signed and ratified by 145 nations, requires states to admit applicants for asylum who have a well-founded fear of persecution. The convention also grants refugees access to courts. But both the explicit provisions and broader intent of the Convention are widely ignored or defied, as nations hostile to immigrants and refugees make invented distinctions between economic and political refugees, and make life miserable for those seeking asylum. The same kind of evasion is widely used to deny the basic human rights of workers that are provided in the conventions of the International Labor Organization, which have also been agreed to by every major nation.

JG: The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic, social, and political developments seem to amount to a deep ongoing crisis in many countries. In your view, what risks for the relation of capitalism and democracy emerge?

RK: The pandemic demonstrates the need for effective governance and the inability of the private market to remedy public health crises. Vaccines and testing regimes are social goods. The countries with effective national governments have done the best at containing the spread of the virus. They have done so in collaboration with the World Health Organization and private NGOs, but the leadership has been governmental. If Donald Trump were a competent neo-fascist, he might have demonstrated the efficacy of an aspiring dictator. But he proved to be incompetent as well as corrupt, thus showing the need for government that is effective and democratically accountable and not just strong. ■

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> Climate Migration in South Asia

by **Md. Rezwan Siddiqui**, East West University, Bangladesh



A climate phenomenon in Mongolia called 'dzud,' describing extreme winters, occurs more and more frequently. Especially when combined with very dry summers it leads to large numbers of deaths among livestock on which much of the population depends for food. Credit: Asian Development Bank/flickr.com. Some rights reserved.

South Asia (comprised of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, India, and Sri Lanka), with an estimated population of 1.836 billion (almost a quarter of the global population) is one of the world's most densely populated regions. With rapidly booming economies, steadily improving human development indices, and rapid urbanization, South Asia has become the latest frontier of the battle in global development.

Migration has always been a part of people's lives in South Asia. Undoubtedly, uneven economic growth is the primary driver of mobility in South Asia. However, the influence of environmental factors is always prominent as well. Evidence of people's tendency to relocate (temporarily/ seasonally/ permanently) to reduce the risk from recurring natural disasters and agrarian crises was common already in prehistoric narratives. The dominant type of mobility behavior in South Asia is internal migration (mainly rural to urban). International mobility is not uncommon as well, especially in the last couple of decades, with a substantial growth in the annual outflow of migrants (mostly economic/labor migration) from this region. Transnational mobility of people between the South Asian countries is also prominent due to their long-shared history, the similarity in socio-cultural and economic life-style, and porous borders.

The actual climate change vulnerability of South Asia has resulted not as much from biophysical vulnerability (changes in climatic parameters and the resulting extreme weather events) as from the socio-economic vulnerability (poor socio-economic conditions, high poverty rates, a high dependency on agriculture, insufficient infrastructure, weak governance, etc.) of its societies. According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020, about 9.5 million people were displaced in 2019 in South Asia due to natural disasters (floods, monsoon rains, and cyclones). There is already enough evidence that the intensity, frequency, and impact of all these hazards are intensified by the changing climate. According to the World Bank, there could be an additional 18-40 million climate migrants by 2050, depending on the efforts to address the problem.

There are some unique characteristics of climate change migration in South Asia. First, climate change is not the prime reason for migration in South Asia, but interacts with other socio-economic vulnerabilities to exacerbate migration risk substantially. There is growing evidence that climate change is already undermining economic prosperity through disturbing social and livelihood security. In addition to that, climate change is already directly affecting ecosystem services, food security, human health, as well as impacting agricultural capacity and subsistence livelihoods across South Asia.



In Asia, typhoons occur with greater frequency, destroying people's livelihoods. Credit: Asian Development Bank/flickr.com. Some rights reserved.

Second, we need to understand that most of the internal migration in South Asia is due to economic reasons, while most of the transnational and international migrations have resulted from the mixed effect of political and economic factors. Climate change is aggravating these factors in direct and indirect ways.

Third, in most cases, it is not easy to distinguish the climate migrants from the others. Efforts have been made, but to no avail! A diverse range of mobility behavior exists across South Asia, adopted by individuals or communities to minimize the impact of climate change (and other threats) on their life and livelihood. It is impossible to put them all into one framework. Therefore, it might be more useful to construct a climate migration framework in conjunction with economic and political migration and examine the role of the direct and indirect impact of climate change on (any) mobility behavior.

Fourth, data about the interaction between climate change and migration drivers are severely limited in South Asia, which inevitably results in poor policymaking and migration management. Moreover, the interaction between climate change and other factors (political, economic, or social) of migration is yet to be fully understood, especially on the micro-scale.

Fifth, in South Asia, climate change is causing predominantly internal migration. This migration often starts as temporary or seasonal mobility, and then results in permanent migration. The majority of migrants head to urban areas, and often follow the migration network and step-migration pattern.

Sixth, transnational climate migration is already a contested issue for the region. There is no consensus among the nations and governments about its nature, pattern, and future. To complicate the issue further, we can see that it has already become a highly politicized issue in the region as well as a (hyped) security concern.

Seventh, the countries of this region are among the primary sources of cheap labor for many developed economies, mostly managed through bilateral agreements. Unfortunately, there is fierce competition among these countries in this sector. Sometimes the resulting labor migration is touted as one of the adaptation processes of climate migrants, which is hardly true.

Eighth, the outcome of mobility (and immobility) decisions highly depend on both the capacity of the migrant and the society they migrate to. The capacity of societies (especially cities) in accommodating climate migration has not increased much so far. Environmental and climate migrants are still forced to live and survive at the edge of society.

Ninth, the migration policy regime of the South Asian countries is mostly aimed at deterring any mobility caused by climate change, in order to manage already constrained resources and services in destination (urban) areas. Very few efforts are aimed at capacity development of these migrants and at better accommodating the migration process. Recently, India and Bangladesh have taken initiatives to develop secondary cities as migrant-friendly cities. However, these policies are often found ineffective due to the failure to address social justice and the lack of human-centric development planning. Traditional elite capture and widespread corruption are still significant obstacles to the success of these efforts.

Unfortunately, there is little fruitful cooperation among the South Asian states regarding the management of these issues. Efforts are mostly limited to the academic and research arena and are not reflected in development planning. Initiatives to address the issue of scarce data through a comprehensive national census are also inadequate. Without efforts to identify climate migrants as well as to address the matter through state and regional policies there is little hope left for us. ■

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> The Climate Crisis and the Question of Democracy

by **Markus Wissen**, Berlin School of Economics and Law, Germany

If we think about climate crisis, climate policy, and liberal democracy, first of all there is an eye-catching tension: fighting the climate crisis through effective climate policies seems to be quite difficult under the conditions of liberal democracy. This is underscored by the poor effects of international treaties, on which (mostly) liberal-democratic states have agreed in recent decades. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol did not help to stop global carbon emissions from rising, and the hesitance of many parties to the Paris Agreement (2015) to commit themselves to more ambitious efforts gives little reason to believe in a more effective future climate policy. Moreover, if we take into account that authoritarian states like China, despite huge persisting environmental problems and a carbon-intensive development model, seem to be able to enforce major environmental and renewable energy programs, then the question arises whether liberal democracy is indeed well-equipped to counter one of the most pressing problems of humankind.

> Liberal democracy and capitalism: A structural affinity

At the root of the historical and empirical tensions between climate crisis, climate policy, and liberal democracy is a more systematic problem. The essence of democracy is equality. Liberal democracy provides for equality of all citizens in the political sphere: The vote of a worker in elections counts as much as the vote of a CEO, and the latter as a legal person does not possess any privilege compared to the former. Without doubt, this is a historical achievement.

But it is only one side of the coin. The other side consists of the fact that liberal democracy systematically isolates the societal power centers from equal participation. Entrepreneurial decisions are private, only the framework conditions under which they are taken can be publically influenced. Beyond this, the stakeholders, i.e. all those who are affected by the decisions' consequences – the workers, the communities in the neighborhood of a factory, the wider public –, have no chance to participate equally in the decision-making process.

It is here where the structural affinity between liberal democracy and capitalism becomes visible. The liberal-democratic capitalist state safeguards civil and political rights as well as private property; it guarantees equality in

the political sphere and at the same time is neutral vis-à-vis the fundamental socio-economic inequality that stems from the fact that a few people dispose over the means of production and the majority has nothing more to sell than their labor power.

The contradiction between extra-economic equality and economic inequality is subject to permanent struggles. In the past, these struggles have resulted in several expansions of liberal democracies in the Global North: Women have successfully struggled for suffrage and a stronger role for the state in social reproduction; the environmental movement has achieved restrictions on hazardous products and production processes; migrants have fought for an extension of citizenship; and the struggles of the labor movement have resulted in a class compromise that basically consists of workers' acceptance of their subaltern role in the capitalist mode of production in exchange for participating in the wealth increases the latter facilitates. This is what social democracy stands for: the expansion of liberal democracy in the direction of welfare states which do not challenge the constitutive inequality of capitalist societies but help to regulate its contradictions.

> Carbon democracies

From an environmental perspective, the problem is that the socially enhanced liberal democracy has always been a *carbon democracy* (Timothy Mitchell), in a double sense: First, the social rights that have been institutionalized in the course of the twentieth century are not least the result of workers' struggles in coal mining and coal mining-related transport infrastructures, i.e. in environmentally destructive sectors that nevertheless were essential for all kinds of economic and social activities, so that workers disposed over a significant structural power. Second, the redistributive institutions of the welfare state are designed in a way that they depend on a carbon-intensive economic growth.

This is the basic environmental contradiction of liberal democracy as the political form of capitalism: the constraints of maximizing economic profits and regulating basic societal contradictions necessarily produce socio-ecological costs that now are about to result in an existential crisis. Effective climate policies are doomed to failure as long as the systemic limits to coping with the climate crisis under liberal-democratic and capitalist conditions are not acknowledged.

“Effective climate policies are doomed to failure as long as the systemic limits to coping with the climate crisis under liberal-democratic and capitalist conditions are not acknowledged”

Acknowledging them would not mean to return to authoritarian solutions. Although the latter might imply the enforceability and acceleration of certain environmental measures in the short run, they lack the reflexivity that is necessary for being successful in the long run.

> Radical democracy

Reflexivity presupposes deliberation, and deliberation is only possible under democratic conditions. Countering the climate crisis thus does not require less but more democracy. Liberal democracy has to be pushed beyond its inherent limits; its achievements, which are currently under strong attack by the authoritarian right, have to be saved by transforming the liberal into a *radical democracy*. This implies that all those who are affected by a decision have the right to participate equally in the decision-making process. The probability of environmentally reflexive decisions would thereby rise, since those who decide are also those who bear the consequences of the decision. Furthermore, radical democracy would mean to create institutions and procedures which would positively sanction solidaristic

forms of behavior and thus support democratic learning and processes of subjectivation that could help to overcome utility-maximizing capitalist subjectivities.

A concrete entry point for radical democracy could be what has been called the *foundational economy* or *infrastructure socialism*. This is about re-thinking and re-directing the economy from the point of view of socially and environmentally useful production and services: the care work on which we all depend and the life-supporting infrastructures in areas like health, food, mobility, culture, communication, water, and electricity. There is a lot of experience in bringing infrastructures under public control – an experience that has suffered under the neoliberal attacks of the recent decades but in many places seems to have undergone a revival in the corona crisis. It would have to go hand-in-hand with overcoming the gendered division of labor. And it could be expanded to further areas that are still run by large corporations, but would have to be put under democratic control to prevent them from further aggravating the climate crisis. ■

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> After Capitalism: Democratic Eco-Socialism?

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



A #FridaysForFuture demonstration outside the Johannesburg Stock Exchange held on November 29, 2019 in South Africa.
Credit: Vishwas Satgar.

In the contemporary carbon-centric lifeworld of capitalism, gas-guzzling automobiles, hi-tech airplanes, massive container ships, and energy-using skyscrapers are weapons of mass destruction. The more these resource-intensive and carbon-centric social relations prevail, the more climate change is accelerated. After rupturing the earth system, this new capitalist nature – under patriarchal domestication, scientifically observed and managed – now has to be geo-engineered and carbon emitted has to be stored in the deep recesses of planet Earth; despite the uncontrollable consequences for life on the planet, oil spigots will only be shut when the last dollar is extracted from this deadly resource. The logic of contemporary capitalism is not merely about dispossession, but about ecocide, that is, the obliteration of the conditions necessary to sustain human and non-human life on planet Earth. This is what Karl Marx called the “metabolic rift of capitalism” and Rosa Luxemburg, the “conquest of the natural economy.”

> Neoliberalism's terminus

Neoliberalism's ideals have been confirmed at its historical terminus. Property rights have spawned the sovereignty of capital, greedy plutocrats wield state power with the crudest of instrumentality, and hyper individualism valorized through Americanized consumption and populist media confirms the banality of celebrity culture. The self-

determination of the Americanized and nihilistic capitalist subject is the only expression of being human in contemporary neoliberal capitalist civilization. But even this is not enough. The next step is the trans-human: the technotopian vision of bio and digital capital. After embracing structural inequality for decades, the world of neoliberal capitalist utopia no longer has common cause with humanity. This is even clearer given the absence of enemies: Soviet socialism is dead, the working class is precariatized, nature is conquered, and history has ended. There are no left bogeys to blame, yet a new right-wing, neo-fascist progeny of this neoliberal order – from Washington, Brasilia, New Delhi, Budapest to Moscow – stands ready to brutally crush any challenge to this utopia, while misdirecting publics against scapegoats – the migrant, the black person, the “Muslim,” the indigenous, or any inflated “terror threat.”

These regimes are disposed to authoritarian and militarized violence as they seek to defend the normalcy of capitalism at any cost. However, history and struggle have demonstrated how unsustainable authoritarian regimes are. The monopoly on violence is never a guarantee of pacification. Even the US military understands it cannot control a world in climate chaos while the US itself is ravaged by climate shocks. War requires scarce resources and is costly, despite the hard choices climate change is going to bring to societies. Militarism in the age of nuclear weapons also has constraints. The hegemonic governance of brutish

inequality is over, while the *demos* is restless and desperate. COVID-19 has exacerbated suffering. At the same time, the democratic subject has a full-spectrum gaze, with multiple digital information sources enabling easy access to information about the socio-ecological condition. Such a subject can even marvel at the idiocy of imperial power from afar, observe the clumsiness of autocrats, and catch glimpses of inspiring assertions of subaltern street power. Put differently, while capitalism will utilize the neo-fascist option, and will even weaponize the digital sphere, the iron curtain of absolute oppression is not invulnerable. It is at this intersection that democracy and socialism will thrive.

> Ecocide as capitalism's endgame

The real terror of the present moment in history is not capitalist neo-fascism but the juggernaut of capitalist ecocide that threatens not just planetary life conditions but capitalism itself. This makes the second coming of fascism anachronistic. It is bone-chilling to see carbon capital prolong its place in the global energy mix despite the alarm bells of climate science, the slowdown in demand during COVID-19, and at least one major climate shock every week on planet Earth. Trump has licensed more carbon extraction in the US, placing it at the top of supply tables, and Bolsonaro supports commercial interests that are continuing genocidal violence against indigenous peoples, destroying biodiversity, and hastening the release of about 140 billion tons of carbon from the Amazon through slash-and-burn appropriation. In South Africa, carbon ruling classes are building the largest coal-fired power station in the world, vaunt fracking, and salivate at the prospects of off-shore gas and oil extraction. These examples of carbon criminality confirm that capitalism and its carbon ruling classes threaten everything including themselves, given the doomsday clock.

The self-destructive logic of ecocidal capitalism is now patently clear. Africa, the imperial subject of the Global North since the Berlin conference, is captured by lumpen bourgeois interests, and already unravelling in parts due to climate shocks. It is estimated that at least 200 million Africans will be displaced by worsening climate shocks and breakdown. "Fortress Europe" and "Prison Complex USA" will not be able to keep the "barbarians" out because these societies, despite their affluence, will also face serious internal fault lines due to climate shocks. The Sunrise movement, Extinction Rebellion, and #FridaysForFuture are merely 1 degree Celsius movements. At 1.5 degrees many more will rise in these societies as people reject being treated as collateral damage by irrational and eco-fascist ruling classes.

> Towards democratic eco-socialism

Three forms of climate justice disruption, expressing the living hope of the many, are being seen. Such expres-

sions of living hope are bringing about a convergence of climate justice forces, together with children and citizens. First is the symbolic disruption of normalcy. The best example of this is Greta Thunberg and the #FridaysForFuture children's protest actions. The alarm bell raised by the children is reinforcing the urgency in climate science and vice versa. Second is tactical disruption through gridlocking carbon, including fossil fuel extractive circuits. Calls to boycott MacDonald's, Walmart, and Subway because they have interests in slash-and-burn agriculture in the Amazon, or Ende Gelände efforts to blockade coal pits in Germany are examples. Third is strategic disruption of ecocidal capitalism through systemic alternatives such as Green New Deals (GND) that advance rapid decarbonization, demilitarization, democratic systemic reform from below enabling people's power to drive the just transition, and a geopolitics of climate justice. Bernie Sanders' GND and the Climate Justice Charter in South Africa with its conception of a political project are examples. Ultimately, these forces will also have the task of confronting the ecocidal logic of imperial power to ensure the Global South can make its own climate justice choices, including for deep systemic change that advances democratic eco-socialism.

A crucial democratic systemic reform that will have to be further globalized from the periphery is the "re-agrarianization" of the world through food sovereignty and agro-ecology. Initiated by La Via Campesina over two decades ago, every community, village, town and city across the planet will have to embrace such a democratic eco-socialist alternative. This has been underscored by the recent biodiversity report of the International Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the land use report of the International Panel on Climate Change. The bottom line is that mono-industrial, carbon-centric, and globalized food systems are implicated in our extinction.

Ultimately, the ecological horizons of contemporary socialism will be defined by biological disasters (such as COVID-19), global heating, climate shocks, worsening inequality, and the human impulse to live. Water, land, biodiversity, oceans, and the biosphere – the global commons – are all going to be implicated in the revenge of nature against capitalist ecocide. The infinity of nature and the finitude of the human will define the next period of socio-ecological history. It is at this confluence that democratic eco-socialism will learn more deeply from indigenous earth traditions to advance life, reject productivism, and affirm a de-alienated relationship with nature. This is what Marx called a "positive humanism." A slow world, operating within the metabolic cycles of nature, is our only hope. Such a world never died but was merely pushed into the shadows by colonial, neoliberal, and imperial violence. ■

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> How Urban Climate Action Can Rebuild Communities

by **Joan Fitzgerald**, Northeastern University, USA



Ms. Margaret Gordon, at a rally of the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project in June 2016. Photo: Brooke Anderson. Credit: West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed two visions of the city. One is the racially and ethnically unjust cities that are the current reality. In US and European cities, death rates from COVID-19 are higher in low-income areas and communities of color. Because they live in neighborhoods that tend to be highly polluted, Blacks and Latinos in the US are more susceptible to asthma and related conditions that leave them more vulnerable to the virus. They are more likely to be in low-income jobs that leave them exposed to the virus. Crowded housing means that distancing at home is impossible. And their neighborhoods often lack basic amenities such as parks and grocery stores.

But the crisis has also revealed an opportunity: a green, equitable recovery that combines climate action with racial and economic justice. Promoting that vision for our frontline communities – those neighborhoods that experience the first and worst effects of climate change – is an urgent priority. Most city climate action plans either don't mention equity, or just pay it lip service. But increasingly, activist groups throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe are pressing city governments to focus first on climate justice.

> Democratic planning

Planning is at the heart of this enterprise. In too many cities, especially in the US, planning is driven by private developers and commercial players. More democratic outcomes require more democratic planning.

Austin, Madrid, Seattle, Oakland, Portland, Providence, and Vienna are among the cities that have recently updated their climate action or comprehensive plans with well thought-out processes for participation by residents of frontline communities. In the best cases, resident groups co-create goals with city officials, analyze goals from a justice lens, and engage in implementation.

These plans help build social, environmental, and economic sustainability in frontline neighborhoods. One of the first elements of the Providence Climate Justice Plan to be implemented is the creation of two green justice zones for priority action, Olneyville and South Providence. Among the potential projects in the zones are building microgrids in key facilities to maintain power when outages occur, weatherization, renewable energy develop-

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ment, job training, and zoning reform to prevent polluting land uses.

> Green justice

Green justice zones combine climate goals with social justice goals. The idea is to combine and integrate all aspects of the climate and social justice agenda in a way that engages residents in community building. That might include renewable energy, deep retrofitting, creating community spaces, creating job opportunities, a new zero-net-energy school, new or redeveloped parks, complete streets, green roofs, and more trees to address the urban heat island effect and manage stormwater.

Oakland, California also focuses action in its poorest neighborhoods and has intensified that focus in its 2030 Equitable Climate Action Plan released in July 2020. The plan's Racial Equity Impact Assessment & Implementation Guide offers strategies for identifying frontline communities, working with residents and community organizations in implementation, and monitoring equity outcomes.

Before this plan, West Oakland had already been designated as one of Oakland's frontline communities. It is home to three freeways, the port, a wastewater treatment plant, and a jet fuel-powered peaker plant that all contribute to high levels of pollution, resulting in high rates of asthma, stroke, and congestive heart failure and shortened life spans. It is being prioritized for deep carbon reductions in buildings along with fuel switching – replacing natural gas stoves and space and water heating with electric units.

Fuel switching improves indoor air quality and reduces emissions and could, at full implementation, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 18%. Improving building energy efficiency would result in another 12% reduction and help reduce energy burden – a documented disparity in which low-income families spend a higher proportion of household income on electric and natural gas utility bills.

> Citizen science

Part of the reason the City is effective in West Oakland is because of partnerships with longstanding environmental

justice groups that have delivered cleaner air and have the trust of the community. The West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project has been focusing on improving air quality in the neighborhood since 2002. Co-founder Ms. Margaret Gordon recalls that her first battle was to redirect trucks that were spewing diesel fumes into the neighborhood on their way to and from the Port.

Since then, the Indicators Project has been partnering with the Environmental Defense Fund, Google, and the University of California, Berkeley in citizen science to monitor air quality in very specific locations. They knew that the state's air monitoring wasn't picking up hot spots. One project had residents standing on street corners counting trucks. Another gave residents of senior citizen homes air monitors and had them keep diaries at different times of day, with windows open or closed to find out when pollution levels were highest. In another project residents received training from Intel on downloading data from air monitors kept in their backpacks. Once specific sources of pollution were identified, they could go back to the state with evidence that pollution prevention and cleanup efforts had to be increased.

With all these efforts, has air quality improved? Ms. Margaret Gordon says her windowsills used to be sooty black, but now they're dark gray. Clearly more pollution abatement has to be done and with the new equitable climate action in place, that should be a priority.

But a city plan isn't enough. What has made the fine-scale monitoring possible is state legislation and funding. California's Assembly Bill (AB) 617, passed in 2017, provides multiple layers of funding to support a community-focused approach to monitoring air quality. With the pandemic leaving state and local governments cash-strapped, much of the good planning won't be implemented. We thus have to wait for the next national administration to fund some version of a green new deal. ■

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> Charity as Status and Stigma: Lockdown in India

by **Mahmudul Hasan Laskar**, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, India



Distribution of food in Barpeta Assam, India, April 2020. Credit: Sayantan Roy Choudhury.

To avert the spread of COVID-19, a nation-wide lockdown was instituted by the government of India. Harsh realities like the hierarchical segregation of the population and the uneven impact of the lockdown have received attention. The loss of jobs and wages due to the lockdown has made poverty and extreme inequalities even more visible. Most harsh is the ill treatment of the poor by rich and upper-middle classes. A popular trend since the inception of lockdown has been for wealthier people to share photographs of themselves on social media presenting relief materials to the poor. What purpose does this serve and what are the implications for genuine redistribution of these highly publicized acts?

> Inadequacy of response

The rich and wealthy middle classes are distributing a certain amount of materials, which may feed these poor one or two days. Why are the elites not able to under-

stand that providing materials for one or two meals is not the solution? The big capitalists can mitigate the problem by utilizing their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds, but these corporate bigwigs instead invest the funds to generate further profits. The government alone is not able to ameliorate poverty unless capitalists give a helping hand in the process through ensuring “good jobs” not just engaging people in factories as means of production.

Photographs on social media portraying the scene of a wealthy person from a large building or bungalow distributing a small pack of relief material to the poor who stand in queue in the courtyard bring to mind the feudalistic pattern of social hierarchy. It is observed that the pack consists mainly of cooking oil (half liter to one liter), rice (2 to 3 kilograms), biscuits (2 to 3 packets), soup (1 to 2 packets), onions (1 to 2 kilograms) and potatoes (1 to 2 kilograms). It is a matter of introspection whether these items

are enough for anyone to survive the over two-month-long lockdown period. What about the health and education of their children? While the wealthy are equipped with technological tools for e-learning or online education, the question of access to education for poor children who do not have such tools does not even occur to them.

> Self-promotion through charity

The lockdown has become an opportunity for aspiring social workers to showcase their pseudo leadership and get political mileage. Serving relief materials to the poor has become a status symbol that is deliberately portrayed in social media. These pseudo social workers manage their impression for self-benefit. Peculiar pictures have appeared in Facebook showing people distributing food packets on the roadside or in market places. Showing hunger is not a matter of pride but rather of shame for anyone, but affluent people exhibit the distribution of food like an award ceremony. The distribution of food packets is glorified through social media as if the hungry poor will live their entire life with these food packets. In one instance, three people, including one cameraman, were seen distributing masks to roadside vegetable vendors in Guwahati city of Assam; the entire scene was choreographed and filmed by the cameraman with a sophisticated camera. Stranded migrant workers have suddenly become the concern of urban middle classes and certain categories of people. Before the lockdown these so-called social activists were hardly concerned about poor migrant workers because they were busy with other social media trends.

> Shame and indignity

These egoistic wealthy middle classes are flaunting their own charitable image at the cost of the dignity of the poor. The poor are simply exasperated by this piety exhibited by the “social service” undertaken by the rich. They are anxious about their dignity, their life and that of their children because their vulnerability is presented by the social worker on social media. Their poverty has become a stigma for them because their condition is being filmed in a ridiculous

manner. Affluent people in a neighbourhood are handing over materials in a ceremonial way and other less affluent are receiving with a sense of helplessness and guilt. Now these poorer people will have to live with the pressure of the pseudo compassion their affluent neighbours have shown them. The children of the poor may find it difficult to manage self-confidence in the school due to the “performance” of social work that exposed their poverty in an insensitive manner. Expressing one’s poverty is not a shameful act, but the treating of the poor like beggars by these performers of social work is humiliating. That is one reason why poor or weaker sections of society suffer from xenocentrism or the identification with the culture and habits of others, rather than their own. The degradation of self-esteem has already occurred because of the decline of agriculture, once a self-reliant and vibrant sector of the Indian economy. Industrialization has created a labor market for manual wage labor, so that those who were once self-reliant rural people are now migrants in the cities and make up major sections of the urban poor.

> Real solutions

The issue of migrants has become a subject of pseudo intellectualism and social activism in social media. But the real solutions to their problems are different, and include approaches like going back to self-reliant agriculture, environmentalism for protecting livelihoods and natural resources and the promotion of indigenous small-scale and cottage industries. These can initiate real solutions to migrant issues and poverty in India but unfortunately seminars (now webinars), symposiums and social media posts just create superficial debate and discussion without any effective discourse.

Relief or food distribution has turned into a photography competition in social media that ultimately affects the poor’s dignity in life. It offers no long-term solution. If the affluent are serious about helping the poor, they should do it in terms of redistribution of wealth without exhibiting it as a matter of status or pride. ■

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> Care Scarcity?

Care Migration and Political Demography

by **Attila Melegh**, Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary

Humanity has reached a particular global social situation in the 2010s. Since the 1980s there has been a rather unique interplay between aging, ongoing marketization with no increase in redistribution, and the death of the peasantry. These factors and their historical dynamic have led to care scarcity and a related dramatic increase in the care migration industry. These developments put the migrant caregivers into a very difficult position, especially with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic making access to health-care even more important globally. Huge chunks of the global population – and not only poor countries – are at the mercy of various care systems increasingly based on migrant labor. Meanwhile, migrant workers are caught in the crossfire between increasing demand for their work, increasing volatility in their employment, increasing hostility toward migrants, and increasing securitization also due to the pandemic. We have reached a point where care for the sick and elderly is becoming more competitive and very fragile.

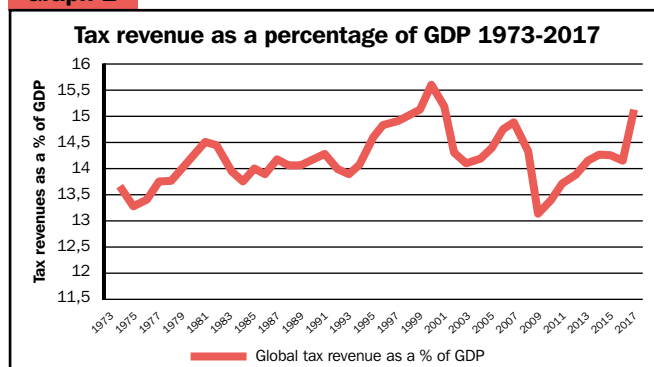
> Increasing domestic and healthcare migration

We lack systematic global data for domestic and healthcare workers. For 2015, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that there were around 67.1 million domestic workers, of whom 11.5 million were migrants and almost three quarters were women. In the meantime healthcare migration has also gone up. An estimate of the World Health Organization (WHO) for 2013 showed a healthcare worker shortage of 17.4 million and projected a dramatic increase in demand that could only be met with increasing migration. The relatively rich OECD countries (United States excluded) have increased the stock of foreign-trained nurses between 2007 and 2016 by at least 80% and the number of such doctors by at least 45%. By 2016, the number of foreign-trained doctors in the above countries reached almost half a million, while the number of foreign-trained nurses is well above 300,000. Rates of foreign-born doctors have gone up by at least 10 percentage points in some countries, reaching 40% or 50% of all doctors (many of whom were blocked in their movement during the COVID-19 pandemic due to local and national lockdowns).

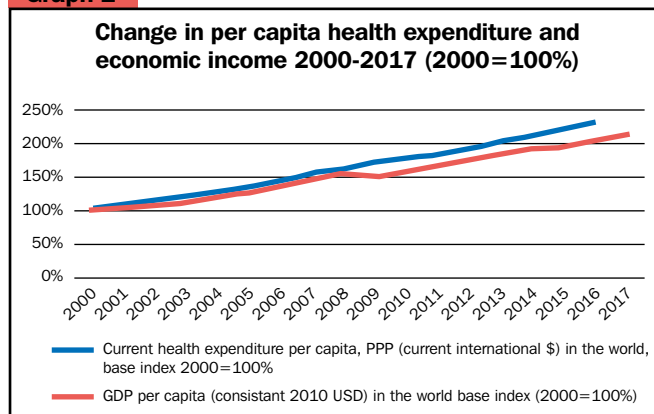
> Aging, rising health costs, and unchanging redistribution

The rapidly aging population and the care of elderly dependents put significant burdens on the younger generations both in terms of labor productivity and actual care needs. This is especially the case given the extended global stagnation of state redistribution, as noted by József Böröcz (2016) in his study on work-related social contribution. Furthermore, the share of tax revenues (redistribution rates) in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has also stagnated globally, oscillating around 14% on average according to World Bank figures (see Graph 1). At the same time, per capita health expenditure has been increasing at least since the 2000s at a higher rate than GDP per capita growth (see Graph 2). Globally, old age dependency has increased from 9.5% to 13.2% over this same period (see Graph 3). This includes countries still with a very young population as opposed to a very old Europe.

Graph 1



Graph 2

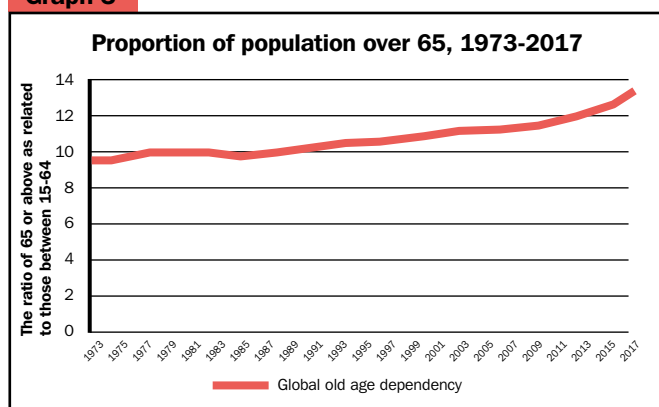


Source: <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>



Until 2010, the world's population aged at a slower pace than the growth of GDP per capita, meaning that, despite the stability of redistribution rates, there were expanding resources available for public and market costs of old-age care. From 2010 onwards, however, the growth of old-age dependency ratios has been faster than the growth of the economy. This means that the income needed for per capita health expenditure can come from extra private sources (purchasing an increasing share of such services in the market using our own income) and/or the proportion of health-related public spending is increasing at the expense of other public goals. This reorganization, in turn, necessarily leads to an increase in market and welfare competition for social and health goods, making it even more difficult for care migrants also looking for social protection for themselves.

Graph 3



Source: <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

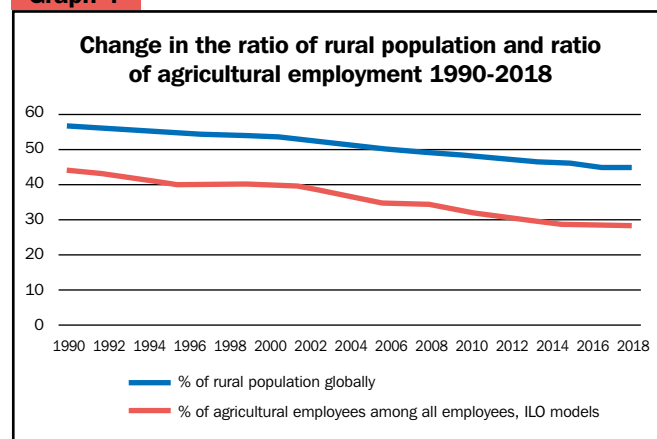
This set of problems can further complicate migration in several ways. Migrants may seek to purchase welfare services from their wages and remittances or to enter the welfare systems of the migration destination countries. Otherwise hostile states with well-established welfare systems can simultaneously penalize migrants and seek their social contributions in order to improve the taxation balance between aging, social and health needs, and public spending. Furthermore, in this social environment there are clear signs of competition not only among local groups and between local groups and migrants, but also among migrant groups themselves as evidenced by interviews with East European care workers rejecting the “costly” protection of incoming refugees. The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased these tensions and we have not yet seen the end of the current economic crisis.

> Global care competition and state protection

Such contradictions may become particularly acute due to changes in the level of state redistribution and aging

rates after what Hobsbawm in *The Age of Extremes* called the “death of the peasantry.” The decline in agricultural employment in the mid-twentieth century continued at a rapid pace and fell below 30% globally by 2018; the rural population has become a minority compared to the urban population for the first time in history. This means that the care burdens associated with aging must be increasingly channeled into market and state redistributive systems as opposed to the historically important rural family-based systems. This means a decreasing weight for old-age care based on familial services. Even in poorer countries, the direct provision of food and material goods to the elderly within the family has declined as opposed to the need to purchase state and market health and social services, including those offered by local or immigrant elder-care givers. This shift is one of the most significant recent transformations in human history and has become a decisive moment in the age of globalization (Graph 4).

Graph 4



Source: <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

This means that marketization is going to lead to further marketization and related counter-demand for state protection, which is an ideal mix for authoritarian nationalisms. Therefore, we can conclude that contradictions around care scarcity in the current capitalistic economic order can be a source of transformation. Thus, during and post-COVID, political demographic debates will heighten, in which universal social protection and a radical change of the economic system will be seen as alternatives to contradictory marketization. And rightly so. ■

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> Could COVID-19 Lead to the End of Globalization?

by **Iliana Olivié** and **Manuel Gracia**, Elcano Royal Institute and Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

The current globalization process, which dates back to the 1970s, includes phases of growth, contraction, and mutation. Many of these correspond to structural changes in the global economic and geopolitical order, including the rise of emerging powers in Asia and the associated shift of the epicenter of global activity from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

The Great Recession at the end of the 2000s and the start of the 2010s has largely resulted in the acceleration and consolidation of these changes, a trend reflected in the Elcano Global Presence Index. The current health, economic, political, and social crisis will also leave its mark on international relations and the process of globalization itself.

While it is still too early to predict the whole impact, we are already seeing some of the consequences of the crisis, such as interruptions in production and consumption (and thus trade). It is also possible to anticipate some of the effects from the dramatic reduction in the international flows of people.

> The world was already de-globalizing before the COVID pandemic

The policies of economic liberalization implemented throughout much of the world in the last three decades of the twentieth century resulted in a rapid increase in international economic exchanges. The various waves of economic globalization have always been accompanied by different forms of internationalization (military or soft) involving cross-border movements of people (troop deployments, migrants, tourists, students, sports players in international competitions, and international development workers) and ideas (exchange of information, culture, science, technology, and education). While the academic conceptualization of globalization has always recognized these other non-economic aspects, analyses of the process of internationalization have tended to focus on the economic dimension.

This focus on the economic dimension was partly responsible for predicting that globalization would slow down, end, or even enter a period of “secular stagnation” during the financial crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed.

And yet while there was a slowdown – and even a reversion in certain variables and in certain years – in economic internationalization for specific trade flows and foreign direct investment, the [Elcano Global Presence Index](#) shows that, despite slowing down significantly and mutating towards softer forms of internationalization, globalization did not go into reverse.

Indeed, the added value of global presence (including all 130 countries, variables, and dimensions) reflects the volume of world exchanges and, therefore, can be used as a proxy for globalization (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Elcano Global Presence Index

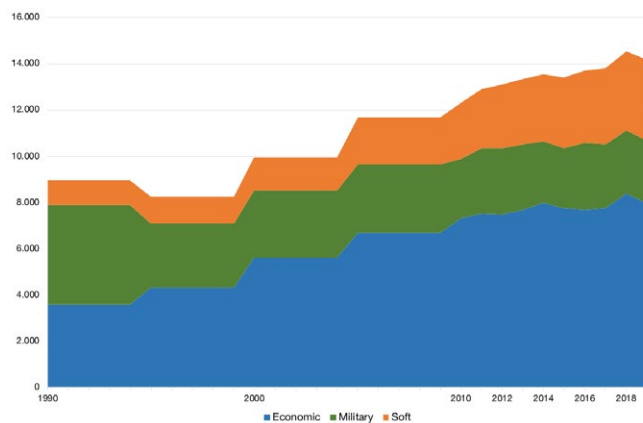


Source: Elcano Royal Institute, Elcano Global Presence Index.

Based on this Index, we can observe phases in globalization: (a) Between 1990 and 1995, coinciding with the geopolitical reconfiguration of Europe, aggregate global presence fell by an annual average of -1.6%. (b) This was followed by a second period of sustained globalization between 1995 and 2011, with a cumulative increase of 57%. (c) A post-Great Recession phase, with moderate increases and decreases, resulted in an average annual increase of around 1%. (d) Then followed a sharp increase, of over 5% (so back to pre-crisis numbers). (e) Most recently there has been a -2.6% decline, which is the largest annual drop recorded in our 30 year-time series (Figure 2).

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**Figure 2. Global presence added value
(for all 130 countries, 1990-2019, in index value points)**



Source: Elcano Royal Institute, Elcano Global Presence Index.

The different variables and dimensions (economic, military, and soft) have also contributed in different ways to the speed of globalization, depending on the phase. Between 1990 and 2005, the main vector of globalization was the economic dimension. The soft dimension made a positive albeit modest contribution during this period, while the military showed a certain retrenchment. However, these trends changed significantly in the 2000s, when the soft dimension began to lead globalization. As for the last couple of years, both the rise and drop of aggregate global presence are mainly due to the performance of the economic dimension.

> The effects of COVID-19 on global exchanges

It is important to stress that the Elcano Global Presence Index captures structural trends, meaning transient financial turbulence or political changes are seldom reflected in its results. There is also a lag of around two years before changes in the dimensions and variables are reflected by the Index. The effects of the 2008-09 crisis do not show in the Index until 2011 and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are not expected to register in the values of the Index until 2021 or 2022.

Although the short-, medium-, and long-term impact of the pandemic on different fronts is already being estimated and forecast by different authors and institutions, the picture, in terms of globalization, is still incomplete. One way to explore the future impact of the health crisis (and the political responses adopted by countries and globally) is to observe different scenarios, based on the effects of the Great Recession on the added value of the Elcano Global Presence Index.

> Scenario A: A crisis like 2008

If the current health emergency and its economic, political, and social consequences are on a similar scale to the former crisis, we would expect the change in the aggregate

of the Elcano Global Presence Index to be similar to the period 2010-15, for all variables and dimensions.

> Scenario B: A crisis worse than 2008

Some analysts argue that the economic, political, and social consequences will be more devastating and deeper than those of the 2008 crisis. In such a scenario, the figures for the various components of the Index would, perhaps from 2022, register the worst possible decline for each of the indicators seen during the period 2010-18.

> Scenario C: A different crisis to 2008

Finally, the particular features of this crisis and the differences with respect to 2008 may mean that variables behave differently. Forecasts and estimations predict an impact on economic variables similar to that of the Great Recession and a stronger impact on soft variables, as a result of the dramatic reduction of cross-border movements of people (affecting variables such as troops deployed, education, migration or tourism).

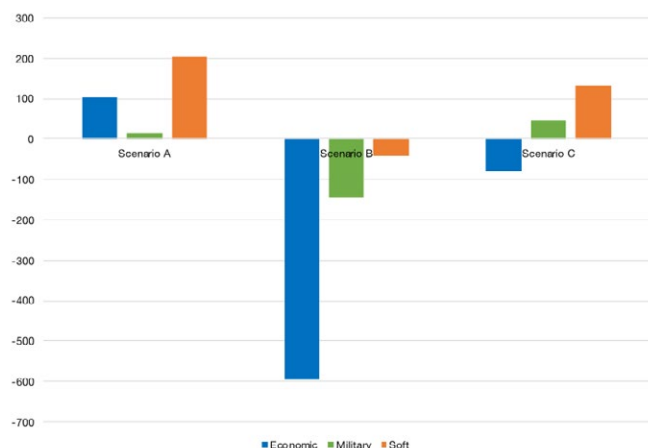
Under this scenario, the expected performance of each of the 16 variables (the rationale for which is detailed [here](#)) would lead to a third scenario, where the impact of the current crisis on globalization is different to that of the 2008 crisis (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Three scenarios for globalization
after COVID-19 (%)**

	Scenario A Crisis similar to 2008 Average rate (2010-15)	Scenario B Crisis worse than 2008 Larger reduction (2010-18)	Scenario C Different crisis to 2008
Energy	6.8	-36.2	-11.1
Primary goods	4.3	-7.5	-1.1
Manufactures	2.6	-3.4	-0.7
Services	1.7	-0.7	-0.7
Investments	-0.3	-8.9	-0.3
Troops	-4.0	-10.2	5.7
Military equipment	3.7	-2.0	-1.0
Migration	1.4	-1.0	-1.0
Tourism	3.7	2.0	2.0
Sports	-0.8	-1.7	-1.7
Culture	7.3	-8.9	-1.8
Information	16.9	-1.4	16.9
Technology	4.2	1.7	4.2
Science	5.0	3.4	5.0
Education	5.2	0.1	0.1
Development cooperation	2.6	-4.8	4.1

Source: The authors, based on the Elcano Global Presence Index.

Figure 4. Aggregate global presence, projections under scenarios A, B, and C (change in the value of the index with respect to 2019)

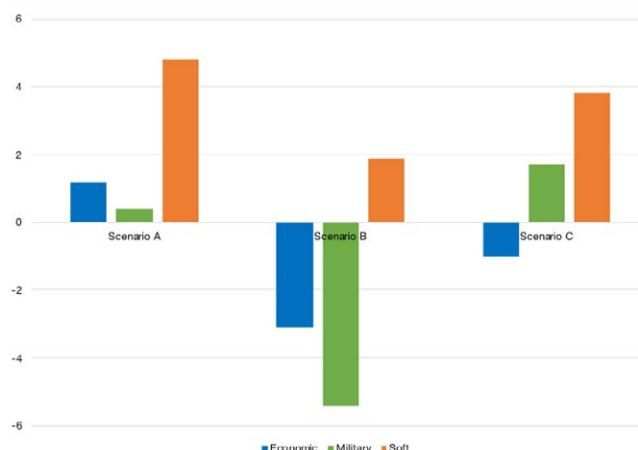


Source: The authors, based on the Elcano Global Presence Index.

Just one of the three scenarios (scenario B) would result in effective de-globalization, with aggregate global presence of all 130 countries falling by 1% with respect to 2019 values. This would affect all dimensions, especially the economic (in absolute terms) and the military (in relative terms).

However, if the transformational effects are similar to the previous crisis (scenario A), we could expect continuity in the process of globalization (+1.7% total global presence), with cumulative increases in the soft dimension and, to a lesser extent, the economic dimension.

Figure 5. Aggregate global presence, projections under scenarios A, B, and C (percentage change in the index with respect to 2019)



Source: The authors, based on the Elcano Global Presence Index.

Finally, the scenario based on different transformational effects from the previous crisis would see a near stand-still in globalization, with the aggregate global presence increasing by 0.7%. This would be the result of a more dynamic soft dimension, offset by a slight fall in the economic dimension (Figures 4 and 5).

In short, similar to the crisis at the end of the 2000s, the current crisis will have an impact on international relations. We can expect to see an acceleration in the structural changes that we have already been seeing in the process of globalization. ■

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> Facing COVID-19: Live-in Care in Central Europe

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A mask advertised for commuters, so that they can be instantly identified as workers at the Hungarian-Austrian border.

In Central Europe, live-in care is an increasingly important pillar of elder care regimes. Care workers, primarily female migrants, live and work in the households of care receivers. Their responsibilities range from housekeeping to medical tasks. The regulation of live-in care varies from country to country, with precarious working conditions as a common denominator. Central European live-in care is based on circular migration and often brokers recruit care workers from poorer countries who are pushed to accept (any) jobs abroad. One prerequisite for this model is the more or less free movement of workers within EU member states and beyond, which, during the COVID-19 pandemic, could no longer be taken for granted because of closed borders. This article analyzes the situation of live-in care in Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary by introducing their respective care models and showing how live-in care has been affected by the pandemic.

> Live-in care in Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary

In Austria, live-in care is legalized as a profession. Typically, two carers alternate in one household every two to four weeks. Care workers are self-employed, which denotes flexibility mainly for care receivers, while carers are not eligible for minimum wage, paid vacation, or sick leave. Unlike Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary both send as well as receive care workers. Outgoing Czech and Hungarian carers circulate predominantly to the German-speaking countries – Austria and Germany. For the Czech Republic, where migrant care work for private households is a fairly new phenomenon, Ukraine is an important sending country. The live-in care sector in the Czech Republic is still small and gaining a (non-EU) migrant worker's residence permit depends on a valid employment contract. Hungary receives mainly ethnic Hungarian care workers from Ukraine and Romania, who, because of linguistic and cultural closeness, don't necessarily move towards Western Europe for higher salaries. The majority of migrant live-in carers in Hungary work informally but there also are a few formal employment opportunities.

> Challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread, it brought an immediate closure of borders, not only but also in Central Europe, and for a while, it stopped circular cross-border migration. In Austria, the pandemic brought live-in care back into omnipresent media coverage and onto the agenda of various actors who strove to continue without change instead of looking for alternatives. The German, Austrian, and Czech governments successfully negotiated "care corridors" while Hungarian care workers were likewise free to enter Austria. Care workers started to consider whether they should stay at home, which likely meant the loss of their income, or leave for/stay in the receiving country. In Austria, many carers extended their shifts, which the federal government incentivized by a one-time, tax-free bonus of 500 euros. Between late March and May, care work-

ers were brought to Austria in three chartered planes from Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania as well as six special trains from Romania only. While at the beginning, all care workers were quarantined for 14 days in a hotel without pay, later only carers testing positive – as well as those sharing the same train compartment as them – had to quarantine, again without pay. As Central European borders were reopening in mid-June, regular travel paths were available to circular migrants again.

As a result of the strict cross-border regime during the first few months of the pandemic, care workers crossing the border back to the Czech Republic were faced with a 14-day obligatory self-isolation at home. Furthermore, they had to provide a negative COVID-19 test, with new tests required every 14 days, for which carers had to pay themselves. The dominant media discourses described Czech circular migrants as a significant public health threat. As some care workers reported online, their families faced social stigma as potential virus carriers in their local communities. At the beginning of the pandemic, Ukrainian care workers in particular often expressed feelings of insecurity, fear, and the worry that they would end up unemployed and “locked” inside the Czech Republic without any possibility of returning home. It was not until May 4th that the Ministry of Interior introduced a new regulation cancelling the 60-day period for providing a new residence permit in the event of migrants losing their jobs during the state of emergency. In contrast to the massive media coverage of the situation of Czech cross-border workers, the situation of migrant care workers in the Czech Republic remained shrouded in silence even in the general discourses about the social relevance of critical infrastructure workers and the urgent need to provide them with adequate protective equipment.

In Hungary, which lacked the media coverage seen in Austria and the Czech Republic, the government’s reaction to the pandemic created additional pressure in elderly care: Thousands of patients were sent home from hospitals in order to free up beds for future COVID-19 patients. This created a demand for additional care-related help while, at the same time, care workers from Romania and Ukraine returned to their home country or couldn’t cross the border into Hungary. The live-in care market

was further unsettled as many people lost their jobs and with it, their willingness to pay for care services seemingly decreased. While many outgoing Hungarian care workers were happy to stay longer in Austria because of the bonus introduced, others were not able or willing to return to work as they faced increased care obligations at home. On social media, Hungarian carers working in Austria expressed their resentment against the receiving country’s measures to transport Romanian carers. Many of them agreed that providing this privilege to one migrant group could risk their own (future) employment.

> Conclusion

During the pandemic, working conditions in receiving and sending countries have been further undermined. Facing worse conditions in their home countries, migrant workers nonetheless have been pushed to accept jobs offered abroad despite potential health and other risks and restrictions during the pandemic. The cross-border care labor market is often portrayed as a win-win one, in which older people receive affordable care and migrants a job paying more than alternatives at home. In fact, this Central European care market creates a scheme of nationality-based structural inequalities, transnational exploitation of workforce, and exclusion amidst a myth of an egalitarian and integrated Europe. Although the fragility of live-in care was given new attention by the pandemic, care workers’ and receivers’ wants and needs were either not addressed, or addressed insufficiently or unevenly. People in need of care and their relatives faced a lack of public support and anxiety because of closed borders. While many measures aimed to ensure the continuation of live-in care, workers’ living and working conditions that were precarious even before the pandemic remained ignored. Because of social distancing – also between care receivers and their relatives –, carers faced increased workloads and isolation. Transnational travel brought the risk of contagion and/or (unpaid) quarantine. Care workers stuck in their home countries faced financial deprivation. And despite discourses about their systemic relevance, care workers were presented as a threat to public health and national labor markets. The social and financial burden of the pandemic thus ended up falling on the shoulders of circular migrants. ■

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> Public Sociology in South Asia During Lockdown

by **Dev Nath Pathak**, South Asian University, India



Illustration by Arbu.

An opportunity to rethink South Asia in terms of human emotion, suffering, and socio-political crises lapsed once again during the lockdown that was enforced to check the spread of coronavirus across the region. A quick reckoning of the pieces of the drama could help in understanding it. The old rhetoric of geopolitical states echoed in the recent unfolding of an old dispute between Nepal and India about Kalapani, a landmass in the Himalayas. This was in the middle of the crisis of migrant workers' desperate attempts to return home during the lockdown. To this, one must add the failure of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) meeting on COVID-19 held during the lockdown, which revealed once again that South Asia is nothing more than a game for several of its member states. It invariably comes down to the participation of its member states in occasional meetings in what is nothing but a talk show on their largesse and common funds, shared strategic interests and bilateral ties, security and safety. There is hardly any space for people's emotions, socio-cultural dynamics, and connections and flows. Seldom does it occur to anyone that South Asia, as an under-explored social

entity, also entails possible cross-border compassion, empathy, and collaboration in line with the shared emotions in the region. A disturbingly dehumanized idea of South Asia dominates and obscures human feelings, anguish, and anxiety in the region. In short, a public sociology of suffering, anxiety, and emotions in South Asia lacks even a faint chance to emerge due to the predominance of a "cold-blooded" objective – the so-called "COVID diplomacy." And hence, an emotionally truthful sociology of South Asia in which humans and their struggle are central remains an ever-unfinished project.

> The crisis of migrant workers

Perhaps COVID-19 universally brought about a blessing in disguise: it was a blow to the smart masks of many including the educated middle class, the class of intellectuals who claimed to have understood migrant workers. Migrant workers became newly intriguing across the region, with a dual social existence, typically described as "one foot in the city – one in the village." All those who claimed to have understood the teeming mass of workers in formal

and informal sectors of the economy were caught fumbling for answers. A series of opinion pieces in newspapers and portals only revealed inscrutable policy jargon and hackneyed ideas about the rural-urban divide in various parts of the region. In such a situation, the chinks in the armor of the state became evident. We witnessed the near disappearance of the machinery of governance and crisis management during the pandemic across the region. Instead, there were evident spectacles such as banging utensils, lighting lamps, and air force choppers showering petals on the health workers in India. The pandemic became even more of a source of panic amongst people due to the ill-devised policies and actions across South Asia. There might be exceptions here and there, yet there remains a common failure in the way the states in South Asia have perceived humans in the face of a pandemic.

In this context, the migrant workers' return migration became a common crisis in the region, which underlined the absence of an empathetic approach. A great deal of the discussion across South Asia in the context of COVID-19 hovers around the intricacies of migration. Everyone was suddenly reminded of an old truism: migrant workers are the backbone of a substantial part of the economy. Every middle-class household in the cities of South Asia thrives due to the help from migrant workers. And yet, unfortunately, these workers have been perceived only as cogs in the machinery rather than as significant humans with emotions, imperatives, and sensibility. This is commonly visible across the region. Bangladesh did not take sufficient care of the disarray in the garment industry, a huge contributor to employment in the country, and hence many workers walked back and forth between Dhaka and their hometowns and villages hoping to find work. Bangladesh also failed to make plans for the returning workers from afar, like India and Nepal. The workers who were once contributors to the remittance economy became migrants without a nation in India too. They returned only to an ungrateful

nation, so to speak. Nepali workers returning from India to Nepal had to walk for many arduous miles without being provided any care along the way. In India, there were arrangements along class lines: flights were arranged for out-migrants returning from foreign locations while there were no facilities made for the return of internal migrants. Though heavily under-reported, the situation for workers in Pakistan was not very commendable either. These workers, be they in the formal or informal sector, were seen only as the embodiment of saleable labor power. They were not perceived as humans with due sentiments, mythology, folklore, culture, and everyday life. This points to the need to reconfigure South Asia as a social category peopled by the workers.

> For an emotionally truthful sociology of South Asia

One ought to steer clear of the dominant logic of state and geopolitics in South Asia so as to explore a nuanced and emotionally truthful sociology of South Asia. Within such a sociology, one can work out novel utopias for a people's South Asia in which emotion and reason can combine for a better comprehension of social reality. Such a sociology ought to be sensitive to the emotionally volatile public. For, within the relatively fluid frame of sentiments, we might inch closer to one another, be equal and able to empathize, and be compassionate. Unfortunately, India's much-congratulated policy of "neighborhood first" turns out to be more a diplomatic gimmick than an outline for socio-cultural togetherness. Such a policy retains the connotation that India is superior to its neighbors and hence it ought to take care of them. With this superiority complex it collapses in the face of the pandemic and the consequent decline of the state, people's rising misery, and lack of hope. Rather than policy gimmicks, it would have been better if we all, within and across borders, could walk away from this challenge together. ■

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> Public Sociology: Facing the Pandemic

by **Michele Grigolo** and **Craig Lundy**, Nottingham Trent University, UK

These are difficult times that interrogate public sociology in many ways. The spread of COVID-19 has magnified disparities and inequalities within societies. It has emphasized the role of the public over private interests, and yet the logic of profit that has penetrated deeply into different areas of social life, including education, is reasserting itself as the pandemic is being, so we are told, kept under control. We would like to report here on the experience of public sociology at Nottingham Trent University (NTU), in the UK, and in particular our MA program that has public sociology at its core. We offer this in the hope of eliciting a collective reflection on public sociology under the pandemic, and as an opportunity for those interested in public sociology to come together and develop further links and collaboration.

To start with, we want to clarify what we mean by “public sociology.” In his influential ASA Presidential Address of 2005, Michael Burawoy understood “public sociology” as a dialogue between sociologists and their publics towards producing a shared agenda. We would agree. However, in our view the students on our sociology programs are not merely our “first publics” – they are public sociologists in their own right. As such they are not just the recipients of pedagogy, but co-producers of knowledge and active community practitioners from the outset. As this indicates, our approach to public sociology here at NTU has revolved around what we like to refer to as the recursive relationship between pedagogy, research, and practice. Like stars in a Zodiac constellation, each of these elements relies on the others for meaning, support, and enrichment. While not every public sociology activity needs to explicitly involve all three points of the triangle, many do, and all contribute in some way to strengthening the bonds between them.

This approach has guided the content and organization of our MA Sociology program. Our modules discuss different aspects of public sociology, from theory to methodology and practical approaches. In our Service Learning module, students collaborate with local not-for-profit organizations, constructing a specific project that draws on

the students’ capacities to address a need or desire of the organization. All this is about “learning with” as opposed to “learning from,” and becoming part of a process with an understanding that processes make a difference when it comes to knowledge and change. Building on this collaboration, students can produce a report for their partner organization, or if they prefer, write an article for an academic journal – two alternatives to the conventional dissertation thesis that aim, in their different ways, to promote the students’ contribution to public sociology at the earliest opportunity.

Although the members of our team share much in common with one another – such as a commitment to social justice and the value of the “recursive” approach to public sociology just outlined – it should be stressed that there is no shortage of divergences and discrepancies amongst us in our various pursuits of public sociology. Additionally, the lived reality of public sociology at NTU continues to evolve, as we learn from others and grow as people and a collective. We take these two facets to be virtues. They also help explain why public sociology for us is more exactly a “critical public sociology,” insofar as this added term suggests a willingness to encourage critical reflection and practice amongst participants.

Aside from our MA program this working through of critical public sociology has been pursued through a number of other avenues. In 2017 we hosted an eponymous symposium on critical public sociology at NTU, funded by the British Sociological Association, and in 2019 we published research on our pedagogy in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* (“Evaluating the Complexity of Service-Learning Practices: Lessons From and For Complex Systems Theory” by Burton, Hutchings, Lundy and Lyons-Lewis). Some members of our team have employed participatory action research to explore empirical questions of work and employment with voluntary sector organizations, and new trajectories are currently being developed, for example around human rights in Nottingham. Throughout these activities, academic staff, students, and

“It is not about going back to normal because that normality is also part of the problem”

community partners have been involved, working together for mutual benefit.

The current pandemic has forced us to reconsider our engagement with critical public sociology. We are starting from questions such as: How is this pandemic magnifying existing inequalities? What measures to control the pandemic are needed and justifiable? How do we continue to do our work under the current circumstances? Should our work change its direction and content? For us, any answers to these questions should continue to involve pedagogy, research, and practice. At the moment of writing this contribution (May 2020), the UK government has begun to relax the “lockdown.” A conversation has started with our community partners about how COVID-19 has impacted them and vulnerable communities in Nottingham. Looking ahead, our thoughts are preoccupied by how public sociology might best respond to this pandemic, in a way that protects the vulnerable and empowers community action. As the higher education sector faces massive funding cuts, on top of those already suffered, we wonder how this

moment of profound uncertainty and instability might offer opportunities for resisting the logic of profit that dominates the UK education system and reframing what education means and does in society.

Eventually, we want to come out of this pandemic with a stronger sense of being part of a bigger community. Against the fear and isolation produced by the current lockdown, we think it is important, as critical public sociologists, to reassert the centrality of society and the social for rebuilding human relations. It is not about going back to normal because, as some have already rightly pointed out, that normality is also part of the problem. Rather, it is about moving forward to a better place. Sociology and public sociology should help with that, in a critical way, we think. For all these reasons, we want to hear more from other scholars and students of public sociology about their work and their thoughts, with the hope of forging connections between us that value and seek to promote the place of public sociology. Please contact us if you are interested in participating in this conversation. ■

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> Social Distancing: The Relevance of Sociology

by **Syed Farid Alatas**, National University of Singapore



Keeping one's (physical) distance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Credit: Mick Baker/ flickr.com. Some rights reserved.

The topic is an excuse to introduce the reader to sociology. However, as a reward for indulging me, I will eventually address the topic of social distancing, only to claim, however, that it is a misnomer. But we need to know what sociology is in order to understand that point.

> What is sociology?

We may begin with the founder of this discipline, Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (AD 1332-1406), one of the most remarkable Muslim scholars of the pre-modern period. He founded an entirely new science that he called the science of human society (*'ilm al-ijtima' al-insani*). This is today called sociology: the study of society. In the words of the great Hungarian-born German sociologist, Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), society itself refers to the different forms of the living together of humans. These forms, which include social contact, social distance, isolation, individualization, cooperation, competition, division of labor, and social integration, allow human beings to come together, live, and interact in various types of associations and groups that form communities and societies. It is important to understand the nature of society and group life if we are to understand social behavior and events. Ibn Khaldun helps us understand this.

To show how it was necessary to know about the nature of society in order to distinguish between fact and fiction in history, Ibn Khaldun gave the example of discussions in historical works concerning the descent of the Moroccan ruler Idris bin Idris (AD 803-828) of the Idrisid dynasty. Gossipmongers had suggested that the younger Idris was the product of an adulterous relationship between his mother and Rashid, a client of the Idrisids. The fact, however, was that Idris' father was married into the Berber tribes and lived among them in the desert. Ibn Khaldun's sociological point was that the nature of desert life was such that it was not possible for such things as extra-marital affairs to happen without the entire community knowing about them. If we knew something about desert society, the way of life of desert nomads, and the ways in which they interact, that is, their social conditions, we would conclude that it was unlikely that Idris could have been born from an illicit relationship.

Sociology, therefore, is about understanding the nature of the social and how social factors play a role in the development of communities, societies and civilizations. With the aim to explain human interaction, cooperation and association, sociological ideas thus often-times moved out of academia. They were taken up and expanded on by politicians and influenced policy making in countries all over the world.

> Rajaratnam and Ronald Reagan on Ibn Khaldun

The late S. Rajaratnam (1915-2006), foreign minister (1965-1980) and deputy prime minister (1980-1985) of Singapore used Ibn Khaldun's ideas to reflect on the future of Singapore in the twenty-first century.

In a speech he gave in December 1979¹ he dealt with the question of how a society could acquire and harness *virtu*, understood in Machiavelli's sense of virtuous qualities such as pride, bravery, skill, forcefulness, and ruthlessness that enabled one to master a situation. *Virtu* was needed by a society in order to deal with the economic, social, cultural, political, and technological forces that were plunging it into the future, in the face of which the failure to act would result in its decline. Rajaratnam was formulating his views during the days of the Iranian Revolution, which also made him reflect on the rise and decline of Islamic civilization. This led him to read Ibn Khaldun's *Al-Muqaddimah*, his three-volume introduction to the history of the Arabs, Berbers, and other nations, upon the advice of his sociologist friend, Syed Hussein Alatas.

Rajaratnam noted that Ibn Khaldun's key concept '*asabiyya*, the feeling of group solidarity, primarily among tribes, villages, and pioneer settlements, was what made nomadic society more resilient, tough, brave, and self-reliant in comparison with people who lived in cities. It was the binding ties of '*asabiyya* that enabled these nomads to conquer cities and form new dynasties. Rajaratnam's insight led him to suggest that Ibn Khaldun's '*asabiyya* was Machiavelli's *virtu*.

About two years after Rajaratnam's speech, a well-known quote from Ibn Khaldun was cited by US President Ronald Reagan: "It should be known that at the beginning of the dynasty, taxation yields a large revenue from small assessments. At the end of the dynasty, taxation yields a small revenue from large assessments. The reason for this is that when the dynasty follows the ways (*sunan*) of the religion, it imposes only such taxes as are stipulated by the religious law, such as charity taxes, the land tax, and the poll tax."

President Reagan cited Ibn Khaldun as an early exponent of supply-side economic theory, the doctrine on which his administration based many of its policies, according to which a cut in tax rates would stimulate the economy, resulting in the generation of greater tax revenues. Citing Ibn Khaldun, Reagan said: "we're trying to get down to the small assessments and the great revenues."²

For Ibn Khaldun, the decline of '*asabiyya* coupled with the pursuit of luxury among the ruling class would result in higher rates of taxation. The problem arises over generations as the ruling elite develops a more sophisticated and

luxurious lifestyle, which requires an increase in taxes and assessments. These finally reach levels that end up reducing or halting productive activities, which in turn decreases tax revenues, causing first a downturn in the production and fiscal cycles of the dynasty, and eventually its demise. This problem also concerned Rajaratnam. He believed that as Singapore entered the twenty-first century and had to "steer safely through *fortuna* – the capricious play of world forces," what was needed was Machiavelli's *virtu* or Ibn Khaldun's '*asabiyya*.

> Durkheim and the study of suicide

While psychology is the science of the mind and of the individual conscience, sociology studies the collective conscience as a social fact. The collective conscience encompasses the moral, religious, and cognitive beliefs and sentiments that are common to the average person and hold society together. Psychological explanations are directed to particular individuals, whereas sociological explanations aim to understand the causes for an entire group based on group characteristics. Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), one of the founders of the modern discipline of sociology, and one concerned with establishing sociology as a distinct discipline, used the study of suicide to show how sociology differed from psychology.

Durkheim studied suicide not just for the sake of studying an important social phenomenon but also to demonstrate to the scholarly community that sociology could play a role in explaining what seemed to be an individual act for which psychological explanations were sufficient.

Durkheim wanted to explain differences in suicide rates across groups. Assuming that biological and psychological factors remained constant from one group to another, differences in suicide rates between groups would likely be due to variations in sociological factors rather than biological and psychological factors. He empirically tested his theory by first ruling out other factors. For example, he ruled out race as a factor because there were different rates of suicide among groups within the same race.

The particular social facts Durkheim used to explain different rates of suicide among different peoples are the degree of integration and the degree of regulation in a society or group. Differences in the degree of integration and regulation can result in one of four types of suicide: egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide, anomic suicide, and fatalistic suicide.

Let us consider the example of two of these types of suicide. Egoistic suicide occurs because an individual is not well integrated into the group. If collective conscience is weak and people are left to pursue private interests in whatever way they wish, this unrestrained egoism can lead to personal dissatisfaction. Not all needs can be satisfied,

and even those which can will lead to more needs and, ultimately, to dissatisfaction and, for some, to suicide. However, if the individual lives in a strongly integrated group such as a family or religious group, these provide a strong collective conscience and discourage suicide.

Altruistic suicide occurs when social integration is too strong. One famous example is the mass suicide of Reverend Jim Jones' followers in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978. The followers of the Reverend willingly drank poison for his sake and gave it to their children as well. They were persuaded or forced into committing suicide by virtue of being part of the tightly integrated society of followers and believing it was their duty to do so.

As we have seen, sociology is about the social: the interaction, cooperation, and association among human beings, and how social factors play a role in their development. What does this tell us about social distancing?

> Is it really social distancing?

We started to hear the term "social distancing" during the current coronavirus pandemic. According to the World Health Organization, to practice distancing means to "[m]aintain at least 1 meter (3 feet) distance between yourself and others." Many refer to this as social distancing, that is, the practice of maintaining physical space between people outside of the home, not gathering in crowds, and avoiding mass gatherings.

What is meant by social distancing is actually physical distancing. Indeed, many definitions of social distancing state that it is also known as physical distancing. This gives the wrong impression that the social and physical somehow refer to the same thing.

Social distance is a very important concept in sociology. As a term in public health it is relatively new, but in sociology it can be traced back to the pre-World War II period. It does not mean the same thing as physical or spatial distance, although this does not imply that social and physical distance may not coincide.

Social distance refers to the lack of social contact, regardless of physical distance or proximity. Social contact itself may be primary, characterized by frequent and more intimate associations, which may or may not involve face-to-face, unmediated visual and auditory engagements with people in our primary group such as family members, colleagues, and friends. Or social contact may be secondary, involving less frequent and less intimate associations with people who are not in our group. In any case, social contact is about social proximity and social relations between individuals, regardless of the degree of physical proximity.

Two people may be physically distant but socially proximate or intimate, that is, having social contact. When a couple, separated by national borders due to the travel restrictions imposed to halt the spread of the coronavirus, meet each other via social media they are not practicing social distancing. They have intimate social contact, despite the physical distance.

On the other hand, it is possible to be physically close without having social contact. In this case, physical proximity coexists with social distance. Take, for example, two people crossing the road at a zebra crossing. They are strangers to each other even though they may be physically close. Their actions or behavior are not oriented towards each other and there is no social contact between them. Another example would be purchasing an item in the grocery store. There is physical proximity but the social contact is limited to a short monetary transaction.

In this pandemic period, we need to encourage and enforce physical, not social distancing. It is the physical distancing that is needed to limit the spread of the coronavirus. It is precisely because of the physical distancing and the lack of possibilities for physically proximate socializing that we need to encourage other forms of social contact, not social distancing.

It is time to think and talk clearly about what we mean. We should be thinking about physical distancing and social contact and how we can enhance social proximity even as we maintain physical separation from each other. ■

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1. "Raja takes a look at the past and the future," *The Straits Times*, December 21, 1979.
2. Robert D. McFadden, "Reagan cites Islamic scholar," *The New York Times*, October 2, 1981.

> A Pioneer of Modern Indian Sociology

by **Mir Suheel Rasool**, University of Kashmir, India



| Yogendra Singh in 2018.

Yogendra Singh (1932-2020) was one of the eminent sociologists of postcolonial India. Singh was a towering figure in intellectual and academic circles for having done pioneering work in Indian sociology on concepts such as social stratification, social change/continuity, Indian sociology, modernization, and cultural change. His writings cover an enormous diversity of themes and perspectives as he navigated from one topic to another with equal interest and ease.

Professor Singh spearheaded the study and dissecting of modernity and tradition in Indian society. A large section of his work is concerned with modernity, tradition, and social stratification. He used an integrated approach to understand and analyze [Indian society](#). His remarkable and celebrated 1973 magnum opus [Modernization of Indian Tradition](#) opened up new horizons for Indian sociology. He also has to his credit ten monographs and

books including *The Image of Man* (1983), [Ideology and Theory in Indian Sociology](#) (2004), and the edited series *Social Sciences: Communication, Anthropology, and Sociology* (2010) where he dwelled on the signification of signs and communication, working at the interface of informational theory and sociology.

Professor Singh had firm convictions, encouraging dissent and using open dialogue as a method of sociological discourse. Even during the current pandemic, his focus was on reinventing sociological paradigms to deconstruct the crisis scenario of postindustrial societies. Singh was a realist to the core and believed in the empirical basis of theories, which is why he has often been called a “social scientist,” soaring above the regimentation of parochial disciplinary classifications. In one of his [articles in Sociological Bulletin](#) he emphasized the importance of the sociology of knowledge, calling for objectivity and realism. He called for a delinking from an international “reference model” and made an acute and precise [catalogue of emerging challenges facing sociology](#). He emphasized the importance of field studies that enabled the objective existential and historical features of a “social space” to be recorded and documented. He was a firm believer in the democratization of knowledge and science. He developed an integrated model to study the structural and cultural aspects of Indian society. He was of the view that developing a particular approach was needed to study a particular spatial context. In one of his interviews he described the rise of right-wing nationalism as being in [consonance with the rise of middle-class anxieties](#) and suggested educational progress as an antidote to the “accentuating threat” of this form of hyper-nationalistic politics.

Yogendra Singh charted how Indian sociology evolved its own discourse thematically around “village studies” and struggled with the indigenization of concepts from 1950 to 1980. Mainstream sociology was still anchored in American functionalism and the rise of a dialectical-materialist understanding was also typical of those years; both developments were essential in shaping Indian sociology. Singh was convinced of the inherent capacity of Indian sociology for further adaptation and change, involving a contestation between defining and reworking the universal discourses of global sociology and the essential indigenization of con-

ceptions in sync with Indian historicity, cultural specificity, and goals of social and economic development. His views have enlightened us as to how Indian sociology has delineated its own distinctive discourse, beyond importing the concepts of western sociology.

During his lifetime, Professor Singh was a member of several prestigious organizations and institutions. He was the principal architect and one of the founders of the Centre for the Study of Social Systems at the School of Social Sciences at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Because of his humble nature and intellectual honesty, he was never over-ambitious when it came to stepping up to the top echelons of academic hierarchy. His concerns were less political than academic, which is reflected in the writings he labored over throughout his academic career. Besides teaching and designing the schema of courses of sociology at various Indian institutions, he conveyed to many of his students and fellow researchers the value of reasoned and radical pathways of understanding society. During his old age, he seamlessly carried out his research and pedagogical activities with full vigor and vibrancy.

Professor Singh's ways of thought and writings have had a lasting effect on contemporary sociology and Indian society. He was articulate in his approach and did not believe in vague lines of thought. He believed in studying actual social facts and social lives that determine individual actions and attitudes, while wishing to see a constructively transformed society in his own lifetime. He undertook incisive and thorough studies of quintessential issues affecting Indian society. Many of his writings are as relevant and useful in the contemporary world as they were when they were first written.

With his death, India has lost a visionary sociologist whose contributions and endeavors for reorienting and modernizing Indian sociology can never be overlooked. His inerasable legacy has left a deep imprint in the hearts and minds of students in developing the spirit for research and inquisitive analytical study of themes confronting society. We will always remember him as a sociologist, teacher, philosopher, and man of impeccable intellectual integrity. ■

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> On the Urgency of (Re)Integrating with the Radical

by **S.A. Hamed Hosseini**, University of Newcastle, Australia



To develop transformative resistance, we need to search for the integration between activism and transformative scholarship.
Artwork by Hamed Hosseini.

C OVID-19 has shown that radical transformations are not only possible but unavoidable to prevent greater implosions. Living through a slow- or de-growth status – where collective “well-living” is gaining primacy over hedonistic well-being – has awakened us to the implausibility of returning to the old normal. Now is the time to quarantine our minds from the fatal cognitive virus of the capitalistic myth of “There Is No Alternative.” Though painful, lockdowns provide moments of reflection on where we are, how we have reached here, and what we can do to unite our creative imaginations and political actions to shape the post-pandemic world.

> Where are we?

In a nutshell, in the absence of worldwide radical, comprehensive actions, we humans are on the road to a full-fledged civilizational collapse. The collapse is most likely a spiral of cascading interrelated catastrophic events: regional climate calamities, global pandemics, economic recessions, severe food, water, and energy crises leading to mass displacements and unrests, global conflicts and civil wars, more severe climate catastrophes, and the acceleration of the current biodiversity downfall.

> How did we get here?

To cut a long story short, a specific form of “civilization” originated from European colonialism entangled with modern capitalism gained full global ascendancy in recent decades. This world civilization system is characterized by its foundational dependence on: (1) *Capital* replacing labor as the ultimate source of value; (2) *Carbon* – fossil fuels or more generally speaking, *extractivism*; (3) *Compulsive economic growth* through relentless commodification of socio-ecological relations and a multi-century mass appropriation of the commons, sustained through the constant promotion of consumerist cultures across the world; (4) *Coloniality*, i.e. the ongoing stratifying power relations and epistemes necessary for maintaining the integrity of intersectional hierarchies; and finally (5) *Corruptive politics*, energized by the rise of monopoly-finance capital,

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corporate-state interest-driven advances in surveillance, datafication, bio- and neuro-technology, and warfare. Let's call the above *five intrinsic characteristics*, the 5Cs.

The system is inherently crisis-prone since the 5Cs require an endless expansion of the planet's capacity. Since we have already passed the earth's biocapacity, and with no present technological solutions on the horizon that can retain this capacity, the same characteristics behind the ascendancy of modern civilization are now contributors to its demise.

> De-carbonization is not enough

Ending any of the above dependencies without challenging the rest of them is doomed. Take the examples of de-carbonization as the most popular solution propagated by progressive institutions. New technologies that harness renewable sources face serious socio-political and economic obstacles. Their rate of progression is too slow to save the planet. More importantly, they are perceived by sections of the ruling class as a potential means of extending capital's hegemony.

The so-called post-carbon policies only stretch the system's dependence on the rest of the 5Cs, instead of ending it. The underlying socioeconomic and biopolitical structures, on which the technological revolutions are based and to which they contribute, must be profoundly challenged so that meaningful transition can be owned and guided by the multitudes. This necessitates not only (1) *De-carbonization*, but also (2) *De-capitalization*, (3) *De-growth*, (4) *Decolonization*, and (5) *Deep democratization* of social institutions; i.e. the 5Ds of a global struggle to save organized life. Thus, de-carbonization, if perceived as an adequate solution, will function as a distraction from the rest of the equally important Ds.

> What can we, as activist academics, do?

The most noticeable form of the reductionist approach to addressing global crises is the recent resurrection of political technocracy. The more it fails the more it becomes authoritarian. Universities, as hotbeds of innovation and cutting-edge knowledge, are losing their autonomy to their corporate industry and business partners which now are often their major sources of support in the age of austerity. Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) is facing an identity crisis. It needs to find a non-reductionist discourse in which HASS can restore its lost historical purpose. A "radical transformative scholarship" needs to be reinvented to focus on liberating praxes for progressive alternatives (as showcased by the authors of *The Routledge Handbook of Transformative Global Studies*).

In response to ineffective technocratic solutions, we have recently witnessed an explosion of self-motivated commu-

nal creativities and grassroots projects pushing for more meaningful systemic transitions in a vast array of forms. The historical necessity of a deep civilizational shift is well understood by a growing number of 5Ds movements.

The 2020s can be regarded as the most pivotal decade in the most critical century in human history where "demanding the impossible" becomes the only "realistic" option for emerging revolutionary forces. The current conjuncture characterized by intensifying economic and ecological crises will most likely translate into unprecedented discontent. In our epoch, we have reached a status where anomalies between theory and reality can no longer be resolved without obtaining insights from radical forces on the ground.

However, these forces are diverse, unstructured, and fast-evolving, making them difficult to comprehend. Only recently, thanks to the pandemic-induced lockdowns and slowdowns, an unprecedented opportunity has emerged for these transformative forces to surface through online engagements with their broader populations. Despite the liberating potentialities of the 5Ds landscape, regrettably, it is still a marginal topic in HASS.

> The necessity of co-creating knowledge commons

The most striking question we face in our engagements with the 5Ds is how to "co-develop" an *inclusive yet dynamic knowledge of the emerging landscape of alternatives*; a knowledge that in turn empowers these transformational actors and practices and helps us reinvent our scholarships as transformative. There is no reason to believe that the intensification of crises will automatically result in the collapse of unproductive divisions in the global left. The expectation that out of the marketplace of contingent interactions between countless forms of the 5Ds, somehow magically a new paradigm will arise that ends capitalism before it ends planetary life ironically resembles the neoclassical myth of invisible hands and the trickle-down fairy tale.

In the current context where interests, rights, and needs of communities are undermined by the preferences of Capital, it remains vital for progressive socio-political endeavors, concerned with building sustainable, self-sufficient, just, and democratic futures, to resist and reverse the capitalist knowledge enclosures. Without submitting ourselves to a technocratic mentality in HASS, recent methodological advances in social informatics can be conscientiously employed to empower the liberating praxes on the ground. The power of big data can be harnessed to co-create "knowledge commons" with grassroots movements, to guide and energize an inclusive transition to post-5Cs eco-civilizations. ■

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> Beyond “Koyaanisqatsi”: Reimagining Civilization

by **Barry Gills**, University of Helsinki, Finland



The dominant templates of power and social organization in our civilization must be profoundly reimagined and radically altered in our future.

There is an emerging view in the present crisis, illustrated in recently burgeoning commentary across the globe, expressing a realization that our present form of world order and civilization has brought humanity and “nature” into a great crisis, and that we must act radically to transform the foundations. The combination, or “triple crisis,” of the three Cs – Climate, Capitalism, and COVID-19 – has brought forward a momentum to address the fundamental causes of this crisis.

> Living in a time of Koyaanisqatsi

The Hopi people of North America have an important myth with great relevance for our present situation: the myth of “Koyaanisqatsi,” often translated as “life out of balance,” “a form of life that should not exist,” or “a crazy life.” In this myth, human beings are custodians for all life, and our purpose is to maintain the balance among all forms of life, perpetually. To do so, we ourselves must maintain a way of life that ensures a harmony with all other forms of life. In Koyaanisqatsi however, human beings have “lost their head,” and run aimlessly towards a precipice of

destruction brought about by their own actions. Such a culture disregards the fundamental unity and interconnectedness of life. It forgets the sacredness of all life. It forgets its own true purpose, and it forgets the profound interdependence of human beings with other forms of life. Its actions are “mindless” and destructive. Only a truly profound spiritual awakening and cultural and material renewal can alter the course of such a culture, and save it and myriad other life forms from the great harm and destruction that Koyaanisqatsi will inevitably bring.

We are living in a time of Koyaanisqatsi. We have been under the spell of totalizing concepts, such as “progress,” “modernity,” “development,” and “globalization.” They have promised us a better future. They have promised us material prosperity, a future age of health, safety, freedom. The truth however, is that they have masked historical processes that have led to this present global crisis.

The study of the “fall of civilizations” and of “existential threats or challenges” to humanity is now increasingly academically legitimated and even becoming “popular.” That phenomenon is symptomatic of the situation we now find

ourselves in: i.e., that we are living through a “great implosion,” a “world system crisis,” a “general crisis” of our dominant form of civilization. Many causes can be identified for this “general crisis,” this “great decline,” which even threatens us with the “collapse” of civilization. Climate change is of course a central causal vector of this great crisis, but it is not the only one, and in many ways, climate change itself is the consequence of much more fundamental, underlying, and long-term historical processes. The historical processes that have induced this great crisis include the over-concentration of wealth (oligarchization); the over-exploitation of labor and “nature” (i.e., the over-extraction of value from human labor and from the natural world, thus increasing systemic entropy); parasitic and predatory accumulation of capital and wealth surplus and “under-investment” in socially useful and productive infrastructure; and a systemic logic of/obsession with commodification, marketization, and “economic growth.”

Our dominant economics, as both academic discipline and real practice, has perpetuated the delusion that somehow the economy is without ultimate biophysical foundations or limits. The environment or environmental economics is but a minor sub-field in mainstream economics, and all environmental problems created in the present by the dominant economic system are believed to be solvable in the future, primarily through technological innovation and via market-conforming principles and mechanisms. This blinkered and Panglossian worldview has already for decades caused seemingly endless complacency, delay, and deferral by the most powerful economic and political actors in the world in regard to radically addressing the changes necessary to avert impending climate and ecological catastrophe. This Panglossian worldview and the worship of the “market” has become the dominant faith of the age, and has been central to the globally hegemonic ideas of “neoliberalism,” “globalization,” and even “development” as understood and practiced across the globe.

Crisis means breakdown. Crisis means system failure. Crisis in the world today means an existential threat to humanity: the “fall” or even the collapse of our civilization, a civilization that globalization has supposedly made an unprecedented success.

> Koyaanisqatsi also holds the solution

What is the solution? Koyaanisqatsi holds the answer to our riddle. We need a “deep restoration” of our civilization, of our entire culture, both spiritual and material – a notion I elaborate in my article published in *Globalizations* in 2020. We need to “reimagine civilization.” The fundamental forms which constitute the dominant templates of power and social organization in our civilization: i.e., the state, capital, and the city must be profoundly reimaged and radically altered in our future. Humanity must accept its embeddedness in the web of life and fully recognize the reality of planetary boundaries, earth system dynamics, biophysical foundations and biophysical limits, ecological and climate change thresholds and tipping points, in what in reality is a unified global system of life. Our future course must consist of a “great restoration” of life on earth, in all its immense and beautiful diversity. Thus, it must also consist of a “great reversal” of the obsessions of universal commodification, marketization, and economic growth that have hitherto been dominating our collective material life. “Re-commoning” of the world, both material and social, will be central to this great transformation of civilization. Peace, both domestic and global, will likewise be an essential element in a renewed and reimaged civilization. The age of darkness of the past few centuries, rife with imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism, and patriarchal power, should now close.

History is written later, but the future is written now. The new worldview emerging in the context of the present global systemic crisis is in fact resonant with a very ancient worldview. The idea of perpetuating the lost pre-COVID-19 “normal” is but a great illusion. The idea of returning to “business as usual” is an inevitably catastrophic idea. Only a radical transformation of the fundamental forms of our civilization will be sufficient to avert future disaster. Transformative praxis of the many, by the many, and for the many, holds the only realistic promise and source of hope for our collective survival. Now there can be no more excuses, and no turning back. ■

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> Rastafari

and West Indian Reinvention

by **Scott Timecke**, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, and **Shelene Gomes**, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, and member of ISA Research Committee on Sociology of Migration (RC31)



A sign indicating the Rastafari presence in Shashamane, Ethiopia in 2009. Credit: Shelene Gomes.

The 1930 coronation of Ras Tafari Mekonnen as His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I was, in part, a cinematic display of pride celebrating a new era in Ethiopian life. 12,500 kilometers away in the Caribbean, poor Black Jamaicans ruled by the British Monarchy watched newsreel footage of the spectacle. For the first time they saw a Black king.

Archival records show that soon thereafter Jamaicans exchanged information, read newspapers and magazines, seeking to find out as much as they could about Ethiopia. This potent symbolism of Africa was captured by Marcus Garvey in his play *The Coronation of the King and Queen of Africa*. This expectant gaze was undoubtedly an organic response to the horrors of racial capitalism.

> A “counterculture of modernity”

The history of capitalism looks very different when written from within the Black experience. Although incomplete

and not beyond critique, Rastafarians are emblematic of what Paul Gilroy called a “counterculture of modernity.” Trinidadians C.L.R. James and Claudia Jones inverted the orthodox analysis of modernity to well illustrate the centrality of the West Indies to the growth of European capitalism; Rastafari are likewise emblematic of a tendency for emancipatory projects to be always already wrapped up in vernacular concepts. This is an inversion of the idea that social change and development are best driven by institutions or state-directed projects.

Indeed, Rastafari cosmology is a good example of how subordinated subjects who envisioned a new way of life, then struggled accordingly. As such, Caribbean-grounded and Rastafari imaginative reinventions like these, which have long influenced the evolution of Caribbean ethnography and social theory, can help inspire a decolonial sociology for this century.

> Elements of a decolonial sociology

To show that a discipline can be moved, let us start with the movement of people. Through combining data collected during multiple fieldwork visits between 2008 and

2015 with postcolonial West Indian social theorists, we have come to understand Rastafari spiritual practice as the product of situated organic intellectuals who sought to provide a sociological explanation for their conditions and everyday life. Indeed, in their core formation, Rastafari “cosmopolitics” provides a rich description of social worlds, as Walter Rodney recognized in Rastafari with whom he “grounded” in postcolonial Jamaica.

During the second half of the twentieth century, waves of organized Rastafari migrated from the Caribbean to Shashamane, Ethiopia. Settling on land granted by Haile Selassie I earmarked for Africans in the diaspora, this urban community represents a potent political statement about how the pan-African social imaginary can be realized. Ethiopia is also a place that for Rastafari signifies the origin of humankind, as well as a divine and sacred place of Zion. Accordingly, settlement is called “repatriation,” which to us signals self-reinvention and a concurrent agenda for social change on their terms.

Given this sacred site, Rastafari continue to pilgrimage to Shashamane and otherwise financially support the local community. This support is especially important to the survival, social improvement, and reproduction of Rastafari values in Ethiopia, and by extension the religious community’s very identity. The recovery of dignity and its connection to divinity is done in the wake of the horrors of a long experience of subjugation during colonialism. This “capitalism and colonialism” connection is not written from the perspective of the London metropole, but rather of persons moving from Kingston to Shashamane.

> Rastafari “cosmopolitics”

Not only do the Rastafari perceive Ethiopia to be a long-standing bastion of Christianity, but they appreciate it as the only African territory never to have been formally colonized by European powers. Building upon a preexisting idealization of Africa as a form of cultural resistance, Rastafari came to believe that Emperor Haile Selassie I was divine. The background to this belief stems from Caribbean peoples being well-versed in the Bible. Certainly Rastafarianism is also an outgrowth of West African-derived religious

practices that survived the Middle Passage. But it is also true that as religious organizations opened schools in the early twentieth century throughout Jamaica, Biblical imagery became well known to ordinary people.

Rather than secular organizing, it was through the reinterpretation of these doctrines that collective resistance to white supremacy took shape. In this reinterpretation we find an early organic attempt to decolonize the Christian practices that supported colonial oppression in the Caribbean.

Within this framework, Rastafari embrace a common humanity, inclusive of those “in the faith,” as they say, and those who have not become Rastafari. This response could be construed as an emerging Southern cosmopolitanism that adheres to an attitude of openness toward cultural multiplicity. Rastafari “openness,” we suggest, is grounded in an historical awareness of Caribbean sociality made out of the transcontinental plantation economy, its hierarchies, multicultural environment, and imaginative acts of self-fashioning. In this way it is a direct challenge to white supremacy.

By no means were Rastafari the first popular expression of pan-Africanism – Paul Gilroy, Hilary Beckles, and Robert A. Hill, among others, describe many previous efforts. Nevertheless, their everyday practices can help enrich the empirical and conceptual inquiry into what we call “ordinary solidarity.” Ordinary solidarity raises questions around what a sociological imagination can look like from a framework of Southern cosmopolitanism grounded in the Black experience.

As an example of ordinary solidarity, Rastafari “cosmopolitics” can help sociologists highlight the ways in which localized scenarios interconnect with global processes. By following the rich description offered by these pathways we think there is the potential to draw upon the Black experience to reinvent sociology by contributing toward a decentered, decolonial discipline well positioned to conceptualize the enduring and emerging inequalities of the twenty-first century. In this way the emancipatory potential of “grounded” West Indian social theory carries on. ■

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> Sri Lankan Sociology

in Global and Local Contexts

by **Siri Hettige**, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and member of ISA Research Committees on Sociology of Education (RC04), Poverty, Social Welfare and Social Policy (RC19), and Sociology of Youth (RC34)



Ceylon University College in 1921.
Credit: Creative Commons.

Ceylon University College 1921

As is well known, many non-western societies came under western colonial domination starting in the early sixteenth century. Sri Lanka, previously known as Ceylon, a small island in the Indian Ocean, was under the domination of three successive colonial powers – namely the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British – from 1505 until its independence from the British in 1948. The country underwent a process of wide-ranging transformation under colonialism, particularly during the 150 years of British rule. Among other things, the most relevant for this discussion is the change in its educational landscape, from a rudimentary school system dominated

by religious institutions to a more diverse general education system. Yet, no system of modern university education was introduced almost until the end of colonial rule, making it necessary for native elite youth desirous of higher education to travel overseas for such education. So there were no opportunities for upwardly mobile natives to acquire university education locally in diverse fields including sociology, a subject already widely taught in many European and other universities.

> The expansion of university education

Since university education was largely a postcolonial development,

the teaching of sociology had to wait till the establishment of a local university in the 1940s. With the increasing demand for university education that followed, several new universities were established in the following decades. Yet, the teaching of sociology remained confined to the University of Peradeniya until 1969, when the second department of sociology was established in Colombo, after more than two decades following independence.

It is significant that, following the setting up of the University of Peradeniya, a department of sociology under a newly appointed Chair was set up there in the early 1950s. It was

initially held by a sociologist from the United States, Professor Bryce Ryan. Since the medium of instruction was English, it was possible to use sociology texts available in English and widely used in western countries and elsewhere. Yet, the situation began to change within the next few years when significant postcolonial social changes followed. The democratic system of government that was established more than a decade prior to independence created opportunities for anti-colonial movements to articulate demands for decolonization and revival of native social and cultural institutions. The consequent change of medium of instruction from English to native languages in 1956, just eight years after independence, set in motion a process of social and cultural change with far-reaching consequences. The steady exodus of many members of Anglicized communities, including urban native elites, resulted in a significant brain drain from the country.

The conversion of two leading Buddhist monasteries in the suburbs of Colombo into two national universities in the mid-1950s led to a significant expansion of university education, beside other consequences. Facilitated by the expansion of the state sector since the 1950s owing to state-led development this trend continued in the next decades, with several more universities being established in different parts of the country, creating more opportunities for higher education and upward social mobility in a postcolonial society characterized by high levels of vertical and horizontal inequality. Given the prevailing low level of economic growth, this steady expansion of university education resulted in high levels of graduate unemployment.

> An insular sociology

The transition from English to native languages, over time, deprived mostly monolingual students of the ability to use texts in English. Though certain institutional arrangements were made later to publish translations of key sociology texts into native languages, resources and other constraints prevented the continuation of this practice. Thus, most of the students were largely confined to lecture notes in local languages. In the next few decades, most of the students became increasingly alienated from original sociology texts widely used elsewhere. Yet, most of the sociology graduates found employment as diverse functionaries in state institutions irrespective of the quality of their training. While some academics continued to maintain contact with overseas universities by way of postgraduate training and exchange visits, others remained disconnected from international academic encounters such as participation in academic meetings or publishing their work in standard academic journals. The trends mentioned above have persisted over time to this day. The National Association of Sociology established in the 1980s under the leadership of Ralf Peiris, the first Ceylonese Professor of Sociology at the first university remains active but attracts a minority of academics from a few local universities. Moreover, very few Sri Lankan sociologists have been members of the International Sociological Association (ISA). The vast majority of sociologists remain unconnected to the ISA and national sociology associations even in the region. Yet, they remain active in teaching, carry out research on local issues and contribute to locally published journals, while graduates from local universities often find government employment.

What is evident from the above is that, in postcolonial Sri Lanka, the political economy of anti-colonial nationalism has facilitated the continuation of enclaves of teaching and research in sociology to a large degree independent of other academic communities elsewhere, be it in the Global North or in the rest of the Global South, in spite of a process of globalization of private education that has enabled many outside the public education system to find alternative education and career opportunities. It is this latter group, often coming from more resourceful backgrounds that remains connected to the process of circulation through private education circuits transcending national boundaries. Yet, most of the latter have tended to be in areas of STEM education, not so much in liberal arts including sociology.

The development of Sri Lankan sociology has been clearly shaped by the changes during and following colonial rule. This fits well with the academic discourses around sociology of knowledge contributed to by both classical as well as more recent social theorists, notably Karl Marx (1844), Max Weber (1947), Max Scheler (1960), Wilhelm Dilthey (1958), Karl Mannheim (1936), Norbert Elias (1956), Robert Merton (1957) and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), among others. The processes of production and dissemination of knowledge have been shaped by the evolving sociocultural context in the country over time. The present tenuous relationship between international sociology and Sri Lankan sociology is a reflection of the conditions under which sociologists in Sri Lanka carry out their work, in their particular sociocultural and institutional settings. ■

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> Sri Lankan Sociology: A Glance Across Time

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The development of Sri Lankan sociology obviously does not follow a clear-cut tradition in sociology unlike that practiced in Europe or America. It is a high blend of sociology and anthropology, with a significant skewing towards anthropology. Two reasons for this are obvious: One is that Sri Lanka was a British colony where its university education was founded by British educators, following the model of the British university system where anthropology was a thriving discipline in the social sciences. The other is that the country already was a center of interest for missionaries and travelers, offering unique beauty, history, and social systems; for any scholar who had an anthropological eye, Sri Lankan society and culture offered a rich laboratory.

However, the teaching of sociology as a subject at the university level, which began as early as 1947 at the University of Peradeniya (the first full-fledged residential university in Sri Lanka), and the contribution made by some leading British and European sociologists and anthropologists to teaching and research made a significant contribution to the development of a Sri Lankan sociology (and/or anthropology). Some renowned first- and second-generation scholars are still active and have substantially enriched the field, producing sociological work of great value. Some of them have continued to function as mainstream anthropologists; criss-

crossing the boundaries between sociology and anthropology seems to be a notable feature of Sri Lankan sociology even today.

> The evolution of a “sociology of Sri Lanka”

Much of the sociological work that has appeared over the last six to seven decades has been in the form of local studies either engaging with macro sociological theoretical debates, or resorting to micro studies, or staying within the boundaries of “middle-range theories,” if I may use the terminology introduced by Robert Merton (1968). Many of the early or second-generation sociologists very consciously based their work on the existing international body of sociological theory and engaged in its application, testing, and questioning at a theoretical level, making a noteworthy contribution to a “sociology of Sri Lanka.” The contribution of Edmund Leach (1961), who served in the Sociology Department of the University of Peradeniya, to the then-ongoing debate on the “super structural dominance of economy,” or Tissa Fernando’s (1972) work on the 1971 youth insurrection in Sri Lanka that viewed the event within the frame of Vilfredo Pareto’s work on the “transformation of elites,” or Laksiri Jayasuriya’s (2000) contribution on neoliberalism and welfare policy, among many others, fall within this tradition of serious theoretical work within Sri Lankan sociology. When examining the con-

tributions made by later Sri Lankan sociologists, it appears that much of the attention has gone into changing social phenomena in Sri Lanka, such as caste and class, agrarian relations, the political system, gender relations, religion and culture, as well as migration and family networks. A clear shift in focus towards emerging and prevailing social issues that have a serious impact on the individual, society, and different social groups can be seen in recent years. During the last five decades, this sociology of social issues seems to have established itself as “Sri Lankan sociology” among both academia and the general readership.

> A “sociology of social issues”

Much of the work falling within this particular “sociology of social issues” seems to have followed the sociological tradition introduced during early American sociology, for instance, W.F. Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* (1943), or Frederic Thrasher’s *The Gang* (1927), or Florian Znaniecki and W.I. Thomas’s *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918), all of which contributed immensely to the development of a theoretical discourse on locally-based micro social issues, rather than the European theoretical sociology or the mid-twentieth-century American sociology with strong philosophical foundations. A great part of the sociological work published in Sri Lanka today is based on data gathered through extensive fieldwork,

“During the last five decades, the sociology of social issues seems to have established itself as ‘Sri Lankan sociology’ among both academia and the general readership”

both at the qualitative and quantitative level, focusing on a variety of social issues that have emerged in the Sri Lankan society today; however, although not entirely devoid of some theoretical basis, it often lacks the theoretical rigor and conceptual robustness expected of scholarly work. This situation has led to the production of an immense body of sociological literature that almost represents a style of “journalistic sociology.” Nevertheless, it is important to add that the popularity of such studies among the general public, especially because they do not entangle the reader in serious theoretical debates, cannot be undervalued in getting wider public attention for sociological work.

The majority of Sri Lankan universities today are engaged in teaching sociology; however, a notable variation prevails at the level of teaching as well as in the subject matter in focus. The consequences of social processes including the 1956

change in the State Language Policy (which made the language of the majority population, Sinhala, the only state language, giving no recognition to Tamil, the language of the minority populations, and English, the only international language used in the country), the acute brain drain that followed, and the change of the medium of instruction in the school system from English to vernacular languages creating a new generation deprived of the opportunity to learn an international language and access global knowledge are still visible in the production of sociological knowledge. Nevertheless, given the enormous systemic and structural changes the society is experiencing and the numerous strategies adopted by people in coping with these everyday realities, the diversity within the emerging body of sociological work is certainly inspirational.

The question, however, is: “Can such a body of work concerning the

‘sociology of everyday life’ be considered ‘sociology’?” Max Weber in his *Science as a Vocation* (1919) writes, “Nowadays in circles of youth there is a widespread notion that science has become [...] a calculation involving only the cool intellect and not one’s heart and soul.” Sociology is not only about seeing, interpreting, and commenting but about “ideas” emerging on the basis of “hard work.” This hard work certainly would be facilitated by knowledge founded by our predecessors. The lack of such theoretical rigor, which is also a consequence of other factors, including language ability, availability of resources, and the commitment towards deep learning of a real science may obscure the difference between everyday sociology and everyday journalism. It should be the concerted effort of sociologists in Sri Lanka to save the discipline of sociology from deep-seated mediocrity while there is still time. ■

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> Reflecting on Peace, Conflict, and Violence

by **Kalinga Tudor Silva**, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka



Displaced Tamil civilians moving from LTTE-held territory to territory held by Sri Lankan armed forces during the last phase of war in 2009.

Sri Lankan sociology began with ethnographic and historical approaches to understanding a stable and largely peaceful society by local and international researchers during the 1960s. These studies tried to unravel the underlying principles shaping durable institutions like kinship, land tenure, religion, and caste. Almost taken by surprise and unprepared to grapple with the emerging realities, these researchers became confronted with diverse forms of violent social conflict in the decades that followed. This essay examines the nature of violent conflict in Sri Lanka from the 1970s, how researchers approached it from diverse viewpoints, the challenges encountered, and what lessons we can draw from these studies for facilitating peace.

> Acute and chronic violence

The violence that erupted in Sri Lanka since the 1970s took many shapes. These ranged from anti-state political uprisings by Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), lit. People's Liberation Front, a Marxist-style youth rebel movement in Southern

Sri Lanka producing unprecedented state repression in 1971 and from 1987 to 1989; the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed ethno-nationalist separatist movement among Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka producing a protracted war from 1983 to 2009 causing serious human right violations on both sides; a brutal outbreak of ethnic riots by Sinhala mobs against Tamil civilians in July 1983; and the orgy of violence by suspected Islamist terrorists targeting tourists and Christians on April 21 Easter Sunday of 2019. As violence became entrenched, it took chronic and acute forms in the hands of law enforcement agents as well as their opponents. All these conflicts posed serious threats to national security. There were also regular episodes of post-election violence in each successive national election since the 1970s, usually targeting the losers. In the words of Jonathan Spencer "violence in Sri Lanka is often an intensification of normal politics rather than a total departure from everyday politics as such."

Most of this violence was identity-driven, fueled by a progressively one-

track mind anchored in a monolithic identity, be it ethnic, religious, class, or caste. Identity conflicts called for sociological analysis not only because they had some continuity with their subject matter in the previous era, but also because they were not amenable to strictly economic or political analysis pursued by related disciplines. Nationalist politics driving the post-independence Sri Lankan state was increasingly appropriated by the Sinhala-Buddhist elite in the name of the ethnoreligious majority comprising over 70% of the population. Counter-mobilizations by Tamil and Muslim minorities called for an understanding of the dynamic interplay between identity, interests, and collective mobilizations in a postcolonial setting with diverse ethno-nationalist moorings.

> Undermining the sociological enterprise

These developments also posed serious challenges to sociology and anthropology in particular. The dominant Sinhala-Buddhist ideology, for instance, sought to suppress any critical engagements from within. For in-

stance, *Buddhism Betrayed?* (1992) by S.J. Tambiah raised the paradox of Buddhism, a strictly non-violent doctrine, being instrumentalized to provoke violence against Tamils. The book was banned in Sri Lanka and a number of propaganda pieces countering it in Sinhala were produced by Sinhala nationalist scholars not only attacking its author, an internationally recognized Sri Lankan anthropologist from a Protestant Tamil background, but also the discipline itself. This mindset also provided the context for a whole generation of Sri Lankan sociologists, including Gananath Obeyesekere, H.L. Seneviratne, Kitsiri Malalgoda, Valentine Daniel, and Chandra Jayawardena to migrate overseas and continue their critical research on Sri Lanka from outside the country. Only a handful of sociologists, spearheaded by Newton Gunasinghe, opted to continue the battle from within. Often the positionality of the researcher came into conflict with hegemonic nationalism attacking any contestations from within or from outside. Similarly, the LTTE violently reacted against any dissent from Tamil intellectuals, branding them traitors to the Tamil struggle. Thus the conflict dynamics undermined the sociological enterprise itself, making detached objective analysis difficult, if not altogether impossible.

As the war progressed violence became more entrenched, with sections of security forces, civil militia, armed gangs, and drug smugglers working in

collusion or conflict with each other depending on the context. The war finally ended in 2009 but violence has continued in the form of a wave of anti-Muslim hostilities instigated by militant Buddhist monks from 2012 to 2020, the devastating Easter Sunday attacks by suspected Islamist groups on April 21, 2019, and the counterattacks of May 13 targeting innocent Muslims in selected areas. Apart from physical violence, there has been property destruction, intimidation, threats, coercion, hate campaigns using mass/electronic media, and the routinization of discriminatory practices by state agencies and civilians alike. As many researchers have pointed out, a culture of impunity has gradually set in.

> The damage of majoritarian policies

The state policy relating to official language is a case in point. The Sinhala-only policy promulgated by the pro-Sinhala Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front) elected with massive popular support in 1956 sought to overcome the disadvantages of the common man vis-a-vis the privileged English-speaking class who ruled the country from the colonial era onwards. The official language policy actually alienated the Tamils from the Sri Lankan state, also limiting their capacity to enter coveted state-sector employment. The majoritarian bias of the state failed to make the Sri Lankan elite realize that this would inevi-

tably marginalize the Tamil speakers. Sociology was emerging as a subject in Sri Lanka at the time and research on language policy was largely conducted by Sinhala nationalist scholars who supported the official policies. The downside of this policy became evident some years later and a more concessionary approach to the use of Tamil emerged within the state itself. However, by then the damage had already been caused.

State policies in education, colonization, and development followed the same pattern as in official languages. They were clearly designed to benefit the Sinhala majority with mainstream Sinhala political parties engaged in a process of competitive outbidding in pampering the majority community. Structural and cultural dynamics often worked in unison to produce legitimacy for the spiral of violence engulfing the island nation.

As for implications for peace building, any ad hoc interventions are unlikely to succeed. This is because a certain policy architecture has developed in post-independence Sri Lanka with built-in mechanisms to sabotage any tampering with the entrenched biases. While small changes can sometimes produce catalytic shifts, we are in a situation where any concession to minorities will be aborted. This is the main challenge for Sri Lankan sociology here and now. ■

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> Analyzing Violence: Sri Lankan State Formation

by **Farzana Haniffa**, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

July 1983 has now become a pivotal date in Sri Lanka that many look back on as signaling the beginning of the ethnic conflict. It is seen as the point that exemplifies the breakdown of relations between a mostly Sinhala southern government and Sri Lanka's Tamils, and the beginning of Tamil out-migration and diaspora. It is also the point when, as Pradeep Jeganathan also discussed, the discipline of anthropology begins to take an interest in understanding "violence."

There were several publications in the immediate aftermath of the violence of 1983. James Manor's 1984 volume *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis* saw contributions by a large group of anthropologists, many of whom were in Sri Lanka that July. Gananath Obeyesekere, Jonathan Spencer, Elizabeth Nissam and Roderick Stirrat contributed mini essays to the volume, all making important points. Stanley Tambiah followed just two years later and then Bruce Kapferer and much later, Valentine Daniel and Pradeep Jeganathan.

> The backdrop to 1983

The United National Party (UNP) had been in power since 1977 and economic liberalization had been introduced to the country in 1978. The UNP regime's authoritarianism was evident in the immediate aftermath of the 1977 elections (when the post-election anti-Tamil violence was permitted to continue unabated for close to one month). This trend increased and culminated a year before the riots in the Referendum of 1982 that permitted the sitting government – voted in with a two-third

majority – to stay in power for an additional term without an election. The opposition to the referendum was significant and dealt with quite harshly by the UNP, mobilizing the large membership of its trade union, the Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS). The JSS itself had been created to undermine the Left parties' support base within the trade union movement and its ideology was not one of socialism but of nationalism. The UNP's threatening and terrorizing of all those in opposition, including the judiciary, is documented by Stanley Tambiah (1986) and Gananath Obeyesekere (1984) as the backdrop to the violence of 1983.

> Anthropological analyses of the violence

1983 also spawned a slightly different set of writings within the country. Jani De Silva has documented the manner in which knowledge production in the aftermath of 1983 resulted in the important volumes *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (1984) and *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka* (1987). The former attempted to dismantle the myth of (Sinhala) ethnic superiority, and the latter critiqued both Sinhala and Tamil nationalism and the structural features that enabled both. The social science critiques were a response to the "riot" with the hope that they would influence the discourse and policy.

Anthropologists seemed to also want to find a more substantive "cultural" explanation for the scale and brutality of violence that was not satisfactorily explained by merely describing the creation of the political and economic conditions of possibility for the event.

Scholars looked for ways to explain the anger and violence of the (mainly) Sinhalese mobs that one anthropologist characterized as "otherwise peaceful people." Therefore we have analyses like that of Bruce Kapferer and to an extent that of Jonathan Spencer (although Spencer disagrees with Kapferer's characterization). These attempt to see elements of a collective Sinhala consciousness as providing an explanatory framework for the nature of violence perpetrated in the space created by the UNP's political excesses. Kapferer described the violence as demonic and argued that one explanation for the violence was the particular ontology of Sinhala consciousness that was similar to that which emerged in the demonic world of exorcism. In a complicated analysis that preserved the context in which the violence occurred, as well as the class antagonisms mobilized towards perpetrating violence, Kapferer likened the violence itself to an exorcism. Spencer saw it slightly differently as an extension of the manner in which politics enabled a release from the extraordinary decorum that was demanded of everyday social life among the Sinhalese. Spencer further argued that the attacks were due to the fact that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "winning" in the north was them going "off script" from the stories told by the temple chronicle *Mahavamsa*. The *Mahavamsa*, a foundational text for Sinhala consciousness regarding the Tamils as well as for Sinhala history-writing, consistently depicted Sinhala kings as decimating "Tamil" invaders.

Valentine Daniel sees Sinhala and Tamil approaches to the past as pertinent to an understanding of the fe-

rocity of the violence. Daniel argues that one of the structural conditions for the violence may be found in the discordance that stems from the different dispositions of two sets of peoples towards the past. The one he terms “Epistemic” and the other “Ontic.” Daniel concludes with the powerful and still persuasive insight that the refusal or the failure of recognition of the others’ mode of being embedded in these two orientations towards the self, and the anxieties and the “radical doubt” about one’s own identity caused as a result of this lack of recognition, can be understood as leading to the violence.

> A politics of cultivated antagonisms

Both Daniel and Kapferer were critiqued for their “culturalist” and es-

sentiaizing frameworks, with many calling for a better disaggregated analysis of who the perpetrators were and how they were organized. What is important to note however was that this way of thinking and writing about 1983 was in itself a way of understanding Sri Lanka’s politics of the time as essentially influenced by the antagonisms of Tamil and Sinhala nationalism. Such an analysis precluded an understanding of the structural features that seemed to necessitate the creation and maintenance of such agonistic and dyadic relations for the purpose of politics.

The productivity of this line of inquiry into violence was depleted with the far more extraordinary violence of the war. As a result, what these anthropologists saw – cultivated animosities taking on the meaning and

status of primordial enmities – was not pushed further, possibly impeding a better understanding of a political system that requires the asserting of antagonisms. Today we are about a decade into the cultivation of another set of antagonisms – between Sinhala and Muslims – and have already experienced an attack of horrifying magnitude by Islamic militants. We are currently unable to understand these developments other than through frames of international terrorism. It is timely that we revisit the production of knowledge regarding 1983 as a way, perhaps, of learning from that experience of cultivating enmities. ■

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> Blurred Boundaries: Anthropology and Sociology in Sri Lanka

by **Premakumara de Silva**, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, and member of ISA Research Committee on Sociology of Religion (RC22)

Sri Lanka has a long tradition of sociological and anthropological inquiry, which is evident from the extensive work done by both foreign and Sri Lankan sociologists and anthropologists on aspects of Sri Lankan society and culture. Their noteworthy contribution to this tradition is evident from the useful bibliographical surveys of Ian Goonetilleke (1979), and published field research by Liz Nissan (1987), Bruce Kapferer (1990), Michael Roberts (1997) Tudor Silva (1990, 2000), Susantha Goonatilake (2001), Sasanka Perera (2005, 2014), Siri Hettige (2010), and Siri Gamage (2014). However, in this brief essay, I concentrate on the interlinkages between sociology and anthropology in Sri Lanka. Highlighted in this essay are certain areas in which anthropologists and sociologists have done research.

> The anthropology / sociology overlap

It has been over 60 years since anthropology and sociology were introduced as areas of study at Sri Lankan universities. There is no doubt that sociology is one of the most popular subjects among university students today. A remarkable fea-

ture of Sri Lankan sociology is that a clear division between anthropology and sociology is not maintained. Academics trained at home or overseas in anthropological and sociological traditions often work in departments of sociology at Sri Lankan universities. Like many other sociologists in Sri Lanka I myself was trained in both traditions. The other remarkable feature is that the great majority of Sri Lankan sociologists cum anthropologists have concentrated their research efforts on Sri Lanka itself and few have done research elsewhere. S.J. Tambiah's work on Thailand (Buddhism); Chandra Jayawardena on Guinea and Fiji (plantation workers); and Arjun Gunaratne on Nepal (kinship) are notable exceptions. As far as subject content is concerned, it is difficult to separate them, since almost all the sociology departments in Sri Lankan universities have developed their undergraduate and postgraduate level course contents with a mixture of both disciplines, often disregarding boundaries separating sociology and anthropology. Students ultimately receive their degree certificates under the sociology label. However, some argue that currently what is taught and produced in the name of anthropology and sociology is not comparable to international standards.

> A historical overview

From a historical point of view, anthropological and sociological interest in Sri Lankan culture and society began to grow during two different historical periods: anthropology emerged in the colonial period, while sociology flourished in the post-colonial period. While anthropology was very much connected to colonial rule, sociology initially evolved under the guidance of an American scholarly intervention, largely due to the appointment of Bryce Ryan as the first professor of sociology at the University of Ceylon in the early 1950s. The origin of the anthropological research tradition in Sri Lanka can be traced back to at least the British colonial period. The ethnographic work of Seligman on the aboriginal Vadda community in 1911 can be considered as the beginning of this tradition. During the First and Second World Wars, Sri Lanka lagged behind in terms of anthropological research. Soon after Sri Lanka's independence, in 1949, the teaching of sociology as a subject was introduced and by 1959 the first full degree program was awarded. In the mid-1950s there were many texts of great ethnographic/sociological value produced by Sri Lankan and foreign scholars. This was built upon by later sociologi-

cal and anthropological work by such scholars as Bryce Ryan (1953), Ralph Peiris (1956), Edmond Leach (1960, 1961), Gananath Obeyesekere (1966), Nur Yalman (1967), Kitsiri Malalgoda (1976), H.L. Seneviratne (1978), and Bruce Kapferer (1983). Much of anthropology/sociology in post-independence Sri Lanka did not directly address the issues of the newly emerging “nation-state” of Sri Lanka but rather focused on issues like caste, kinship, land tenure, and popular religion.

The “foreign” anthropologists who conducted much of their research on Sri Lanka came mainly from British, American, and Australian universities. There have been several outstanding contributions by foreign anthropologists to the study of Sri Lankan culture, society, and politics. However, their anthropological work was greatly influenced by the work of the two most prominent anthropologists Sri Lanka has produced, Gananath Obeyesekere and S.J. Tambiah, both of whom came into prominence during their academic career in top-ranking North American universities. The local anthropological/sociological tradition was mainly built upon the work

of these anthropologists, although much subsequent research done by both foreign and local scholars as well as by researchers of Sri Lankan origin based in other countries has made significant contributions to exploring hitherto neglected and emerging social and cultural issues in Sri Lanka.

> Changing concerns

Since the early 1980s, Sri Lankan sociology/anthropology has shifted attention to study group violence in Sri Lankan society – intra-societal violence involving ethno-religious communities as well as disadvantaged groups in society like marginalized youth. The post-independence generations of sociologists and anthropologists who made significant contributions in this area included Newton Gunasinghe, Siri Hettige, and Tudor Silva, who had just returned following their doctoral studies in foreign universities and began to explore new areas of research such as inequality in rural Sri Lanka, youth identity and violence, and public health. It is significant that the work of the above and other scholars in recent years has been influenced by the theoretical and methodological insights of

long-established anthropological and sociological traditions.

An attempt has been made in this short essay to provide an account of the development of anthropology and sociology as fields of study, research, and teaching in Sri Lankan universities, since the establishment of the first department of sociology in 1949 until more recent times. Today eleven out of fifteen universities in the country offer at least undergraduate courses in these fields. The coexistence of anthropological and sociological traditions in teaching courses, research, and publications is evident to varying degrees across the university system. What is noteworthy is the considerable diversity among academic institutions in terms of quality of teaching, research, and publications and the connection of academics to long-standing traditions in both anthropology and sociology. It is against this background that the work of academics in these fields is likely to face many challenges in Sri Lanka in maintaining a set of shared standards in teaching, research, and dissemination in a complex and dynamic local and global environment. ■

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> Globalization and Dependency:

The Plastic Waste Issue in China

by **Pinar Temocin**, Hiroshima University, Japan



Plastic waste in the Philippines. Credit: Adam Cohn/flickr.com.
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Globalization can be seen as an integral process where transformation takes place in the social, cultural, and economic spheres of society. It affects both developed and developing regions and nations from micro to macro level. Globalization has brought significant changes through posing challenges to our lives. The environment has also been affected by it due to new forms of economic governance.

A focus on world realities under globalization allows us to witness the embedded nature of dominance. The concept of dependency as part of the globalization process (or globalized world order) sheds light on the international system

that is based on the compromise between economically vital “core” countries (so-called developed nations) and poor “peripheral” countries (so-called developing countries). In the ecological cycle we see a correlation between dependency and resource exploitation. This has generated a non-linear relationship where developing countries seem dependent upon developed ones in their waste trade (instead of the other way around). This could be regarded as a consequence of globalization.

Globalization has helped the Global South and North to be more connected, through increased economic ties. However, the relationship has become more complex than

ever when considering its dual trajectories. In this sense, a closer look at the waste hierarchy (especially the plastic waste issue in the poverty cycle in China) would be an ideal example to show how this unbalanced relationship functions in reality.

> China's plastic waste issue

The plastic waste trade in China (considered a “crisis” by some) is one of the best illustrations of how dependency operates in the new world system. China is the world's largest importer and processor of plastic waste (as a top destination for recyclable trash) in the global waste industry, accounting for 56% of the global market.

The interdependency of countries can have problematic structural effects. Waste exporting countries get rid of the consequences of their “waste addiction” through cheap alternatives and approaches that focus on disposal out of sight rather than recycling. Needless to say, these countries profit from this waste status quo while enjoying better environmental conditions. Waste importing countries (e.g. Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and others) suffer from harmful health conditions, exploitation of labor, environmental pollution, and such. Even worse, the importing countries seem to be unable to form a solid regulation or control mechanism to restrict waste imports due to their supposed economic benefits. Although the waste trade could be seen as an economic opportunity for developing nations, there is disharmony between the opportunity and the toxic reality. China, as a developing nation, can be seen as a “guinea pig” for this disharmony that particularly affects its own environment and the public health of its population through increased toxicity (consequently violating the right to live in a healthy, clean, and safe environ-

ment). Furthermore, it also affects the rights of the workers who separate plastic wastes from foreign countries in such poor conditions.

Through the export of waste, people in developed and industrial countries (such as the US, Japan, Australia, etc.) enjoy a cleaner and more protected environment and a healthier way of life while Chinese workers (struggling with plastic pollution) and children (not attending school due to their work in the plastic recycling sector) suffer from being part of the waste industry. The discarded material flow from the developed countries to the developing world to be processed out of sight (instead of developing domestic recycling industries and policies) has lately resulted in the fact that poverty-ridden countries are the ones facing a socio-environmental crisis because of the self-interest and waste exportation of industrialized countries.

> Conclusion

Although China's plastic waste recycling issue seemingly has been silenced or masked by the country's economic growth over the past years it can be considered a globalization or global inequality issue where the continued hegemony over the sorting and recycling management of waste can be witnessed. Rather than contributing to development within the importing countries, the global waste trade with its unequal impacts creates a “recycling battle” or “plastic struggle” caused by the garbage of rich nations in China (and other Southeast Asian countries). Furthermore, it reflects the established economic and waste reality in which the Global North's control over the developing countries has resulted in a blockage which does not allow the South to make progress on its own path towards a fairer world order. ■

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