

# GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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with Dasten Julián

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Global Inequalities  
and the Pandemic

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COVID-19:  
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- > Sociologists in the Civic-Political Arena
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- > On the Capability to Take Care of the World
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# > Editorial

**I**n this issue of *Global Dialogue* the section 'Talking Sociology' takes up the current developments in Chile. In this interview conducted by Johanna Sittel and Walid Ibrahim, Dasten Julián, a most renowned researcher working in the intersecting fields of sociology and history reflects on political developments, social protests and precarious work in his country, and on the relation between social science and society.

For the past one and a half years the COVID-19 pandemic has led to fundamental changes in everyday life as well as to new economic, social and political crises. Since the beginning of its outbreak *Global Dialogue* has strived to give insight into the developments around the globe. For this issue, Karin Fischer has organized a symposium systematically reflecting on the pandemic and global inequalities with contributions from India, Peru, the UK and South Africa. Although the pandemic affects the world population, "we are not all sitting in the same boat." The development, marketization, and (lacking) availability of the vaccines, and the effects of the pandemic in terms of health or education show and increase global inequalities between poor and rich countries, the Global South and Global North, vulnerable groups already suffering from ecological or economic crises and those groups who can afford to protect themselves.

Our second symposium discusses the remarkable change in the relation between the economy and the state. Scholars promoting the concept of the Foundational Economy criticize the economic liberalization of the last decades, analyze the limits of the dominant idea of growth, and plead for new modes of provisioning in the fields of health-care, education, food, public transfer, etc. combined with

infrastructures shaped and controlled by democratic institutions. Reflecting on the changing role of the state in the face of the pandemic, authors discuss about how far this may affect the relation of economy and politics in the long run, the direction in terms of authoritarian or democratic tendencies this may lead to, and to what extent sociology is challenged by the new state interventionism.

In the theoretical section Arthur Bueno reconstructs the neoliberal era of the last decades that caused economic and social crises as well as crises of subjectivity. By focussing on depression he discusses the turn from self-entrepreneurship to exhaustion, and from self-realization to alienation, as well as the influence of protest movements and authoritarian politics, and future perspectives.

The artist Jenni Tischer contributes to the public debate on essential work in the pandemic by explaining two of her collages aiming to make invisible work more visible.

The section on COVID-19 outlines some challenges for sociology, with Margaret Abraham analyzing how the pandemic goes along with increasing domestic violence, Karina Batthyány and Esteban Torres taking up the topic of social inequalities, and Mahmoud Dhaouadi discussing the growing influence of hate speech, while Alejandro Pelfini focusses on the society's learning processes.

Last but not least, the 'Open Section' offers theoretical reflections, in particular concerning competing conceptions of humanity, as well as the discussion of recent events and contemporary developments in different countries regarding violence on the one hand and care on the other. ■

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

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In this *interview with Dasten Julián*, we discuss the recent mass protests in Chile, the following process of establishing a new constitution, and what role engaged sociologists can play here in the face of pervasive precarity.



The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and increased existing inequalities of wealth and income, gender and race – within national borders, but particularly drastically on a global scale. The development, marketization, and (lacking) availability of the vaccines, and the effects of the pandemic in terms of health or education show and increase **global inequalities** between poor and rich countries, the Global South and Global North, vulnerable groups already suffering from ecological or economic crises and those groups who can afford to protect themselves.



This symposium deals with questions about the relationship between the state and economy. Contributors address how respective state responses to the pandemic will also influence future forms of governance and how already observable forms of **state interventionism** can be understood. Is there a new form of state interventionism in the making, and if so, will it take on authoritarian or democratic characteristics?



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“In many cases the economy grows through human suffering and environmental disaster”

Francesco Laruffa



# > Sociology in Moments of Crisis

## An Interview with Dasten Julián



| Dasten Julián.

Dr. **Dasten Julián** is an academic and researcher at the Institute of History and Social Sciences, the Austral University of Chile. He is currently working as principal researcher on the project “Precariousness of work in the southern macro-zone of Chile: Intersections, territories and resistance in the Maule, Ñuble, Biobío and La Araucanía regions” (2020-2023) funded by the National Research and Development Agency of Chile. He is also a research associate at the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP) of the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (South Africa). Dasten Julián graduated from the Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena, Germany and works on topics such as: precarization of work and life, union strategies and organization, extractivism, public sociology, as well as work in the Global South in general. His research is carried out in close collaboration with civil society, trade unions and NGOs.

Here Dr. Julián is interviewed by **Johanna Sittel** and **Walid Ibrahim**, research associates at the Department of Industrial and Economic Sociology of the Friedrich-Schiller-University in Jena, Germany.

**How did the 2019 social protests come about in Chile? The protests were sparked by a hike in public transportation fares. Was it just a small spark that broke the camel's back, or is there more to it than that, as the state of public services and conflicts says a lot about the state of a society?**

The social protests have a historical origin in the Constitution imposed by the civil-military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990), with the systematic annihilation of democratic forces and the realization of a fraudulent plebiscite in 1980. At the Latin American level, Chile is the only country that retains a constitution made under military dictatorship. Its persistence in social life has a series of expressions due to the fact that it paved the way for the introduction of neoliberal policies in a brutal and total manner. In this sense, for five decades Chilean society has been intensively precarized and plundered, through a process of unbridled and unprecedented commodification.

This has been part of a political consensus between the two coalitions that have governed Chile since 1990, which have sustained the primacy of the neoliberal or-

der on two axes: trust in the market as an entity of welfare allocation and social integration, and the Pinochet Constitution as an obstruction to the democratization of the political system. This period (1990-2019) was called the “democratic transition,” which implied a process of gradual democratization to recover certain bases of coexistence and democratic organization of society. However, the system and the institutional political actors blocked the channels of participation and active decision-making by the majorities, while the economic model reached high growth rates.

A systematic process of distrust and delegitimization of the political system was incubated, with a profound distancing from the citizenry. Processes of economic collusion, cases of irregular campaign financing, impunity in courts of justice for businessmen, etc., were some of the symptoms of a society trapped by networks of power cemented during the dictatorship. The slogan “Chile woke up” shows this moment of revelation and rebellion, of conscience, identification, and power, just as the government’s “declaration of war,” the violation of human rights (8,827 formal complaints in courts of justice) and the imprisonment of demonstrators (up to 27,432 of them) synthesizes the authoritarian, conservative, and military sense that had prevailed in formal politics.

Protests in Chile also combine very diverse subjectivities and geographies. Young people, women, the elderly, indigenous peoples, migrants, etc., develop repertoires of alliance in spontaneity and coordination. The present and the past have converged through a generational encounter of political memory in private and public spaces, the political has manifested itself in aesthetics, in artistic creativity, in music, in the streets, rural areas, as well as in assemblies, conversations, the occupation of virtual spaces, etc. As a society, we have had a cultural, political, and symbolic reencounter of great depth, which is intertwined with “dignity” as an objective, as a custom. Therefore, what is exposed in this encounter is the original and constitutive element of Chilean society, its social contract, its foundations, its Constitution.

***How does the process of elaboration of the Constitution look at this moment? Is there any actor that stands out here? Do social sciences play a role or do legal experts dominate?***

A National Plebiscite was held on April 26, 2020, one year ago. More than 7 million people participated. Over 78% of the voters, that is, some 5.8 million people, ratified the need for a new Constitution, as well as the need for it to be carried out by people elected to an Assembly (Constituent Convention), without the participation of members of Congress. Some 50% of registered voters voted in the process, setting a historic participation rate due to the voluntary nature of the vote.

At present, the constitution-making process is at a key moment, as the elections of those who will compose the constituent assembly will be held on April 11<sup>1</sup>. The composition involved a series of discussions regarding gender parity and the participation of indigenous peoples, which was not subject to elections but to government intervention and political lobbying. This required constant vigilance of the congressional decision-making processes. This collective vigilance showed the institutional capture through which the process had been taken, and that the constituent moment had acquired a new political meaning: the revitalization of the party system.

Although the revolt had an anti-party sensibility, focused on mass action, and critical of the political system, it was the organs of the state that ended up channeling and shaping the constituent process. The independent forces and their candidacies have had to face a series of difficulties and inequalities compared to candidates who are members of political parties, as reflected in the obstacles to the registration of candidacies, financing, and participation in the media, among others. This has hindered the organization of independent forces, which are already widely dispersed and fragmented.

The pandemic has limited the debate and meeting spaces for the discussion and elaboration of proposals. The social sciences have promoted a series of reflections with a critical and reflective view of the process, in an attitude of denunciation and collective awareness of human rights violations, etc., assuming a public role, leaving the academic habitus and opening up to the challenges of the moment. However, most of these interventions have been restricted to the virtual sphere or to the traditional media of books, scientific articles, etc., which has hindered their impact and massiveness. Nevertheless, it has installed a public sense of the relationship between engagement, science(s), and knowledge.

***What parts of your social scientific work play a special role in the political disputes that have recently marked Chile? Are there particularly relevant areas or problems in combining engaged social science and political work?***

My scientific work has emphasized research on the precariousness of work and life. I have dedicated myself to accounting for the characteristics of working and living in Chilean society considering the cultural, subjective, economic, and territorial elements that are inscribed in the intersections of power. My objectives have been to establish a local-territorial work platform with social, environmental, and trade union organizations, mobilizing connections with global research networks, and to strengthen the cohesion of the national social scientific community in labor studies.

As I have been investigating the process of social precariousness and the world of work, I have been able to see directly how work, employment, and unemployment are identified as critical places for people’s living conditions. The quality of employment, wages, automation, incomes, the introduction of platforms, and the weakness of the system of social rights put a great deal of pressure on people’s lives. Indebtedness, the search for informal jobs, or for more than one job, are part of this dispute between dignity and precariousness of life. Many of these problems are some of the cores that run through the political and social disputes in Chile, and also show the precariousness of young people, women, migrants, the elderly, etc.

***Is social science to take on a responsibility, especially when conflicts come to the forefront or do you think science operates in a different time frame, perhaps in the longer term?***

There are several people and working groups that have been trying to strengthen these bridges between social science and society, aiming to make visible and highlight the importance of scientific knowledge in decision-making, actions, and democratic deliberation. This gap between the world of research, the public sphere, and, especially, the activity of social movements, is what needs to be overcome. In fact, many movements such as the feminist, environmental, and other movements already give an example and allow us to have an idea of these articulations.

For their part, the responsibilities of the social sciences become clearer in moments of crisis. Conflict is often a symptom of crisis and at the same time a herald of change. This process is often a site of reference in the social sciences. Personally, my practice of sociology is a response of urgency. Such has been the war unleashed on society, the depredation and precarization, that I have had to act/do in a very present sense, which is part of the very possibilities of a precarious, flimsy, and uncertain temporality. This has its contradictions and negativities, since it hinders the idea of the future (which could enclose the lack of utopias), but at the same time it teaches a new, more practical, and active way of forging utopias in knowledge.

***Are your research results perceived publicly and outside science, and are political actors interested in the results of social science research?***

My experience shows me that this is the case. But I believe that the question is not whether the results are perceived, but rather whether there is a work of building paths, networks, in which knowledge is exchanged, dialogued, shared, and recreated. There is constant communication with organizations, associations, trade unions, etc. We try to mobilize our research agenda in relation to problems that we identify in reality, based on diagnoses originated in these spaces of dialogue. We aim for a harmonious approach to global scientific challenges and public problems in the region.

This is how the “Grupo de Estudios del Trabajo desde el Sur” (GETSUR) came into being. GETSUR is a local-territorial work platform, which relies on global research networks and seeks to strengthen the fabric of social and trade union organizations. We promote a synergy and symbiosis with the needs of trade union organizations, for which we have made the university available, both in terms of infrastructure and logistics, as well as in terms of knowledge and research capabilities to address specific problems in training, information, and/or reflection.

The October rebellion has indeed been a very important milestone for the social sciences. As scientists we are witnessing our own awakening, and the possibility of attending and being an actor in this awakening is also revitalizing and refreshing. I believe that the concept of precarity and precariousness offers one of the multiple possibilities for allowing us to walk along this line.

***Your research topics are precariousness, the insecurities of the labor market, and how they contribute to the reproduction of societies. However, you have also participated in projects that have involved the neighborhoods and governmental institutions of Temuco in recycling models. Can you tell us a little about this research experience and identify the particular problems and challenges of this type of sociological research?***

Of course. These experiences have been emerging by following the sorts of threads that I find along the way, and that, between curiosity, pedagogy and sensitivity, lead me to collaborate with other actors in the local space. Among the recycling experiences, I collaborated with a Chilean NGO called Red de Acción por los Derechos Ambientales (RADA), which is an organization that collaborates with various social movements, Mapuche communities, and territorial organizations in the region of La Araucanía and Wallmapu. They have a strategy and a “Zero Garbage” plan for waste management and handling in the city of Temuco, for which they successfully proposed a project to a public fund for environmental protection in 2017.

We initiated this experience following the closure in December 2016 of the city’s landfill, which had been operating since 1992. The landfill had collapsed and had contaminated the groundwater of the site. It had been installed in the middle of 22 Mapuche communities in the western part of the city. The consequences for the health of the people living around it had been confirmed in several investigations, and the government had invested in public services and infrastructure as a sort of culpable mitigation for the consequences of the environmental sacrifice. The contamination affected the local economy, the living conditions and the environment. But, in this precarity many people saw in the landfill a possibility to subsist economically working with the recycling and sale of waste.

This is how in 2016 we conducted a cadaster of informal recyclers, scavengers of garbage at the landfill. Before the closure of the landfill, I collaborated in the formation of the union of recyclers together with RADA. The union had 62 members. Some were Mapuche men and women from the sector, others were people from the poorer neighborhoods of Temuco. Most of them saw it as a family job. In this task I was accompanied by a sociology student, who conducted research on the closure process and the gen-

eration of economic alternatives to recycling. It was there when, faced with the proposal of the union to seek and devise an economic space for subsistence, we thought of the proposal for the environmental protection project in an ecological way.

***In your opinion, how do the two research areas – precariousness and local ecological initiatives – relate to each other?***

I think the way they are related can be exemplified through the experience I was telling you about. In this experience we began to work on a first node of interrelation: the precariousness of the recyclers in their daily work and the precariousness of the Mapuche population living in the sector and enduring the environmental racism of the landfill. Both types of precariousness were intertwined in a way of understanding development, society, work, nature, and life. They were present in a conflict: the landfill, its installation, its operation, and its closure.

The garbage, as a product of a society centered on consumption and as the materiality of ecological unsustain-

ability, showed us how precariousness multiplied around it. Workers living off garbage. People are ready to eat or look for food among the garbage. Extreme poverty and social neglect. That is why, before the closure of the landfill, the labor informality that had prevailed in recycling led to a new zone of social expulsion, where it is more difficult to develop strategies of persistence and subsistence. The formation of the trade union is not a guarantee of political strength because the institutional framework induced fragility for workers organizations, but at the same time allowed us to think of an associative figure to elaborate alternatives.

There is a series of crises that threaten human existence and hence the multiplication, no longer of risk, but of the precariousness of living. I believe that the current political disputes have introduced a political sensibility, especially the feminist, ecological, and decolonial movements of knowledge, which invite us to rethink the sense of urgency, crisis, and commitment in the face of a voracious, predatory, and war capitalism. ■

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1. The elections have been postponed by the pandemic. They will be held on May 15 and 16, 2021.



# > COVID-19 and Global Inequalities

by **Karin Fischer**, Johannes Kepler University, Austria

**“COVID-19 is a global challenge. However, the greater the challenge becomes, the more the horizon becomes limited to a nationalistic or even narrower perspective”**

**T**he coronavirus exempts no one and respects no national borders. According to the UN Development Program, the human development index – a combined measure of education, health, and living standards – is on course to decline for the first time since 1990. The decline is expected across the majority of countries – rich and poor – around the globe.

This observation should not evoke an “equalitarian imaginary.” COVID-19 reveals that we are not all sitting in the same boat. “While we are all floating on the same sea, it’s clear that some are in super yachts, while others are clinging to the drifting debris,” as UN Secretary General António Guterres put it. The pandemic has exposed and increased existing inequalities of wealth and income, gender and race – within national borders, but particularly drastically on a global scale.

Highly unequal impacts of the pandemic can be observed at many scales, from the household to the sub-national and country level. The contributions in this special section focus on wide-angle perspectives on inequality – i.e., the North-South divide. Three subject themes illustrate entrenched inequalities between rich and poor countries: the unequal access to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and technologies; the sovereign debt burden and unequal financial relations; and the unequal exposure to climate change.

The first article by Kajal Bhardwaj illuminates the TRIPS Agreement of the existing world trade regime which places a higher value on intellectual property rights and private profits than on the human right to health. Monopoly rights of companies spur what is increasingly seen as “vaccine apartheid” or “vaccine imperialism”: the unequal, inequitable, and shocking scramble for COVID-19 vaccines. In her contribution, Camila Gianella visits Peru as one site in the unequal global vaccination procurement battle. Pfizer put her home country at the bottom of the supply list after not accepting some clauses of the vaccine purchase agreement – despite the fact that Peru has one of the highest COVID-19 incidence and mortality rates in Latin America.

The pandemic and the resulting global recession are driving countries into a debt trap. This is not a problem of poor countries alone. According to the Global Sovereign Debt Monitor 2021, 132 out of 148 countries surveyed in the Global South are critically indebted. Christina Laskaridis shows the unequal geographies of sovereign debt under COVID-19. She makes clear that policy concerning debt is a global power play with an enormous influence on living conditions. Luckystar Miyandazi adds to this the uneven global geographies of profit: Illicit financial flows are extracted from the world’s poorest countries and end up in the pockets of individuals, trade “partners,” headquarters of transnational corporations, and tax havens in the Global North. Africa loses every year nearly as much as the combined total annual inflows of official development assistance and foreign investment, she writes. That means that these countries have no fiscal space to pour cash into their economies or finance special social protection programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Debt repayment obligations and illicit financial outflows will further strangle their economies and hinder long-term development, as she shows with the example of Zambia.

Last but not least, E. Venkat Ramnayya and Viha Emandi draw attention to what they call “twin disasters,” as both the coronavirus and ecological vulnerability grow exponentially in some regions in India. They show that the social and economic impact of the pandemic is further exacerbated by ecological disasters such as water stress, floods, or cyclones. Again, the consequences of environmental disasters are unevenly distributed and primarily affect those who already suffer disproportionately from the pandemic.

COVID-19 is a global challenge. However, the closer the problems get and the greater the challenge becomes, the more the horizon becomes limited, it seems, to a nationalistic or even narrower perspective. Clarion call from the contributors: No one is safe, until everybody is safe! ■

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# > People Before Profits: A COVID-19 Clarion Call

by **Kajal Bhardwaj**, lawyer, New Delhi, India



*Global Justice Now and The People's Vaccine projection campaigning for global vaccine equality at the offices of the Association for the British Pharmaceuticals Industry, Westminster, London, 2021.  
Credit: Flickr: [Jess Hurd/Global Justice Now](#).*

In 2001, the World Trade Organization (WTO) confronted the impact of intellectual property (IP) obligations enshrined in its multilateral agreement, the TRIPS Agreement, on global attempts to address the HIV pandemic. At the time, multinational pharma companies sued South African President Nelson Mandela over legal provisions to allow the import of affordable generic HIV treatment; these companies, as patent holders on the treatments, were charging tens of thousands of dollars for them while generic HIV medicines cost a dollar a day. The companies alleged that South Africa's actions violated the TRIPS Agreement. Global outrage against the pharma companies for launching the case resulted in all WTO members adopting the Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health. This affirmed that countries had the right to interpret the TRIPS Agreement in a manner supportive of their right to protect public health and ensure access to medicines for all.

## > COVID-19 and TRIPS barriers

Twenty years later, another pandemic, COVID-19, has two-thirds of the WTO membership demanding that IP obligations under the TRIPS Agreement be waived. TRIPS flexibilities highlighted by the Doha Declaration – compulsory licenses, parallel imports, or strict patentability standards – have helped countries access affordable HIV, Hepatitis C, cancer, and heart disease treatments. But the current proposal by India and South Africa argues that a fast-moving, fast-mutating, infectious disease like COVID-19 requires a full waiver of IP barriers leaving countries and competitors free to pursue the research, development, and production of any COVID-19 health technology – without wasting time in complex licensing negotiations, without the fear of multi-million dollar IP infringement lawsuits, and without the fear of trade pressures from rich countries.

Rich countries, as expected, are arguing that IP is not creating barriers. But on the bleak one-year anniversary of the pandemic, the evidence is to the contrary. Even as

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global attention is focused on what is increasingly being seen as “vaccine apartheid” in the unequal, inequitable, and shocking scramble for COVID-19 vaccines, this inequity has underpinned access to masks, diagnostics, equipment, and treatments from the very beginning.

For the broader public, the realization of the reach and power of IP protection probably came with the news that Italian researchers working on 3D printing for ventilator valves could face legal action from IP holders. A US Senator asked 3M, a company that holds hundreds of patents on mask designs that it enforces aggressively, to give up its patents to increase supply. Threats of legal action forced pharma company Roche to reveal the recipe for its COVID-19 tests in the Netherlands. Cepheid’s USD 19.80 price for its 45-minute COVID-19 tests could be as low as USD 5 and has drawn condemnation from civil society groups. US MNC Gilead sells the anti-viral drug Remdesivir at USD 2,340. Its handful of licensees supplying a limited number of developing countries charge USD 320. But researchers at the University of Liverpool estimate that mass-production prices could be less than USD 6.

As rich nations vaccinate one person every second, most of the poorest nations are yet to administer even a single dose. There is considerable vaccine manufacturing capacity in the Global South but a minefield of IP protection including patents, trade secrets, and data exclusivity stands in the way. Data from the European Patent Office shows hundreds of patents related to coronavirus vaccines. Studies suggest that vaccine patents tend to be extremely broad, covering ingredients, process technologies, age groups, and dose regimens. Trade secret protection allows vaccine producers to hold on to know-how that could help other manufacturers quickly scale up production, while data and market exclusivity will likely create further barriers in their registration.

### > Deepening North-South treatment divide

The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine should have been available for mass production under Oxford University’s original pledge of non-exclusive licensing of IP on their COVID-19 technologies. Instead, an exclusive deal was struck with AstraZeneca, which entered into secret sub-licenses with some manufacturers. Production capacity is clearly insufficient as doses from India trickle into some developing countries. And the promise of no-profit pricing has not been kept as poorer countries are reportedly paying between USD 3 and USD 8 per dose.

Interestingly, rich countries like France, Germany, and Canada were among the first to adopt legal measures to

facilitate COVID-19 compulsory licenses. Israel issued a compulsory license on the anti-viral Lopinavir/Ritonavir. Hungary and Russia issued compulsory licenses for Remdesivir. Government action to remove IP barriers often results in companies modifying their profiteering behavior around IP. Israel’s compulsory license resulted in AbbVie announcing that it would no longer enforce its patents on Lopinavir/Ritonavir globally. Patients’ groups in India, Thailand, and Argentina have filed patent challenges on Remdesivir and Favipiravir. A Canadian manufacturer has publicly sought a license for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and may pursue a compulsory license.

Rich countries have poured millions in public funding into the development of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments. Yet they pay high prices and face supply disruptions. Instead of using legal measures to remove IP barriers, open up sharing of know-how, and increase production, they are snapping up available supplies and enforcing export restrictions. Worse still, there is no requirement for the companies to be transparent about their production capacities, their prices, or their agreements. Some negotiations reportedly feature demands that countries indemnify companies for adverse reactions or put up government assets like embassies as collateral. While the companies have undermined voluntary mechanisms by refusing to engage with the WHO’s technology access pool or by de-prioritizing supplies to the Covax facility aimed at the fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, pharma associations are increasing their lobbying against governments and UN agencies attempting to overcome IP barriers. The WHO and UN agencies have come out vocally in support of the TRIPS waiver. But the WTO secretariat is burying its head firmly in the sand, adamantly continuing to push voluntary approaches. Even as these positions seemed to get more and more entrenched, on May 5, 2021, after months of campaigns by activists for the TRIPS waiver, the United States Trade Representative made a surprise announcement supporting the TRIPS waiver albeit limited to COVID-19 vaccines.

Even as the US move pushes negotiations on the TRIPS waiver closer, what is evident is that we have wasted the past year waiting for the companies to do the right thing. Calls for a “people’s vaccine” are growing louder. As new variants emerge, countries like mine face devastating successive waves, and deaths and lingering illness from COVID-19 exact their toll on patients, families, and health systems, we have no more time to waste navigating complex trade rules that place profits over people. The TRIPS waiver will be the necessary first step in clearing the pathway to ensure access to all COVID-19 health technologies for everyone, everywhere. ■

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# > COVID-19 Vaccines: Unveiling Global Inequalities

by **Camila Gianella**, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú-Cisepa, Peru



*Vaccine distribution follows the same unequal patterns as global inequalities have before the pandemic.*

*Credit: FrankyDeMeyer/Getty Images/iStockphoto.*

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating economic and social effects across the globe. However, one dangerous message that has emerged from this global crisis is that we are facing the same crisis everywhere (we are in the same boat), as if facing a lockdown in Bergen, Norway, were the same as facing a lockdown in Lima, Peru; or facing a lockdown in a wealthy neighborhood in Lima were the same as having to deal with the major challenges that the lockdown represents for families living in the shantytowns of the same city.

This homogenizing imaginary has allowed an unequal distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines, despite some calls



to guarantee equal access across states. The fact is that wealthy countries won the race: they were the first with the capacity to buy the vaccines and consequently, to start vaccinating their populations. While it is true that some rich countries, like Norway, have committed to sharing vaccines doses with poorer countries, by January 2021, access to vaccines was determined by a country's wealth.

### > The privatized drug innovation regime

The situation we are facing with respect to access to the vaccine worldwide does not result (only) from the miserliness of particular countries, but reflects a problematic global drug innovation regime. Rich countries have allocated public funds to the development of the vaccines. Even in the case of Pfizer, which has denied the participation of public money in the development of its vaccines, reports show that its partner companies, which have co-developed the vaccine, have received public funds. The participation of rich countries in the development of the vaccines allows them to ask for "better prices," but does not deny private companies the right to profit from the vaccines. As a consequence, under the current rules, and despite the urgent need to vaccinate South Africa's population to stop the spread of the disease and its new variants, South Africa has had to [pay almost 2.5 times](#) more than most European countries for doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine.

The participation of public funds has not prevented private vaccine manufacturers to ask for confidentiality clauses, as well legal reform to protect them from lawsuits if their COVID-19 shots cause unexpected side-effects. The need for vaccines, and the lack of global leadership to impose some minimum conditions on the trade of COVID-19 vaccines, have given enormous power to vaccine manufacturers. They are delaying or blocking negotiations with

countries that need the vaccines, thus delaying access to these and eventually contributing to more deaths and to the development (and spread) of new variants of the virus.

One example is Peru and its failed negotiations with Pfizer. Peru is among the countries with the highest COVID-19 incidence and mortality rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as globally. By January 2021, when the country was experiencing the beginning of the second wave, the health system had already collapsed. In 2020, the Peruvian government had started negotiations with Pfizer, but refused to accept some of the clauses imposed by the company related to non-liability. As a consequence, Pfizer put Peru at the bottom of the list, despite the devastating impact of COVID-19 in the country. As in the case of South Africa and the price of vaccines, this has been done with total impunity; vaccine manufacturers are imposing the rules, and deciding who will have access and at what price, in the midst of a global emergency.

### > Access to vaccines and the right to health

Access to medicines such as vaccines is one of the fundamental elements for the full realization of the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Innovations in medicine and access to this innovation constitute a key element of access to medicines, and consequently, laws and regulations governing the access to medicine innovation are central elements of national health policies. The COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled the lack of global leadership and the weakness of states in imposing conditions on the manufacturers of valuable goods, as well as the limits of the current medical innovation schemes. The allocation of public funds to private companies is clearly not enough to guarantee universal access to medicines. ■

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# > Perpetuating Divides

## Between Creditors and Debtors

by **Christina Laskaridis**, The Open University, United Kingdom



| Illustration by Arbu.

**W**ealthy countries combat the economic downturn through debt-financed spending and economic stimulus, while low- and middle-income countries in the Global South are caught in an unfolding debt trap. The legacies of colonialism and past geographies of sovereign debt in the Global South are being reinforced in times of COVID, with long-standing approaches to international lending promoting creditors' interests over debt relief.

### > North-South inequality and global debt finance

David Graeber was among those who exposed how debt is effective at shrouding historical relations of dependence and unequal power relations. Time and time again, he argued, relations of violence reframed in the language of debt have the immediate effect of making the one in the weaker position appear in the wrong. International loans were part of colonial projects, and repayment difficulties generated conflicts between creditors and debtors that resulted in direct foreign supervisory mechanisms and military interference, but it was not infrequent that debtors successfully suspended payments and prevented debt collection. More recently, global inequalities in international debt have been explored through the prism of neo-colonialism and financialization.

Subordinate financialization characterizes unequal debt relations, with structural constraints to development arising from being in a subordinate position vis-a-vis a core.

One aspect of this relates to the international monetary and financial system. As posited by Keynes, and subsequently by many post-Keynesians, liquidity preference reveals a hierarchy in financial assets that becomes most evident in the international economy during conditions of uncertainty and instability. Warnings of upcoming debt traps were mounting up to the eve of the pandemic. Years of loose monetary policy in the US, born out of a response to a crisis in the global North, alongside the actions of financial firms, created a surge in global liquidity, with knock-on effects for current debt crisis. This led to a global search for yield across the developing world that led to a changing creditor landscape for many low- and lower middle-income countries, with highly unequal access and cost of finance for low- and middle-income countries. This built in a structural vulnerability to "market risk" with the ability of a country to finance and refinance itself becoming highly dependent on factors beyond its control, adding to the long-standing concern of foreign exchange volatility arising from commodity dependence.

Debt repayment problems emerge from development constraints and global structures of production, themselves products of colonial pasts, and less from the often-heard explanation about domestic mismanagement of public finances. Another aspect of this relates to entrenched institutional failures about how debt crises are addressed. When debt repayment problems arise, countries face an amalgam of creditors' forums, disparate legal environments, exclusion from capital markets, and risk creditor litigation, while being forced to abandon development plans. This is often alongside contractionary IMF programs that fail to provide equitable and long-lasting solutions to debt problems, weakening a state's ability to protect vulnerable populations. As widely acknowledged, debt crises are dealt with in ways characterized by "too little, too late," frequently failing to re-establish debt sustainability, and at great social cost for the debtor country.

### > The impact of COVID-19 on debt

With the onset of the pandemic, long-standing inequalities in the global economy were exposed and exacerbated. Alongside disruptions of trade, which countries are reliant on as a source of foreign exchange, and declines in key commodity prices determined in financial markets, the capital flow reversal in spring 2020 was the largest ever on record. This led to a depreciation in countries' currencies, making the burden of foreign currency debt repayments greater. The lack of access to hard currency during a crisis reflects unequal integration and subordinate position in the international economy and creates an unequal ability to respond. While this is most obvious in the markedly different scales of fiscal support measures across income groups, asymmetric access to needed liquidity is reinforced by the actions taken by powerful actors.

Only some of the largest countries have access to enlarged dollar swap lines inaugurated by the US Federal Reserve Bank, and regional financing arrangements have been mostly inactive, leaving the main policy response to global debt issues to come from the G20 and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Yet, despite estimations of \$2.5 trillion needed in unconditional and debt-free financing, along with a \$1 trillion estimated debt cancellation across income groups, and long overdue overhaul of debt architecture, the response has relied on increased access to expensive loans across regions and income groups, often to countries already facing debt-repayment difficulties. Some of these countries already spend amounts of public revenue on debt service that are several orders of magnitude greater than that spent on healthcare. IMF loans and temporary postponement of bilateral debt service through the Debt Service Sus-

pension Initiative (DSSI), established by the G20 in April 2020, worsen existing debt problems and, are predicated to lead to years of future austerity, while indirectly enabling non-participating private and multilateral creditors to get repaid. The voluntary aspect of the DSSI means that debt service relief is partial, and favorable to non-participating creditors, and delivery is on expensive terms and far less than needed. The Common Framework established in November 2020 to address restructuring reflects these known institutional failures.

### > A skewed international debt architecture

The pandemic highlights the long-known inability of the existing international debt architecture to administer the entire universe of creditors, prevent collective action problems, ensure inter-creditor equity, and most importantly, ensure that debt repayment difficulties are dealt with rapidly, transparently, independently, and comprehensively in a way that minimizes the impact on populations in countries in debt crisis. It is important to recall that the existing approach is the result of persistent attempts by creditors to administer the debt crisis according to their interests, repeatedly refusing proposals and attempts to address it in ways proposed by low- and middle-income countries. A core element of this system is the World Bank and IMF's austerity programmes that frequently result in negative impacts on human rights and rely on a loan approval process that labels debts "sustainable," exacerbating debt burdens, underestimating the scale of the problem, and undermining needed relief. All the while, as the bells of continued stimulus ring loud in certain high-income countries, the response to global debt problems is predicated on the assumption that growth will bounce back to pre-pandemic levels and that countries will embrace a pandemic of fiscal austerity after transitory deficit spending, abandoning investment and needed social spending to curtail government expenditure.

We know that IMF conditionality and austerity worsens growth prospects, has a devastating impact on health, inequality, and poverty, and a bad track-record of repaying debts. While this reproduces underfunded, weakened socio-economic infrastructures, it also reinforces the lack of legitimacy that these institutions face. The response has made evident, once again, that institutional processes reinforce historical elements of integration in the international economy. The loan approval process is symptomatic of unequal power between debtors and creditors, which highlights the politics of knowledge of who decides what can and cannot be paid. It enables creditors to prioritize the cost of restructuring debt over that of failing to restructure the debt to alleviate the situation of debtors. ■

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# > Challenges to Reducing Poverty and Inequalities in Africa

by **Luckystar Miyandazi**, Program Specialist, Tax Inspectors Without Borders, and Coordinator for Africa, UNDP Africa Financial Sector Hub, South Africa

**E**ven before the coronavirus disease pandemic hit the globe in March 2020, global inequalities measured by most indicators had been on the rise for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic and its unprecedented consequences in almost all areas of life as we knew it has only further exacerbated these multidimensional aspects of inequality due variously to differences in nationality, age, gender, race, national or ethnic origin, religion, economic status, and other dimensions.

## > Backsliding on poverty and inequality

Although the prevalence and mortality rates of COVID-19 are still low in Africa, the continent is now being challenged to recover from the severe debt and financial crisis worsened by the pandemic. This is especially undermining Africa's previous moves towards achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in areas such as improved health care, access to food, and education. More importantly, it undermines the acknowledgement in the SDGs, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, that ending poverty requires reducing inequality. At the continental level, Africa's aspirations under Agenda 2063, the continent's long-term transformative vision to foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth and development, also prioritize ending poverty and inequality. Thus, inequality is closely linked to development and economic growth and has become a major policy issue globally.

Unfortunately, a United Nations report predicts that Sub-Saharan Africa will see the largest increase in extreme poverty in 2020, with an additional 26 million people living below the international poverty line because of the pandemic. This figure returns Sub-Saharan Africa to 2015 poverty levels, implying a loss of 5 years of progress in the region. Therefore, now more than ever, it is crucial for Africa to focus on improving the lives of the poorest and most marginalized through creating a sustainable, just, and equitable society in all aspects of life.

For many African countries, economic inequality – the unequal distribution of income and opportunity between different groups in society – is most concerning. Even the African countries with the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP), such as Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Angola, record some of the highest levels of poverty and inequality.

African countries face two further challenges in trying to reduce inequality and invest in growth and development: Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) and the rising debt crisis.

## > Illicit financial flows

IFFs are money that is illegally earned, transferred, or utilized through certain commercial activities like hiding the real owners of companies through illegal shell companies; organized criminal activities like poaching, drugs, arms and human trafficking, oil and mineral theft; and corrupt practices which play a key role in facilitating these outflows. Rich multinational corporations, tax havens, and individuals are responsible for most of IFFs from the world's poorest countries. There is a higher concentration of IFFs in certain sectors, notably the extractives and mining industries, which tend to end up in rich developed countries and trade partners of Africa. Looking back at the past two decades, endless tax-related scandals like Luanda Leaks, Mauritius Leaks, Lux Leaks, Swiss Leaks, the Panama Papers, and Paradise Papers, among others, have exposed the issue of IFFs and raised public and political concerns about dealing with them.

Available information from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) shows that Africa is losing an estimated \$88.6 billion – equivalent to 3.7% of its GDP a year – through IFFs. These outflows are nearly as much as the combined total annual inflows of official development assistance and foreign direct investment received by African countries. This shows Africa's potential to do without foreign assistance if it were able



## **“Illicit Financial Flows are not a ‘victimless crime’ – they are harmful to individuals and society”**

to bring back the money lost through IFFs to invest in the continent's development.

This is money that is being lost to a continent that is already suffering from a lack of revenue. IFFs are therefore not a “victimless crime” – they are harmful to individuals and society. It also has a striking developmental impact as it plays a major role in increasing the degree of socioeconomic inequality in Africa and globally through taking away money required for health, education, infrastructure, and other public goods and services.

### **> Growing debt**

Africa also faces an imminent financial crisis caused by rising debt problems due to borrowing from both public and private external creditors. With COVID-19, some African countries have asked for debt cancellation and debt relief to help them recover from the pandemic's devastating health and economic effects.

However, for example, for a landlocked, resource-rich country like Zambia that only achieved lower middle-income status in 2011, the spiraling heavy external debt burden and recent default on its debt repayment are blamed by some of its citizens on political elites' mismanagement, corruption, lack of transparency, and poor policy responses that only go towards fueling poverty and inequality rates. In 2020, Zambia became the first African nation to default on repayment of its \$42.5 million Eurobond debt. Zambia has struggled with sustaining its external debt payments to other governments like China, to multilateral institutions, and to external private creditors, including loans and bonds. COVID-19 has exacerbated the human and economic crisis by overwhelming the health

system, among other things. Key sectors of the economy like mining, agriculture, and tourism have been adversely affected by the pandemic, leading to job losses and high unemployment rates. The fiscal space to implement measures that could lead to more investment in social safety nets is limited due to debt and the multiple tax incentives given to multinationals.

### **> Need for pro-poor tax policies**

Domestic resource mobilization (DRM) through taxation and pro-poor national tax policies can play a key role in reducing economic inequality in many African societies and globally.

Taxation plays a key role and can affect equality by, for example, raising revenue that is then spent on providing much-needed public goods and services like education and public healthcare. Progressive taxes can be used as a means of redistribution of income, wealth, and maximizing social welfare, thus reducing economic disparities. Taxes can be a powerful social instrument that plays a significant part in the regulation of choices and behavior with implications for health outcomes, gender equity, and the environment. Taxes are also an important tool for representation and accountability as applying improved tax allocation to fund public services can particularly benefit the poor.

It is clear that tax is an essential resource for the achievement of development objectives and can play a key role in the reduction of inequality in Africa and globally. The role of tax should not be understood as one-dimensional; it goes further than just funding the response to and recovery from the pandemic to building more just and equitable societies. ■

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# > Twin Disasters in India

## – An Unfinished Agenda

by **E. Venkat Ramnayya** and **Viha Emandi**, Youth For Action, India



*The consequences of environmental disasters primarily affect those who already suffer disproportionately from the pandemic. For example, the Hyderabad's Osmania General Hospital for coronavirus patients in India was flooded in 2020 due to heavy rains. Credit: Twitter@UttamTPCC.*

**I**f and when the pandemic ebbs, life will be far from normal. Human, livelihood, and property loss will be enormous as has been proven in India when people faced the twin disasters of COVID-19 and floods. In 2020, in the midst of COVID-19, India faced the wrath of nature when heavy rains and cyclones occurred in several states of India resulting in livelihood loss, crop loss, and loss of human lives. This multiplied the impact on millions of migrants who came back to their villages in the wake of COVID-19 and could not sustain themselves. The relief operations by the government and civil society organizations were not adequate to deal with such gigantic twin disasters. Nature has finally pulled the rug from under our feet. COVID-19 is undoubtedly a public health catastrophe and calls for enhanced investment in public health. But, fundamentally, the pandemic reflects ecological disequilibrium. Evidence has accumulated that loss of biodiversity and ever-increasing human incursions into the natural world have contributed heavily to the outbreak and spread of epidemic diseases like COVID-19. Understanding ecology and evaluating environmental change will be key to identifying future potential pandemics. COVID-19 also reinforces the need to pay far greater attention to the biosciences that underpin agriculture, health, and the environment.

### > The pandemic lockdown and reverse migration

In India, the vulnerable communities of migrants and particularly women and children had to face multiple kinds of psychological and economic stress. It is known that the majority of women work in the informal sector of the economy; when the reverse migration took place, a large number of women could not find any employment in their village once they returned from the cities due to the lockdown. This contributed to women's depression, despair, and economic uncertainty. During the same period, a 100% rise in complaints of domestic violence was reported, while women could not get any social assistance from social institutions. Limited contact with their natal family due to marginal access to smartphones and the unavailability of formal support contributed to raising anxiety and suicidal behavior amongst women. A large number of adolescent girls and young women called 1098, a child helpline support center for protection from physical and mental abuse. Health-care institutions could not address problems other than COVID-19 and poor women had to rely on their own means, spending large sums of money on both the treatment of COVID and childbirth. Malnutrition amongst women and children was rampant as the government relief was

not adequate and school closures meant that children did not receive the school midday meal. Partial starvation of families was visible, with the absence of employment leading to the depletion of their meagre savings for survival.

### > Floods

Even in urban areas like Hyderabad city, the vulnerable population in slums and tiny settlements had to abandon their homes as the floodwaters entered them. Many of these poor communities have lost their employment and household articles, and have had to shift temporarily to new locations and undergo a terrible amount of physical, psychological, and economic stress. The floods are the result of faulty planning, with the promotion of construction on drainage canals and water tanks having further reduced the carrying capacity of the urban environment. Further, the series of cyclones and floods that took place in India from 2014 onwards is the result of both anthropogenic emissions not only in India but also other parts of the world, as well as of unplanned developmental activities in the country. As an example, the massive floods of the Kosi river in the eastern state of Bihar in August 2014 were the result of heavy rainfall in Nepal, where the river originates, and the release of 28 lakh cusecs of water there. The resultant flooding of the Kosi's embankments affected some 225,000 people, who lost lives, crops, livestock, and property.

### > Governments must act

The time has come for policy makers to wake up to the climate change situation and collectively work towards restoration of ecology and environment. We are hopeful that the US will have a new commitment to this under the leadership of President Biden. At the fifteenth G-20 summit in November 2020, the Indian Prime Minister called

for a new global index for the post-COVID world, which would incorporate a strong emphasis on respecting nature with the spirit of trusteeship of "Mother Earth." Another element would be the creation of a vast talent pool, ensuring technology reaching all segments of society and more importantly "the transparency in the governance." The establishment of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) with 18 countries and four international organizations as members will give infrastructure damage during natural disasters the attention it has not received so far. It will be especially important to saving lives and livelihoods in poorer countries impacted disproportionately by disasters.

Global policies may take time, but the way forward in India should be to redefine the concept of the "poverty line" and work towards achieving an "empowerment index." The empowerment index would include the fulfillment of eight basic fundamental needs: health care, sanitation, housing, basic nutrition, clean energy, education, safe drinking water, and social security. The corporate sector must support the government in achieving these basic needs; rather than rushing to win contracts for vaccine development, companies should work toward sustainable development to produce qualitative results so that access to the vaccine can be "the first right" of the vulnerable population. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds must be utilized to enhance health infrastructure, access to vaccines, and adoption of and mitigation activities for both COVID-19 and climate change. The Indian government must enhance its health budget from the present 1% to at least 5% of GDP to meet post-COVID-19 health challenges. In the words of the women members of the self-help groups our organization works with, the government must provide them "a safe place to live, better access to basic needs, and initiation of contingency measures to fulfill their immediate fundamental necessities." ■

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# > The Foundational Economy

## as Key to Social Renewal

by **Julie Froud**, The University of Manchester, UK, for the Foundational Economy Collective



Gratitude towards so-called “essential workers” was often expressed during the corona crisis, while it is apparent that most of them are badly paid and are working in precarious situations, as well as exposed to new work-related risks from COVID-19.

Credit: [Flickr/Creative Commons](#).

**T**he current pandemic provides a sharp reminder of the importance of the foundational economy – those goods and services consumed on a daily basis that make safe and civilized life possible. These include the pipe and cable network infrastructures that deliver utilities, communications, transport, and food supply, as well as the providential<sup>1</sup> services of health, care, education, and income support.<sup>2</sup> There is a tendency to take these for granted, undervaluing both the services and the workers that provide them, until a serious disruption creates inconvenience or major threat. During COVID-19, many citizens have realized that food distribution systems are precarious, just as power supply interruption or a drought provides a reminder of our dependence on continuous electricity or water. The pandemic has given us the term “key workers” or “essential workers,” those people who have continued to “go to work” during the crisis to ensure everyday infrastructures are maintained. At the same time, it is apparent that many of these essential workers are badly paid and in precarious situations, as well as exposed to new work-related risks from COVID-19.

Beyond this timely reminder of the critical nature of the foundational economy, the crisis underlines the importance of collective organization, provision, and in some cases consumption. Even those with high incomes are still dependent on the quality of transport systems or intensive care in hospitals; a high private income cannot guarantee a good Wi-Fi signal, nor clean air or good quality public parks. In a similar way, our individual security depends on the quality and extent of healthcare services across the globe in a pandemic. All of this reinforces the limits of standard measures of economic progress (such as per capita GDP), which fail to capture the range of different kinds of values that contribute to a good life, and often do not adequately reward those who do essential work.

### > Renewing provisioning and infrastructure

Recognizing the importance of these material and providential services requires clear thinking about the oppor-



tunity provided by the current moment. In short, there is a dual challenge to secure improved well-being of current and future generations through a policy and political focus on the foundational economy. The deficiencies of foundational service provision had been laid bare in many countries even before COVID-19 struck, through varying combinations of underinvestment, privatization, marketization, and financialization. Infrastructure that is literally crumbling, underfunded care in ageing societies, “food deserts” where citizens cannot easily access good quality fresh food: these are all examples of failures of foundational provision, where improvements would enhance the well-being of citizens.

In many cases, foundational renewal for the well-being of current generations requires additional financial resources for both capital and revenue funding. Even in high income countries like Germany, the deterioration of transport and educational infrastructures has been subject to [intense debate](#). However, investment on its own will not address problems that are also a consequence of how services are organized and provided, meaning that renewal also needs to cover the reform of what are often dysfunctional business models. For example, an underfunded care system requires more resources to meet the health and social needs of a growing group of older or vulnerable people. However, if care providers are owned by private equity or other extractive ownership forms, additional resources may get directed into higher profits and not into hiring more workers or improving care. Or, if care is organized by large bureaucracies with little input from care recipients, additional resources should be combined with reforms to localize provision and give greater voice to stakeholders.

While improving services for citizens through rebuilding infrastructures and services, the political challenge of foundational renewal includes addressing the climate and nature crises to also deliver the well-being of future generations.<sup>3</sup> For example, meeting net zero emissions targets will require significant contributions from foundational

economy activities like housing, transport, and food.<sup>4</sup> As these are essential, reductions in emissions will result not from abstention but from changes in production and consumption, encouraged by new regulations and behavioral shifts. This could include different construction techniques and retrofitting existing buildings to make them more energy-efficient, changes in the composition of food consumed, and substituting active travel and public transport for private vehicles.

### > A clear role for the state

There is a clear role for the state in these renewal processes. It is not only the case that many foundational services are provided and/or financed by the state to some degree, but that social citizenship, enabled through access to these infrastructures of everyday life, requires a state that is accountable and responsive. Many of the original foundational infrastructures like water and sewerage systems, electricity grids, or public hospitals were delivered through planning and engineering on a top-down basis. Renewal and provision of new infrastructures needs also to provide a much stronger role for citizen participation, especially where there are trade-offs (as with addressing climate change or working within budgets) or where expertise in communities and locally-based organizations already understands how to improve social outcomes, such as in public health.

The renewal of the foundational economy is also an important precondition to other policies promoting universal basic income or universal basic services. Simply giving cash to citizens will not ensure well-being, as quality of life depends on access to collectively provided services such as healthcare, broadband, social housing, integrated and affordable public transport, and green space. If there is to be a meaningful legacy from the pandemic it should include a renewal of the foundational economy, which enhances current livability in a way that is socially and ecologically sustainable. ■

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1. The term providential is used here in the sense of provident, to provide for future needs. The term echoes the providential societies, which were established to allow people to save to pay for costs of sickness etc. in the future. The term covers public and welfare services.

2. For more information, see: <https://foundationaleconomy.com/introduction/>.

3. For more information, see: <https://foundationaleconomy.com.files.wordpress.com/2021/01/fe-wp8-meeting-social-needs-on-a-damaged-planet.pdf>.

4. For example, the Stockholm Institute estimates that 59% of the ecological footprint in Wales can be attributed to consumption of food (28%), housing (20%), and transport (11%) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/ecological-and-carbon-footprint-of-wales-report.pdf>.

# > Future-Fit Economies and the State

by **Andreas Novy** and **Richard Bärnthaler**, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

**T**hat we are currently living in times of profound turmoil is widely acknowledged. The question no longer is *whether* profound changes will take place in the twenty-first century, but *how* this transformation will happen – in a chaotic way, as we are currently experiencing in dealing with the pandemic, or collectively shaped. The latter depends on two prerequisites: re-thinking economics, and strengthening public and democratic institutions.

## > The limits of XXth-century economic thought

Over the last decades, market-liberal thought, already dominant in the nineteenth century, has experienced a renaissance. Often criticized as neoliberalism, it has permeated political thinking and acting far beyond right-wing policy-making. The strengths of the market in ramping up (eco-)efficiency and optimizing the allocation of scarce resources have become a dogma, disciplining the mainstream in the EU and the US. Optimizing markets, however, will not suffice to keep us within planetary boundaries – not only because green growth (which, in the absence of absolute decoupling between economic growth and environmental pressure, is in fact not green at all) tends to offset efficiency gains with increased consumption but also because market liberalism ignores predominant unsustainable routines, practices, and habits. It holds an almost religious belief in the power of well-informed, rational consumers to “solve” the climate crisis through individual market choices. This priority given to market solutions not only reinforces uneven access to consumption, it is also a threat to democracy. In market liberalism, the state is neither weak nor restricted to *laissez-faire*, but has a strong mandate to enforce contracts and protect private property rights. However, in a world in which property rights are concentrated within business corporations, the market-liberal state has engendered new, undemocratic, and highly unequal power structures. Multinational corporations have become global rule- and decision-makers, able to externalize costs onto society and the environment and translate this externalization into privatized shareholder value.

After World War II, both in the Global North and the developmental states in the Global South, a “post-war consensus” based on welfare capitalism emerged. Infrastructure provisioning was considered a foundational task for public authorities: from the access to health and education to the

significant municipalization or nationalization of the provisioning of energy, housing, and mobility. A larger repertoire of instruments – macroeconomic interventions, limits to the scope of markets, and redistributive measures – resulted in plural economic institutions, enabling prosperity in Western Europe and North America as well as national development in the Global South. While at the end of the twentieth century this economic consensus suffered severe setbacks in academia and policy-making, it regained influence in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Financial Crisis. The twenty-first century version of welfare capitalism reflects a pragmatic approach to social-ecological transformation, promoting ecological modernization and acknowledging a more active role for the state in innovation and industrial policies, but ignores how profit and growth imperatives and consumerism structure the very ways in which we produce and live. As a consequence, inequality remains high and the climate catastrophe escalates. What is more, the effectiveness of the territorially-organized “welfare and regulatory state” has been weakened by an increasingly de-territorialized economy, enabling multinational corporations to avoid national legislation and concentrate wealth.

## > An emerging framework

Given the escalating crises, an incipient third stream of economic thought has emerged. It takes up insights from Marx, Keynes, Braudel, feminist economics, and the Foundational Economy Collective to distinguish between: (i) the foundational economic zones of everyday activities, including existential and local provisioning as well as non-paid care work; (ii) the value-making market economy, including non-essential local provision and export-oriented activities; and (iii) the value-taking rentier economy. Karl Polanyi’s understanding of the economy as a system that organizes livelihoods is best suited to face the challenges of social-ecological transformation, highlighting the need to expand and strengthen the foundational economy (top priority) as well as non-essential local provision (second priority), convert the export-oriented market economy, and shrink the rentier economy.

While acknowledging that a good life for all within planetary boundaries can only be actualized through a transition to post-capitalist modes of production and living, this approach lacks a strategy on how to introduce the neces-

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sary changes in a democratic way. Some proponents tend to reject the state and privilege grassroots movements and civil society activism, thereby reinforcing market-liberal anti-statism and political fatalism and conflating mainstream post-political policymaking of the last decades with state agency in general. The rise of a range of authoritarian governments, however, demonstrates the potential power of state institutions. While none of them, whether in contemporary Brazil, India, or China are role models, they show the potentialities inherent in the state as a bordered jurisdictional entity with territorialized sovereignty: be it the municipal-state, the nation-state or the European-state. Ignoring the potential that lies in states' monopolies over legitimate rule-making is not only naive and dangerous, but, above all, remains trapped in niche-games at the expense of potential counter-hegemonic projects.

**> The need for non-capitalist state institutions**

Effective strategies to strengthen a future-fit economy require to pursue interconnected territorialized forms of self-determination by empowering a diversity of entangled, but proper policy spaces via selective economic deglobalization – e.g. the city, region, nation, and beyond. States, governing a territory via public and democratic institutions, must neither be reduced to the *nation*-state, nor to centralized bureaucracies. Innovative state forms will have to be more decentralized, empowering and protecting intermediary institutions as well as self-managed non-commodified spheres of working and living. However, a critical political economy has stressed the limits of such progressive state agency in capitalism, insisting that the state in capitalism is a capitalist state.

We agree that public and democratic state institutions can only flourish in economic systems beyond capitalism.

However, as non-capitalist zones have always existed *within* capitalism, non-capitalist state institutions can exist within capitalism too: be it cooperatives, municipal companies, or public pension systems. And as capitalism depends on foundational economic zones (especially care and infrastructures), non-capitalist state institutions sustain the legitimacy and effectiveness of capitalism. Because capitalism depends on its own negation, state agency can strengthen foundational economic zones that enable a civilized life for all inhabitants. Inclusive access to affordable collective provisioning systems (care, health, education, housing, mobility) can be combined with the exclusion of unsustainable options (e.g., a ban on short-distance flights) and the steering of investments into sustainable economic activities (e.g., through subsidies, direct investment, taxation, social licenses, re-training programs) to ensure social-ecological universalizability. In the short-run, this is a viable strategy to move beyond neoliberalism, strengthening green, non-capitalist state forms within capitalism.

In the long run, however, a capitalist mode of production remains incompatible with a good life for all within planetary boundaries. Hence, to move beyond capitalism, new forms of the state must evolve around the flourishing of decommodified spheres of life *beyond* their functionality for the reproduction of capital. This could constitute transformed civil society-state relationships in which investments in as well as the operation of infrastructure provisioning become more socialized and dependency on labor market income is reduced. Promoting well-being would result in more free time instead of increased wages, accessing public goods would be favored over possessing private ones, reducing the costs of living (for e.g., affordable public infrastructure and housing) would be prioritized over raising purchasing power. ■

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# > COVID-19: New Articulations of State and Economy

by **Bob Jessop**, Lancaster University, UK

**T**he significance of the COVID-19 pandemic is still unfolding. Until the virus is controlled, if not eliminated, we will not fully know which responses worked well. But it is already clear that some countries have been more successful in controlling cases and reducing excess deaths from any cause. It is also clear that the pandemic has produced a new rationale for state intervention oriented to mutual aid as well as supporting private business. This article addresses this aspect of the pandemic.

The pandemic can be considered as a global crisis. Crises tend to disrupt accepted views of the world and how to “go on” in it, calling into question theoretical and policy paradigms as well as everyday routines. Although pandemics have long been recognized as a potential threat, the COVID-19 crisis was initially largely construed as an exogenous, accidental shock that threatens humankind. This is reflected in the biopolitical discourses of security to protect the population and in militant discourses directed against internal threats (e.g., migrant workers, the Roma population). In contrast, the pandemic crisis can be traced to capitalized agriculture invading the natural world and creating conditions for diseases to cross from animals to humans. COVID-19’s diffusion also reflects global trade and international travel, making it easy to switch countries and continents. The incidence of the pandemic is nonetheless uneven: different political regimes construe it differently, prioritizing biopolitical security, defense against enemies within, or wealth over health.

## > Explaining the UK’s poor response

This article focuses on Europe and North America, where poor performance may stem from a strategy to subordinate the polity more directly and durably to the “imperatives” of “globalization” as construed in neoliberal discourse. This strategy promotes “precarity” in society as a disciplinary tool to reinforce the financialization of everyday life, with growing inequality in wealth and more stratification within classes. It also accelerates the turn from welfare states with shared citizenship rights to a coercive workfare regime and, especially in the USA, chances of imprisonment. Neoliberalism privileges market forces and uses state power to

expand them. In contrast, COVID-19 privileges the state as a key actor, private-public partnerships, and unconditional solidarity (mutual aid), and resurrects the caring society.

The UK is a neoliberal political regime that was ill-prepared for the pandemic in terms of its organizationally fragmented, decentralized, and poorly coordinated set of public and private entities. The Government was also distracted by the need to implement Brexit, with a new Prime Minister oriented to his public opinion ratings. This said, the British health system was ill-prepared for the pandemic. Spending on healthcare per person was reduced to an average increase of 1.2% from 2009 to 2018, which did not match the growth of healthcare needs. There is a shortage of over 40,000 nurses, 2,500 general practitioners, and 9,000 hospital doctors as well as a shortfall in intensive care equipment.

Past governments had prepared a pandemic strategy that was a technocratic blueprint that did not reflect the poor condition of health and social care infrastructure, including ventilators and personal protective equipment, and the precarity of workers and marginal groups. Reflecting on its 2011 Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy, the British government’s policy “followed the science” as presented by the Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies. The science was based on a misleading analogy with influenza epidemics, reflecting an expectation that the virus would cause an extra 250,000 deaths that would be handled through triage (allowing the elderly to die, dispersing the sick to care homes). When public opinion rejected this, the Government attempted to flatten the curve of rising infections to delay the spread of the virus and then imposed national strategies, with some devolution. This was followed by establishing tiers of lockdown, often too little too late. Indeed, low levels of sick pay mean that the financially insecure continue to work, even when unwell. This has contributed to the high level of infection and fatality.

The Government has failed to establish a functioning test-trace-isolate system and, due to its obsession with the private sector, has not connected local services and national agencies to deliver a coherent response. There is no systematic follow-up of isolating or quarantining per-



**“The pandemic has produced a new rationale for state intervention oriented to mutual aid as well as supporting private business”**

sons, except travelers returning from designated countries. Coronavirus testing in the community in the UK is delivered outside the usual NHS structures, without the good medical supervision seen elsewhere (e.g., Germany, Ireland, and South Korea). The vaccination policy, however, has been handled well through the health service.

The UK prioritized wealth over health in its response to COVID-19, which backfired. Indeed, protecting health is also more effective in defending the economy. In the US, the UK, Sweden, and Brazil, governments refused at first to note the deadly nature of COVID-19 and to protect lives. Keeping (big) businesses going mattered more. This led to late lockdowns and social isolation measures, then “light” lockdowns that did not suppress the virus; and then too early relaxations, leading to a revival of the pandemic.

**> The success of strong state action**

While COVID-19 is a global pandemic, however, there is little coordination of responses among politicians as op-

posed to scientists. Instead, pandemic and vaccine nationalist solutions are prevalent in advanced capitalist societies and little effort or money is spent on coordinating a global vaccination campaign. This is particularly clear in the Global North, which expected pandemics to affect the Global South. Yet, regardless of whether a country is democratic or authoritarian, an island or continental, Confucian or Buddhist, communitarian or individualistic, if it is East Asian, Southeast Asian, or Australasian, it has tended to manage COVID-19 better than any European or North American state. Zero-COVID policies like those in New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Australia, where strong state action and public health measures worked, are better than herd immunity policies that rely on tolerable deaths, gradual build-up of immunity, and/or wide vaccination policies. We can expect that post-COVID-19 inquiries will critique the neoliberal response and recommend good investment in adequate public health and care infrastructure with strong support for effective state action. ■

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# > The Leviathan is Back!

## Corona State and Sociology

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Vaccination centre in Erfurt, Germany. The caring side of the “Corona State” or a necessary measure for economic recovery?  
Credit: Walid Ibrahim.

**T**he Leviathan is back! This is how one could summarize what is currently happening in parts of the world due to the Corona pandemic. In his seminal work, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil*, Thomas Hobbes chose the analogy of a sea monster to express the contradictory nature of the modern state. During the era of neoliberalism, it seemed that the Leviathan was in retreat. This was never really true, of course, for even in Chile only a tyrannical state made possible the market-radical experiments of the Chicago Boys. Nevertheless, sociological social critique meant above all market critique. It was by no means a coincidence that Karl Polanyi became the academic chief witness for a double movement that initially amounted to a far-reaching disembedding of markets. Since the Corona pandemic, the pendulum has swung back. The Leviathan intervenes – as a state of emergency for the purpose of fighting the pandemic and *at the same time* as an economic interventionist state that invests trillions of dollars in countries and regions that can afford it in order to protect and, if necessary, rebuild the economy.

### > Assessing the Corona State

How is this state to be assessed? Systems theorists are irritated, because they had ruled out the possibility of a state actor that intervenes effectively in every social subsystem. Keynesian economists rejoice because government debt is now the means of choice to stimulate the economy. Liberal journalists, on the other hand, worry about the fundamental rights that the “Corona State” will suspend during the numerous lockdowns and shutdowns. So how *should* we assess this new state interventionism? As a preliminary answer, we venture the thesis that state interventionism may become the midwife of a “capitalism with a new face.” However, the Corona State is a hybrid, for it responds to pandemic and recession with two fundamentally different variants of state activity that are only loosely coupled to one another. COVID-19 is being handled by a state of emergency that, on the one hand, operates within the constitutional framework, and on the other hand, overrides the constitution by temporarily suspending fundamental rights. The only legitimation for the state of exception is the fight against the pandemic. The

state enforces binding social distancing rules to prevent the rapid spread of the disease. In doing so it is responding to a medical catastrophe; yet as the pandemic becomes more manageable, it will lose its legitimacy. All those trends which certain analysts welcome in the present state of exception – deceleration of everyday life, renunciation of consumption, avoidance of travel, taking time to care for oneself and others – could after the pandemic's end only be maintained on a voluntary basis. The recognizable urge to restore a pre-COVID-19 normality gives an inkling of how divorced from reality such analyses are.

The economic interventionist state must be assessed differently. The gradual move away from fiscal austerity, balanced budgets, the “Schwarze Null”<sup>1</sup> and – so far only hinted at – higher taxation on large assets and high incomes, represents progress compared to the market radicalism of earlier times. Nevertheless, the Corona State is no guarantee of a socio-ecological transformation that meets the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In political-economic terms, it treads on thin ice, because even in rich countries, exorbitant public debt only works as long as central banks and financial markets play along and guarantee a low interest rate policy. This makes it all the more serious that the responsible state apparatuses are often characterized by a lack of imagination in economic and industrial policy. Weaned on prudent interventionism, they know little of what to do with the windfall from investment and reconstruction programs.

### > The limits of economic intervention

For this reason, too, one should not place high hopes in the ecologically sustainable effect of the Corona State. The interventionist economic state aims to directly counteract a contraction of economic activity. The legitimacy of debt-financed reconstruction programs is measured by the success of growth. In this respect, the Corona State is an ambivalent entity. The economic interventionist state is to dish out the soup that its unequal twin, the state of pandemic emergency, has cooked up for it. In the process, ecological sustainability goals fall by the wayside.

Climate change offers an object lesson. Only at first glance does COVID-19 seem ecologically beneficial. Like the crash of 2007, lockdown and economic crisis cause “degrowth by disaster.” It is true that restricted mobility and temporary industrial collapse have reduced carbon dioxide emissions

to an extent not seen in decades. But with the revival of the economy, emissions have risen more rapidly than expected. Calculations by the International Energy Agency (IEA) confirm a 5.8% drop in emissions worldwide in the first three months of 2020; that is equivalent to the emissions of the entire European Union. But since April 2020, global emissions have risen again; in December, they were already above the levels of the comparable month from the previous year. In order to achieve the 1.5-degree global warming scenario that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change considers to be still reasonably controllable, global greenhouse gas emissions would have to be reduced by an average of 7.6% per year – but this would have to be done continuously and not as a result of a temporary lockdown. The IEA fears that the world’s historic opportunity to reach peak global emissions in 2019 is being squandered. Tough distributional struggles, which all societies face as a result of high debt levels and declining tax revenues, could further exacerbate this trend.

Finally, one must note that though the interventionist state is a Leviathan, this monster may have beneficial effects. It protects its own national population, placing human life above economic interests. The flip side of this, of course, is that it makes the fight against the pandemic the object of imperial rivalries. Only those states that have enough vaccines and can rapidly swing their vaccination campaigns into action will have the chance for rapid economic recovery. As a result, a global health threat is being combated with vaccine nationalism. Despite all the expressions of solidarity, as of spring 2021, a full 10 countries had secured 76% of the available vaccines. As many as 85 low-income countries may take years to begin immunizing their populations. This increases the risk of mutations that prove resistant to vaccines. Evidently, the capitalist-dominated state system is unable to treat vaccines as a public good and so help achieve the sustainability goal of health protection for all (SDG 3). In its dominant form, therefore, the Corona State is anything but a guarantor of progress in social and environmental sustainability. For sociological analysis and critique, it implies that we must redefine our subject matter. The state must once again become the focus of sociological expertise. To truly assess what the Corona State is and how it operates, we need large, globally focused, interdisciplinary research programs. It is time for the international sociological community to tackle these tasks quickly and decisively. ■

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1. “Black Zero,” indicating a balanced budget.

# > COVID-19: The Making of Unsafe Places in Germany

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Abandoned production hall. Credit: Daniel Mullis.

It is “precisely whose or which lives are policed or made safe,” argues Rosemary-Claire Collard, which defines biopolitical calculations. Biopolitics, following Michel Foucault, is politics concerned with the well-being of a population. It is the capability of “making live” and “letting die.” Matthew Hannah, Jan Simon Hutta, and Christoph Schemann argue that state responses to COVID-19 “have been justified in biopolitical terms by a ‘re-biologization’ of the population, and a perceived overarching imperative to keep as many people alive as possible.” But obviously some lives count more than others. All over the world the level of infection with COVID-19 rises with marginalization in regard to class, race, and gender. The pandemic has a very distinct geography that sheds light on neglected segments of society, places that the state is not willing to make safe. I will elaborate on this argument with particular reference to state (non-)intervention in Germany.

## > Peripheralization

“Where the virus is concentrated, you find the peripheral, in the city and society” argue Samantha Biglieri, Lorenzo De Vidovich, and Roger Keil. In a talk early January 2021 the latter identifies three related patterns of peripheralization: *Spatial peripheralization* involves places that are not central in contemporary societies; *institutional peripheralization* arises from state-led practices that organize society in ways that push people to the margins; and *social peripheralization* addresses the racial division of society – a perspective which I wish to broaden by adding the dimensions of class and gender to that of race.

Regarding the geographies of COVID-19 in Germany, the Robert Koch Institute has shown that in the winter of 2020/21 mortality was about 50% to 70% higher in regions with high socioeconomic deprivation than in regions with low socioeconomic deprivation. Data from urban regions such as Berlin, Bremen or Cologne indicate that the pandemic hits those districts hardest where population density is high, people have a lower average income, and the poverty rate is higher. When discussing state (non-)



intervention, *institutional peripheralization* is the most meaningful among the three patterns of peripheralization. It becomes evident for example in the production of poverty as well as the production of spatial periphery.

Regarding the first pattern, poverty has taken on greater prominence through the implementation of the German welfare system reform referred to as Agenda 2010. Inter alia, a low-wage sector was implemented and basic social assistance was reorganized. Poverty does not exist naturally: it is re/produced by an unjust economic system, and it is aided by law and state power. The consequences are evident. Figures show that people dependent on basic social assistance are affected far more by COVID-19 than more affluent sections of society. The long-term unemployed are hospitalized almost twice as often as people in employment. People lacking economic resources live in more overcrowded or cramped quarters, often peripheralized in social housing; they work under precarious conditions; and they are cut off from digital infrastructures, making proper homeschooling impossible. All these aspects result in higher vulnerability and a growing social divide. In the course of the pandemic the less wealthy have lost income, while the middle classes have maintained their status, and the super-rich have become richer.

The second pattern discussed – the production of spatial periphery – is a political process applied from the center of society. On the one hand, political decisions under the principles of capitalist statehood create landscapes of centrality and periphery. Products of this include patterns of exclusion in social housing, refugee camps, shelters for the homeless, nursing homes, but also the assignment to precarious working conditions. During the pandemic all of these social settings have become COVID-19 hotspots in Germany. At the same time, housing estates and urban districts in particular have been portrayed in political discourse as dangerous places, in order to decouple the pandemic from mainstream society. This strategy is already known from discourses about ghettos. First the pandemic is spatialized, then part of the space is labeled “migrant,” “poor,” “unruly,” etc., leading to the conclusion that this space, along with its inhabitants, is the true problem.

### > Centrality

What becomes evident is that the making of un/safe spaces is a political process applied by the powerful. Foucault argues that in the course of neoliberalization the

political economy becomes the defining rationale for governmental decisions. Wendy Brown adds that “the state’s purpose is to facilitate the economy, and the state’s legitimacy is linked to the growth of the economy.” German measures aiming to constrain COVID-19 adhered to this principle. According to the available data, only 12.8% of gross value added was directly affected by pandemic-related restrictions: these effects were felt the most in retail, catering, education, the travel and recreation industries, and culture. The other 87.2% of the economy continued operations more or less unaffected. No attempt was ever made to shut down the economy to protect the precarious labor force from infection.

It follows that mass outbreaks in peripheralized spaces also indicate centrality. This can be argued for the high infection rates in slaughterhouses, logistic centers, and schools. The meat industry is an important export-oriented sector in Germany, whose production was not allowed to come to a standstill. In the case of logistic centers, Agnieszka Mróz, an Amazon worker from Poznan, Poland, made this point sharply when she stated that she and her fellow workers were not victims, but worked at the central hub of global capitalism, crucial to the unimpeded flow of commodities. In the case of schools, it is clear that, despite much talk of children’s rights, children never counted for much during the pandemic. Schools were opened primarily to keep parents available for the labor force and not for the sake of educational justice.

### > Patterns of state (non-)interventionism

COVID-19 marks multiple spatial, institutional, and social peripheries, and these are the spaces where the virus and the social consequences have the greatest adverse effects. Socioeconomic deprivation exposes people to deadly risks and poverty. Regarding state interventionism, it is of great importance to highlight the authoritarian and security-oriented paths that most governments have chosen to take in confronting the virus, instead of including people in a democratic process of restraining freedom based on solidarity and justice. But it is also important to analyze more carefully where the state has chosen not to take action, and *not* make places safe. And where, instead, political decisions have deepened patterns of externalization, marginalization, and peripheralization along the class, race, and gender lines, in order to protect ‘the people’ from whom the marginalized are separated. ■

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# > After Depression: The Post-Neoliberal Subject

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*The turn to the twenty-first century took place largely under the sign of depression, predominantly displayed in feelings of exhaustion, emptiness, and an inability to act. Credit: Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona on Unsplash.*

**W**e live in a time of great transformations. From the financial collapse of 2008 to the wave of political protests that emerged in the following years, from the rise of new far-right movements to the current impacts of the pandemic, a series of events signal that we are at a historical crossroads: a world seems to be dying while another is yet to be born. These processes pose new challenges not only to established social institutions but also to what seems most intimate to us: they manifest an exhaustion of the ways of feeling, thinking, and acting that have prevailed in the past decades. Our crisis is also the crisis of a form of subjectivity. Without taking into account the structure of the latter and its current transformations, one cannot properly assess the dangers nor the potentials of the present. But how can one characterize this subject currently in crisis?

## > The entrepreneurial-depressive subject

The turn to the twenty-first century took place largely under the sign of depression. Psychological suffering seemed then no longer to be predominantly displayed in the classical neurotic symptoms of Freud's time, but rather in feelings of exhaustion, emptiness, and an inability to act. Freudian neurosis consisted in an illness of *guilt* in which the subject felt torn between the allowed and the forbid-

den, the authority of the law and the force of repressed drives. Depression, in turn, can be described as an illness of *inadequacy* in which everything is apparently allowed but one feels unable to measure up to the full range of available possibilities. A person becomes depressed because she must bear the weight of the illusion that everything is achievable: split between the possible and the impossible, the endlessly available and what one is really able to accomplish, the depressed individual is a person "out of gas."

Such a shift from neurosis to depression in clinical diagnoses does not merely concern particular experiences of suffering. Rather, it can be viewed more broadly as the sign of a new social order established from the 1960s onwards: one in which individuals came to be faced with ever stronger requirements of self-responsibility and self-realization in a context of declining social support and escalating inequality, competition, and precarity. As a result of an "elective affinity" between the development of a post-Fordist regime of accumulation and the diffusion of Romantic ideals of personal authenticity, a new subject took center stage: the neoliberal "entrepreneur of the self" supposed to obtain market success by aptly responding to the demand of "being oneself" or, as suggested by a popular self-help book, one's *Best Self: Be You, Only Better*. What is required of this entrepreneurial subject, rather than dis-

ciplinary obedience, is the sustenance of a singular life both self-discovered and experimentally created, emotionally communicative and flexibly adapted to ever-changing market conditions.

The depressive individual marks the point at which this requirement of being an entrepreneur of the self becomes subjectively problematic: when the prospect of authentic self-realization turns into emptiness and exhaustion, when the search for autonomous self-determination ends up in a sense of alienation. More than just a clinical diagnosis, depression has thus become a keyword for various kinds of subjective failure with regard to normative expectations institutionalized in the last decades of the twentieth century.

### > Crisis and politics of exhaustion

This social configuration – which we may designate metonymically as the *depressive society* – is pervaded by escalating tensions, and yet managed to maintain a considerable degree of stability in the past decades. So much so that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, this institutional arrangement seemed by its very logic to hinder the articulation of depressive symptoms in terms of explicit political claims and organized social struggles. Today, however, the pressures of this order have intensified to such an extent that its persistence appears to be seriously compromised: depressive exhaustion has itself come to a point of exhaustion. It is in this regard that I suggest we speak of a *post-depressive constellation*: a situation in which the social-psychological tensions of the depressive order have reached a peak, leading to a variety of reactions and struggles but not yet to the establishment of a new consensus and a stable institutional framework.

Such an account finds its grounds, I shall argue, from the fact that forms of political struggle that have become prominent in the past years can be interpreted as reactions to two major tensions inherent to the neoliberal, entrepreneurial-depressive individuality.

With regard to the issue of *autonomy*, the promise of this form of subjectivity is that one can reach self-determination through entrepreneurial initiative: by offering an innovative product in one of the various markets of which social life is now comprised, one would be in a position to leave one's personal mark on them and transform them in one's image and likeness. Yet the repeated failure in fulfilling this promise leads rather to a strong sense that one is subject to a set of pre-determined laws often difficult to understand and to modify: "There Is No Alternative." It does not come as a surprise, then, that several movements of our time manifest a marked resentment towards the ruling elites and make claims for more participation: they can be seen to constitute a reaction to the *fatalism* of the prevailing forms of social regulation.

Neoliberal subjectivity is also marked by a second tension, this time concerning the question of *authenticity*: the tension between the promise of affective connection with others and the structuration of social life as a market-like competition between atomized individuals (again synthesized by one of Thatcher's mottos: "There is no such thing as society"). However, the demand that each person should be a self-sufficient individual has resulted in growing feelings of isolation and social fragmentation. It does not come as a surprise, then, that several political movements of our time manifest a desire for experiences of affective communion: they can be seen to constitute, in this regard, a reaction to the prevailing forms of social *disintegration*.

And yet, the post-depressive situation is not characterized by a single cohesive form of political action or organization. We are dealing not so much with a new order as with a new constellation, a set of different reactions and political horizons. In the following, I will address two political stances that have become prominent in the past years, but should not be taken as the only ones emerging in the current crisis. Our present is framed by a central question – what comes after depression? – with no single or prevailing answer yet.

### > Post-depressive effervescence

Many of the political uprisings of the 2010s – from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street, from June 2013 in Brazil to the *gilets jaunes* in France – were marked in their decisive moments by experiences of affective immersion in a vaguely structured collectivity as well as by the absence of clearly defined goals. These two features are crucial for understanding why they can be seen as expressions of a post-depressive situation.

The normative and affective vagueness of these movements, for which they were so often criticized, was also the basis of their appeal: it allowed for a sense of togetherness based on participation in a shared atmosphere, a perception that social and political differences were no longer irreconcilable but rather could give rise to an affective unity established in and out of diversity. This is crucial for understanding the thrust of those movements. In contrast to the self-sufficiency of the self-entrepreneur and the isolation of the depressive subject, the experience of finding oneself on the streets with a multitude of people was felt by many as an affectively liberating or "cathartic" one.

Now, it is clear that this (rather indeterminate) sense of affective togetherness arose in connection with the confrontation with a common (yet also quite roughly defined) antagonist: the political system, prevailing institutions, "all that is there." The experience of collective effervescence was intensified by its conjunction with radical, if momentary, challenges to established norms. Confrontations with

the police, blockages of the streets, occupations of public institutions: suddenly, life no longer seemed to be constrained by a set of immutable, fatal, laws. In contrast to the self-entrepreneur's adaptation to pre-given norms and the depressive subject's feeling of powerlessness, the experience of challenging the established order could give one the sense of having regained the capacity for effective collective *self-determination*.

Such moments have proven to be, however, inherently unstable. Soon the perception arose that this sense of togetherness is made of heterogeneous elements that are not easily reconcilable; soon those involved realized that their normative standpoints can lead to radically different political arrangements. A new set of tensions derived precisely from the normative vagueness and affective indeterminacy of these movements. They marked the beginning of struggles concerning the political meaning and institutional articulation of that quite ambivalent collective experience – out of which emerged, among other political stances, a new wave of far-right movements.

### > Post-depressive authoritarianism

The growing perception of social fragmentation may explain why, similar to what had occurred in the movements of the 2010s, the recent rise of the new right has been characterized by intense expectations of affective communion. However, the experience of being immersed in a heterogeneous multitude, an indeterminate “common,” gave way here to more uniform and exclusionary conceptions of (national) communion – as in Trump's “Make America Great Again” or Bolsonaro's “Brazil Above Everything, God Above Everyone.”

This political stance can thus be seen to respond to social disintegration in an aggressively *defensive* manner: it takes affective togetherness to be possible only by way of an exclusion, or even elimination, of extraneous and corrupting elements – be they “communists” (associated with the Left), “criminals” (associated with the racialized poor), “enemies of the family” (associated with feminist and LG-BTQI+ movements), etc.

Yet the new far right has not only reacted to the perception of affective fragmentation by advancing different sorts of moral crusade; it has also responded in a particular way to the sense of normative delegitimization that gained traction in the wake of the 2008 crisis and the political protests of the 2010s. In this case, what came to be felt as problematic about social institutions is not so much that they appear to embody inexorable “laws of nature” (as in the depressive order) but rather that we would live in a

world in which “natural” norms have lost their efficacy. The authoritarian subject reacts less to a state of fatalism than to a perceived situation of *anomie*, i.e., a sense that forms of regulation that provide social relations with order and stability no longer hold.

This explains why such a political view is not oriented towards the suspension of prevailing norms, as in those previous experiences of collective effervescence, but rather towards the establishment of a repressive order. In reaction to a society perceived as socially disintegrated and anomically deregulated, the authoritarian claims a political community that could extirpate disintegrating elements and enforce norms coercive or violent enough to retain their effectiveness.

Yet, in addition to being authoritarian, the new far right is also often (and with particular clarity in the Brazilian case) characterized by claims to an even further radicalization of the neoliberal project. This is the paradox of post-depressive authoritarianism: while reacting to the crisis of neoliberal subjectivity and drawing its oppositional force from that, it strives by all means to continue, and even radicalize, that same form of subjectivity. Precisely in this paradoxical structure – an attempt to move beyond depression by reinstating the conditions of depression – lies one of the sources of its enormous destructive potential.

Authoritarianism and radical neoliberalism are thus mixed here in a peculiar (we may say: post-depressive) manner. Their political alliance leads, on the one hand, to the notion that an affective communion can be established that would be based on the exclusion, or elimination, of each and every one who refuses the ideal of an allegedly incorrupt entrepreneur of the self: “the good citizen.” It also leads, on the other, to the idea that a sufficiently cohesive normative order can be achieved only by means of the undeterred, and violent if necessary, enforcement of the “laws of the market”: there *shall not* be an alternative.

### > Beyond depression?

It would be certainly misleading to consider such a combination of new authoritarianism and radical neoliberalism as the only or main horizon opened up by our current situation. A more comprehensive analysis, which I cannot pursue here, should consider the ways in which other political projects have been responding to the crisis of entrepreneurial-depressive subjectivity – whose inherent tensions can be seen to have become even stronger with the outbreak of the pandemic. Still, whatever path we might take collectively in this regard cannot but come from the unfolding tensions and struggles posed by such a constellation. ■

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# > The Visual Representation of Invisible Work

by **Jenni Tischer**, University of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria

**A**s a result of the measures introduced to tackle COVID-19, some of us are experiencing social distancing, distance learning, separation, and isolation in a number of environments. At first glance, it seems as though one can talk about a “we,” “us,” even a collective experience, or go even further and think of a global collective. Drawing on my experience as a lecturer at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, however, I do not entirely agree this is possible. At a time of drastic restrictions to individual freedom of movement in public spaces, the enormous range of political and societal options to deal with this exceptional situation is becoming ever clearer.

Collective spaces of learning and experiencing such as schools and universities, as well as public spaces such as parks and playgrounds, are still only partly accessible, thus shifting the focus of life into private space. When jobs are lost and children can no longer be sent to childcare facilities – without recourse to a weekend home with a garden – people are confined to the small space of their homes. Statistics have shown that there has been a surge in psychological and physical domestic abuse, and the issue of gender-specific division of labor is (back) on the agenda. COVID-19 fundamentally demonstrates the type of work that our societies rely on: system-relevant and reproductive labor. We all depend on paid and unpaid care workers, such as sex workers, friends, lovers, children, among others. Every single body and its environment needs to be nurtured, groomed, cleaned, fed, loved, cared for, held, attended to, healed, regenerated. I’d like to point out here that the notion of “system-relevant” is especially controversial, as it implies that certain work is not (as) relevant for “the system.”

As we have all experienced, increased media attention to those jobs which ensure our basic and existential needs, and the sudden visibility of employees at the supermarket, led to people doing things such as clapping as a gesture of appreciation. One of my students, Nora Licka, wrote a paper about the difference between a gesture that is collectively performed in public and solidarity as a political act. Her conclusion was that a collectively performed act of appreciation in public is a strong gesture that can change the way people think and give them hope and strength to carry on. Ultimately, however, it will not contribute to better

and safer working conditions for workers in supermarkets, hospitals, day-care centers etc., or to equal and better pay and fewer working hours in the long run. Moreover, when we go back to the question of what is classified as system-relevant in the first place, we become aware that there is, and always has been, work that is invisible (and unpaid), either because it takes place in the private, domestic sphere or because it is carried out during the night.

Against this backdrop, I would like to introduce and discuss my two collages from 2020 that accompany this text: “Nightcleaners” and “Service.” In the collage “Nightcleaners,” you can see the cut-out and duplicated figure taken from a film still from the experimental documentary *Nightcleaners* (1972-75) by The Berwick Street Film Collective, and two reclining marble sculptures cut out of a picture that documents *Hartford Wash: Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Inside* (1973), a performance by the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles that took place in the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in Hartford. The Berwick Street Film Collective’s initial idea was to get a group of immigrant and working-class women to join forces with a group of feminist activists in an attempt to form a union. One of the artists, Mary Kelly, was part of the film team and also involved in the night cleaners’ campaign as a feminist activist. One of the first concepts was to have a real-time documentary as a durational film lasting about eight hours that merely shows the cleaning of a toilet. Alluding to the poster for the film *Nightcleaners*, which depicts the sequences of a woman cleaning a toilet, the stills in the collage represent the potentially endless, repetitive activity of cleaning the remains of office workers during the night. At the woman’s feet we see the double image of a white marble sculpture of a woman lying on the ground, captured in a supposedly relaxed pose.

This sculpture can be seen in the background of a photograph taken to document the performance of the American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, in which she cleans the floor of the museum. The artist’s *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* written in 1969 and her body of work as a whole address the unrecognized and devalued fields of domesticity, reproductive labor, and sanitation work. By transferring domestic work from the private sphere to the public realm, it becomes visible. And by declaring this work as art [“I do a hell of a lot of washing, clean-



Jenni Tischer, "Nightcleaners," collage on paper, 30 x 40 cm.

ing, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately) I 'do' Art. I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art."] as well as exhibiting it, Laderman Ukeles not only raised questions about visibility and the value of reproductive work, but also demonstrated how the systemic substrates of material support (even when it comes to art) are inevitably entangled with value production, especially if the process seems to be immaterial. The reversed construction of representation in the collage calls into question the hierarchy of whiteness represented by an iconography created within Classicism, which disregarded any polychromy in sculpture, constructing a racist ideology based on pure monochromy and pure whiteness that had never existed in the ancient world in the first place.



Jenni Tischer, "Service," collage on paper, 30 x 40 cm.

"Service" is a collage made of copies of a picture from a newspaper in which a woman is cleaning in front of a poster depicting a woman with a headset. The woman who is cleaning the floor is shown from the back and wears a blue uniform. In contrast, the woman on the poster smiles at us and is supposed to represent the pleasant and friendly service operator. The collage highlights that even though the technical equipment may change – just as the feather duster and robot vacuum unite on the collage – it is not possible to simply change the valorization of labor in the service sector by using a different image or different equipment. The entanglement of representation, valorization, and invisible work still needs to be highlighted and unraveled in order to address the defining hidden structure of "dirty work" that is divided down lines of class, race, and gender. ■

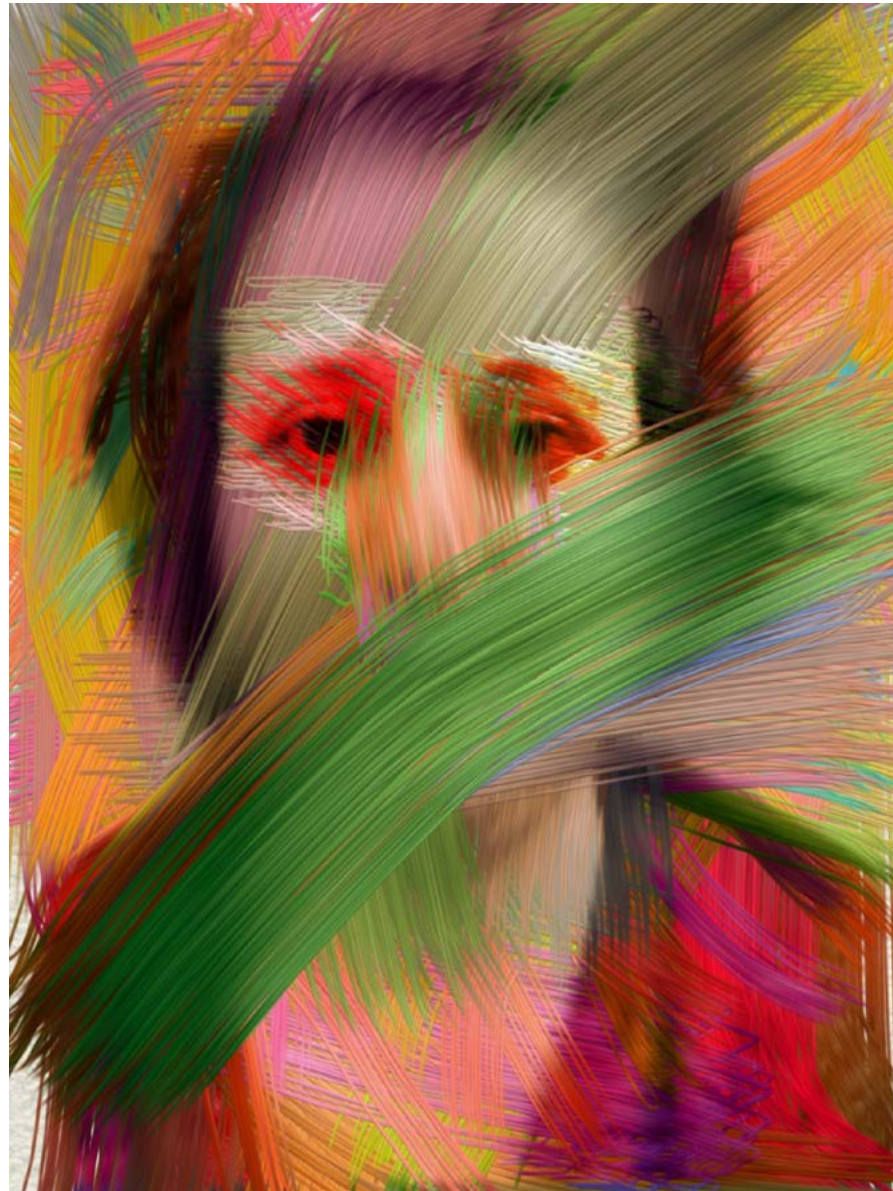
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# > Domestic Violence

## During the Global Pandemic

by **Margaret Abraham**, Hofstra University, USA, former President of the ISA (2014-18) and member of ISA Research Committees on Racism, Nationalism, Indigeneity and Ethnicity (RC05), Sociology of Migration (RC31), Women, Gender and Society (RC32), Human Rights and Global Justice (TG03) and Violence and Society (TG11)



Credit: [Flickr/Jane Fox](#).

less safety for those in dysfunctional and abusive relationships. The conditions of financial and mental stress, also caused by the pandemic, have led to abuse in some families where it did not previously exist. For those already experiencing abuse, it has compounded and exacerbated violence, in some cases leading to death.

Domestic violence is about power and control exercised by one individual over another and it can manifest in various ways: physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, psychological, and economic. While domestic violence occurs in all communities, however, it cannot be generalized. Each instance and relationship has its own context of differentials of power, privilege, and control. There also exist complex commonalities and differences of experiences based on the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, caste, culture, age, region, religion, and immigrant status. Research indicates that domestic violence has a disproportionate impact on marginalized groups at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven this to be true as marginalized groups shoulder more of the burden in terms of job loss, financial hardship, and infection (for example, due to greater exposure through essential service work, and/or low access to healthcare).

### > Pandemic conditions

Since March 2020, reports from several countries have shown that the lockdowns and various restrictions put

**T**he fact that there is an increase in domestic violence during times of crisis and uncertainty has been well documented. The current COVID-19 global pandemic has been no exception. Since March 2020, coronavirus has led to worldwide “lockdown,” “stay-at-home,” and “shelter-in-place”

orders, placing government mandated restrictions on people’s movements. While this has proven to be a necessary step in slowing the spread of the virus, it has caused what some are calling a “shadow pandemic” of domestic violence. The social isolation and distancing policies, vital to public health and safety, have ironically meant far

in place have increased and intensified gender-based violence, especially violence against women and children. The inability and reduced options available for those experiencing abuse to escape and leave the confines of their home has led to isolation from friends, families, workplaces, and other support networks. This has then created conditions where abusers have engaged in increased and persistent surveillance and control over their victims, and are able to monitor and constrain their behavior through restricted access to food, clothing, healthcare, and sanitary products. The pandemic has also, inadvertently, created barriers to the availability of much-needed community and mental health resources. Not just fear but also the lack of viable alternative safe options have forced victims of abuse to remain with their abusers.

The conditions created by the coronavirus have reduced many forms of institutional and social support for us all. While power and control continue to be at the core of domestic violence, causal factors have been increased through pandemic-related stresses and hardships including food insecurity, unemployment, fear and anxiety, frustration, depression, alienation, and grief. The closure of schools and childcare facilities has in many cases added to this stress and put strain on family resources at all levels; it has also increased exposure for children in abusive households. Communicating and seeking help becomes more challenging within the confines of the home, and particularly as public health and safety measures necessitate organizations to close physical offices and move online. However, COVID-19 has also led some organizations to begin thinking creatively about new ways to reach out and deliver much-needed support services.

Early in the pandemic this issue was acknowledged. Antonio Gutiérrez, the Secretary General of the United Nations, called on governments to take measures to address “the horrifying global surge in domestic violence”

and to address women’s safety, even as they responded to the pandemic. Groups and community-based organizations and anti-violence organizations have been responding in several ways to support people experiencing domestic violence. In the US, the National Domestic Violence Hotline reported a 9.5% increase in total calls received between March 16 and May 16, 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. It also documented how abusers were using COVID-19 to further control and abuse. Manifestations of abuse and controlling behaviors by perpetrators now include denial of food as well as the withholding of essential health and safety items such as soaps, disinfectants, and protective masks. In some countries the agency of abusers has been increased as access to the legal system and other support systems such as police, shelters, and courts have been limited, and cases delayed. For immigrants this is further exacerbated by a fear of deportation. The role of the state and the policies and practices of governments during the pandemic around issues of internal and external migration have implications for those experiencing domestic and gender-based violence that often go overlooked.

As organizations addressing domestic violence comply with safety protocols during the pandemic, they have had to shift the ways that they work to support survivors. Kavita Mehra, Executive Director of Sakhi for South Asian Women in New York, explains:

*During the months of March and April, while shelter-in-place orders were in effect in New York City, Sakhi for South Asian Women was serving a community that was living in the epicenter of the epicenter. From the conversations that our team was having with survivors, especially those living in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, they were seeing forms of violence escalating and becoming more extreme. Simultaneously they were managing the unexpected economic fallout from the pandemic, which resulted in unprecedented rates of housing, food*

*and utility insecurity. The limited support from the federal package served as a relief to some survivors; undocumented survivors and/or survivors who still had a shared bank account with their abusers were left without protections. To support our community, Sakhi distributed over \$130,000 in emergency aid and nearly 16,000 pounds of food from the months of March to October 2020.*

Some domestic violence organizations found themselves not getting as many calls due to the challenges, fear, and lack of privacy faced by people within the constrictions and confines of the home.

### > What can sociologists do?

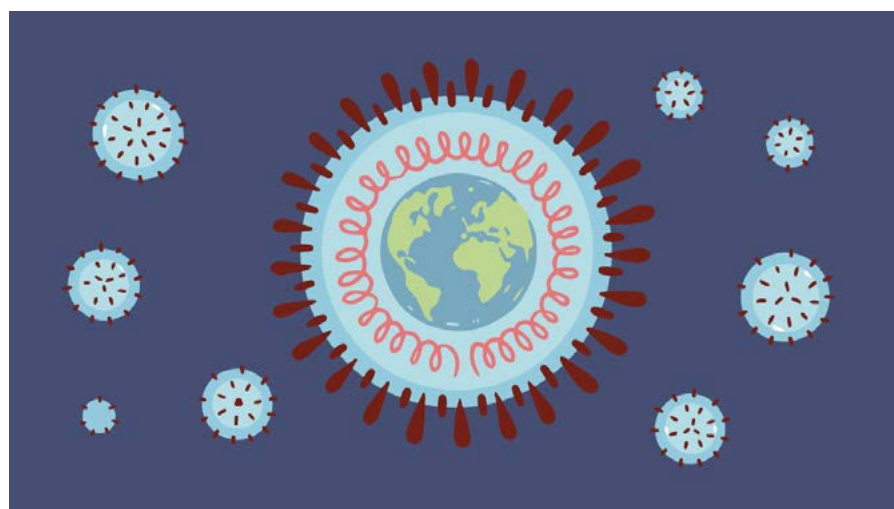
Addressing domestic violence cannot wait for this pandemic to pass. As sociologists, we must draw upon a contextual global sociology and come together with scientists, social scientists, policy makers, activists, and other stakeholders to develop an agenda to end gender-related violence and bring about structural change. We need better methods for data collection and reporting. We need to understand the social, economic, and political dynamics that are impacting experiences of domestic violence during COVID-19, and we must use that understanding to inform action. What prevents and assists women and children from getting out of abusive relationships during disasters, and what are the challenges and successes we have seen? Drawing upon an intersectional approach, we must use our knowledge, theory, and analysis, to highlight, act, and intervene. We need to support those organizations and initiatives that are finding creative ways of meeting this new reality. We must, ourselves, reimagine and reconfigure how we address domestic violence, and all forms of gender-based violence, during this period in human history. The women and children in lockdown, at home with their abusers, cannot wait. ■

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# > The COVID-19 Crisis: New Sociologies and Feminisms

by **Karina Batthyány**, CLACSO Executive Secretary and **Esteban Torres**, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba-CONICET, Argentina



Credit: Creative Commons.

Social change usually precipitates itself along two axioms. First, historical events and processes determine the guidelines of knowledge production in the social sciences, and not vice versa. The transmission of COVID-19 emerges as an “external” and objective event that fully impacts the social-scientific sphere. Four decades earlier, another event “external” to the regional field, such as the start of the extermination machinery of the military dictatorships in South America, decomposed the autochthonous bases of sociology, interrupting the globalization impulses that it had been unfolding at high speed since the 1960s.

Secondly, common sense is ahead of science, only to be later devoured by it. Here appears this new perception of global belonging in an embryonic state, without yet being able to recode itself with new theoretical and analytical instruments as well as practical action. If we decide to take the phenomenon of COVID-19 seriously, if we immerse ourselves in it with full attention, we should let it sweep over us completely. As social scientists we are usually willing to assume with a certain tranquility the premise that truth is provisional, but not the graver practical consequence that such an affirmation brings: that every perspective and idea created needs to be systematically destroyed or needs to destroy itself in order to be recre-

**F**or the social sciences, the main novelty that the mega-crisis linked to the expansion of COVID-19 has produced is the recognition of the impossibility of ignoring that we live in territorial societies that are increasingly globally interdependent. If, before 2020, social studies were still able to develop acceptable justifications for dispensing with a global framework of observation, this is no longer the case. The pandemic started a process of irreversible attention, which will sooner or later affect all research objects, and from which there is no turning back.

It is no longer possible to omit the existence of a global society without falling into serious anachronisms. If, in the times of maritime navigation, the conquest of America initiated material globalization,

it is likely that the blows dealt by the representations of COVID-19 on our digital screens will once and for all anchor globalization as intellectual common sense. Thus, rather than expanding the process of material globalization, the collective processing of the avatars of COVID-19 is expanding the process of mental globalization. We are not witnessing the decline of micro-social sensibilities and subjective singularizations, but rather a vertical, abrupt, unthinkable end to a long process of ignorance and historical denial of the gravitational forces of world dynamics on societies.

## > The mechanics of social science knowledge production

The mechanics of how agendas of knowledge production are transformed are not completely unknown.

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**“The world crisis of COVID-19 gives us the opportunity to advance in the creation of new theories of world society for all sociologies to face in better terms, from each historical location, the growing globalization of social, gender, and economic inequalities”**

ated again. It is the only method so far to avoid living comfortably in the falsehood of the known.

#### > New theories of world society

Just as a world society is not the product of a single location, a theory of world society cannot be either. A world society could resemble a higher order network, which differentiates, integrates, and relates the whole of the national, regional, and global social spheres. We could assume that each point of social location in the world is a unique condensation, direct and indirect, of these three interacting spheres. Germany's global society is definitely not the same as those of Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, Chile, or China. But all of them, on the basis of their interactions with each other, make up world society. Nor is there such a thing as a single patriarchal system or globalized capitalism: what exists are concrete patriarchal modes, as well as different dynamics of subjection between central and peripheral capitalisms in world society.

The recognition of this principle of irreducible differentiation does not eliminate the probability of discovering universal regularities, but it does minimize the probability that structural relations and processes can assume identical modalities in different locations. Recognizing that the primary substratum of society is worldly implies that the materiality of the social sciences and sociology are also worldly. Since the 1960s, Latin American sociology has ceased to be

“the Other” of sociology, or its simple alienated reproduction, to become an active current of world sociology. In this sense, we assume that the theory of world society that we need to construct demands the emerging knowledge of the total plexus of the intervening locations, balancing one's own point of view on this differentiated totality with the point of view from each other's location, and activating from this extended practice the necessary anthropological exercise of trying to “put oneself in the place of the Other.” From this preliminary assumption, the world would not be conquered by gathering all the existing knowledge, but by creating a new global dialogue, capable of producing new syntheses from the world views produced and projected from each point of historical location.

The world crisis of COVID-19 gives us the opportunity to advance in the creation of new theories of world society for all sociologies. The new global visions would allow us to face in better terms, from each historical location, the growing globalization of social, gender, and economic inequalities. In the case of critical feminist perspectives, it is quite clear how a greater globalization of their visions can enhance their programs of structural social transformation. This would be a process of intellectual adjustment to the material deployment of the political movement, which is essentially global.

With modern critical sociology the question is more complicated. Further globalization of its perspectives does not necessarily lead to the develop-

ment of a socially engaged science. Still less does it lead to a potentially transformative sociology. It is essential to further problematize the notion of political commitment in modern critical sociology in order to understand why it has not been producing extra-academic political effects for decades. We believe it is necessary to place such practices at the service of a general policy of social change. The development of a modern critical sociology, politically engaged, demands some kind of novel connection with the politics of movements and national parties. It is a matter of leaving an academic space of comfort, in the same way that sociological currents did until the 1970s – at least in Latin America – and that feminist critical thought does today. The approach to national politics demands the integration of a principle of reality that constitutes the best antidote against the proto-radicalism of critique as an end in itself and against a maximalist utopianism that cannot concretely explain how we might move towards a better society for all. In turn, this political transformation of modern critical sociology is a necessary condition for entering into a powerful and constructive dialogue with feminism.

It will depend on us, on our capacity to build an intellectual, scientific, and political community, to put in place collective initiatives with sufficient power to precipitate a structural change that can alter the current course of our societies in this disconcerting historical time. ■

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# > The Frightening Global Impact of COVID-19

by **Mahmoud Dhaouadi**, University of Tunis, Tunisia and member of ISA Research Committees on History of Sociology (RC08), Sociology of Religion (RC22), and Language and Society (RC25)



*The COVID-19 pandemic has struck at the most basic social parameter of human collective existence: social interaction. How will social distancing affect our everyday lives in the future?*

Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#).

**B**y all accounts the coronavirus pandemic is a very unusual worldwide disaster event. It has drawn health specialists to the frontline to reduce the death tolls and the rates of infectious patients, especially in advanced societies. Some of these societies and others have been forced more than once to have a widespread

lockdown for weeks. The US and the UK are leading examples. Consequently, the crisis should be a priority concern for social scientists that must be analyzed not only in quantitative terms but also through qualitative perspectives. Such analyses may be of great importance for enhancing the state of planet Earth now and in the future.



## > Social sciences must concern themselves

The COVID-19 pandemic has struck at the most basic social parameter of human collective existence: social interaction. The slogan “stay home” has become the key message in most countries. Normal social interaction has been put on hold globally. Ordinary social interactions within and between societies are not the same and future corona waves are hardly excluded. Its current presence globally and its potential continuity for the coming years might become part of the mainstream of people’s and societies’ patterns of life.

There are specific problems resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Sociologically, the alarming situation of the pandemic presents a new global social problem for which the social sciences have to figure out new concepts and conceive of new tools different, for instance, from those of the late sociologist Erving Goffman (1922-82). Drawing on Symbolic Interactionism, he provided a dictionary of new sociological concepts that facilitate the understanding of the minute details of face-to-face interactions. Within the ongoing global pandemic, potential new sociological concepts will need to be invented to analyze the following consequences of this pandemic on humans: life uncertainty, significant loss of control over events, concern only with the immediate present. Qualitative sociology may be better equipped to deal with these new features. However, the task of the social sciences would be twofold:

First, we need to study the current social and psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people’s behaviors and the different dynamics of societies which have experienced the crisis since December 2019. The magazine *Scientific American* has focused in its June and July 2020 issues

on the social and psychological impact of the corona pandemic on people: what can the pandemic teach us about how people respond to adversity? The June issue has underlined the stress to which physicians and nurses in public and private hospitals and clinics are exposed. Yet in its August 2020 issue this magazine adopted a rather calming tone toward the coronavirus by showing that social distancing is a natural phenomenon among animals seeking to avoid infections from sick ones. While this may be true, obviously social distancing remains problematic in the long run for normal *human* social interactions.

Second, societies must today preview the scenes of social life in the world if no radical treatment is found in the coming few months or years. To deal with the consequences of the pandemic, the findings from both types of studies would partially innovate new social sciences different from the present mainstream ones. Other major features of the corona pandemic are unfolding in terms of their impact on social solidarity in societies. Western advanced societies are described as individualistic, and social media networks have said to have hardened the core of that individualism. The ethics and practice of social distancing and other anti-corona measures favoring social isolation are bound to strengthen individualism and loneliness not only in these societies but also in non-Western societies. Thus, the global damage to normal social interactions between individuals, groups, collectivities, and societies is more than clear.

## > Climate change and hate speech

Two enormous problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic are worth outlining: climate change and hate speech. The coronavirus pandemic is explained by some analysts as the outcome of human behavior on earth

which has led to the pollution of the globe. The pollution has in turn its negative impact on climate change and the likely emergence of new dangerous viruses as some current theories point out. They take the Chinese city of Wuhan where the coronavirus initially emerged as an example. Whatever the cause of the latter, the globalizing coronavirus infection represents a puzzling and dazzling challenge that invites modern scientists to be more humble and modest in the exercise of their disciplines. Their scientific ethics must first of all be very serious about minimizing the range of potential problems which may result from their scientific work.

As to the phenomenon of global hate speech around the world, it is likely to be on the rise during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. Hate speech is a behavior which demeans, brutalizes, and excludes people and discriminates against them on the basis of their religion, color, gender and ethnicity. Its source is usually a feeling or an attitude unfavorable or hostile toward a person, a group, or an entire society or civilization. It is expected that the coronavirus will be added to the list of items causing hate speech. Citizens from countries strongly affected by the coronavirus are facing and will confront increased discrimination and hate speech as they travel outside their countries. As such, the tourist industry throughout the world is being hit very hard and will continue to be hit, now and in the coming months and years, as the WHO projected in August 2020. There is a paradox here. The global COVID-19 pandemic is supposed to unite societies today but its impact on discrimination and hate speech is hardly positive. Thus, the global tourist industry is likely to suffer today and tomorrow not only because of the constraints of mobility but also because of the potential global increase in hate speech and discrimination. ■

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# > Post-Pandemic Scenarios,

## from Adaptation to Collective Learning

by **Alejandro Pelfini**, Universidad del Salvador, Buenos Aires, and FLACSO Argentina, Argentina



Credit: Creative Commons.

**A**lthough we are still in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects and damages are difficult to calculate, as is the estimation of a date by which it will come under control, the social sciences have not stopped reflecting on possible scenarios for a post-pandemic world. The depth of the global crisis, as well as the unprecedented effects of the pandemic on daily life and on the functioning of capitalism in general have been so dramatic that this reflection goes beyond a speculation on the availability of vaccines, the recomposition of systems of public health, and international cooperation within the World Health Organization. Rather, and taking into account that the pandemic is a major civilizational challenge, it focuses on the capacity for real learning in extreme situations and for the resilience of entire societies in the face of traumatic situations in which societies and human beings

share an unprecedented structural vulnerability.

### > Possible post-pandemic reactions

As the economist Branco Milanović has demonstrated, the international system and certain societies introduced important changes in their models of development and political organization following other global crises that went beyond the economic and included challenges to public health, or great wars, such as the crisis of 1873 or 1919. Hence, it is not utopian to consider that from this pandemic too, important changes will arise in modes of production, consumption, and lifestyles, showing once again the capacity of capitalism and modernity to adapt to new challenges and to rethink themselves. Of course, this is not guaranteed as such, but depends on the activation, first of re-

flection, and then of political action to promote those transformations.

For the moment, the first reaction and therefore one of the possible scenarios for the post-pandemic is the particularist retreat. As it has already been experienced in some countries (the US under Trump or Brazil under Bolsonaro), it is not worth dwelling too long on it. It is about continuing with business as usual, and promoting a return to normality by taking refuge in the nation-state, ignoring – as with other issues – the global implications of the pandemic and existing radical interdependencies. Instead, it is more interesting to explore two possible transformative scenarios that rely on the agency of human beings and on the reflexivity of societies. It is possible to distinguish two levels or degrees of transformation from these capacities: a first step linked to adaptation (understood as an adjustment of one's own preferences

and interests to the new complexity of the environment), and a second, more demanding process of collective learning (implying a review of the validity of these preferences and interests based on a moral obligation to reduce harm).

### > Adaptation

How, then, could a primarily adaptive scenario be conceived, in which the three fundamental social spheres (state, market, and civil society) develop a communicational adjustment to a more complex and challenging environment without thereby rethinking or completely abandoning settled practices that have already proven harmful? At the international level this would involve a strengthening of multilateralism. At the national level, the state would be more present, though at the same time as it invests in public health it will be more attentive to securitization and the surveillance of privacy. From the market we can expect greater commercial protectionism and public investment; a deepening of digitalization; the promotion of scientific cooperation, but without altering the protection of intellectual property. And, to a certain extent, a recovery of the productive economy and of the so-called essential goods and services will take place instead of pure financialization. By focusing on civil society, responsible consumption, subsidiarity, and self-care will be promoted, and attention will be paid to sustainable development, although

within the framework of a low-intensity democracy.

### > Collective learning

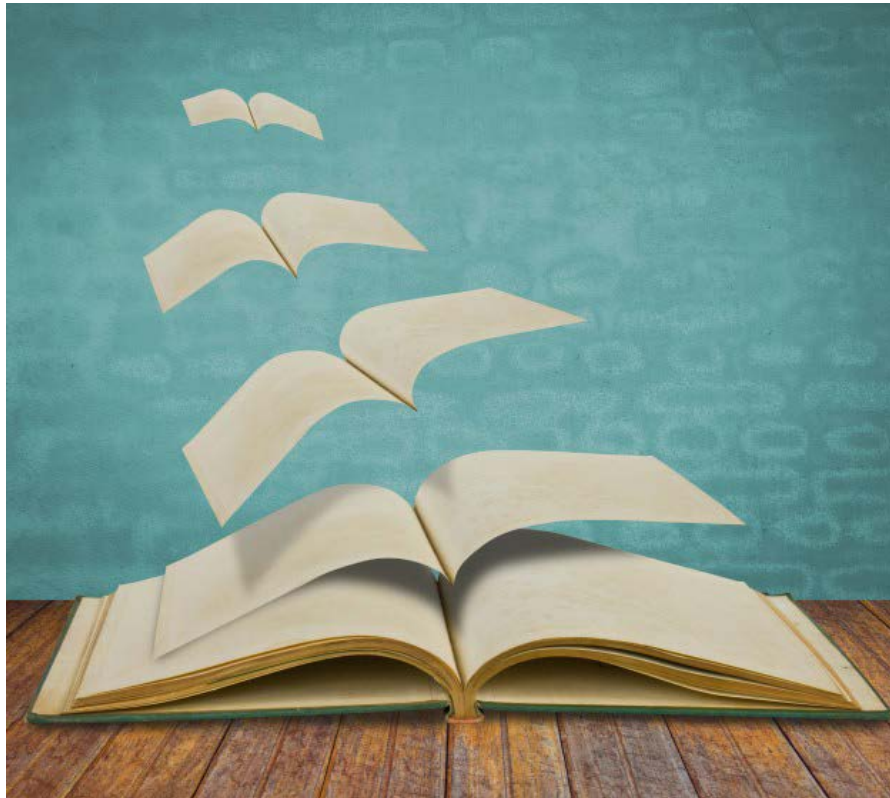
A more demanding reaction with greater transformative potential implies a deeper collective learning process, which requires going beyond the order of negotiation and international cooperation to spaces of global governance focused on the provision and conservation of public goods, risk reduction, and the prevention of catastrophes. This is reflected at the national level in a state that centers its public policies around the notion of care and the reduction of inequalities in accessing public goods. In the field of production and consumption, short-distance logistics and local trade and production will be promoted, together with the strengthening of small cities and an economy based on the revaluation of “essential” activities; last but not least, the current North / South disputes over intellectual property and patents will pave the way to more equal and inclusive regimes. Civil society will be increasingly constituted as a network of “prosumers” (J. Rifkin), where the glocal level emerges and care networks that are sensitive to gender differences expand; spaces for transformability will be opened, inspired by alternative ideas such as post-development and degrowth in a process of politicization that accounts for a fundamental democratization in terms of equalization and access.

Which of these alternatives has more possibilities and on what does it depend to prevail? We are already conscious of the limits of the first non-transformative reaction and little can be expected of it. However, it is always a possibility to consider, and it still has its adherents. Capitalism and modernity have shown their capacity for adaptation and renewal, even incorporating the most radical criticisms that have been made of them (as demonstrated by Boltanski and Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*). Hence, it is not unreasonable to think that the adaptive response is the most likely option and that it will occur almost mechanically from an interaction between expert systems, large corporations (especially those linked to digitalization), and political actors who think in the short term. Meanwhile, the most demanding collective learning depends on a radicalization and activation of social movements and popular organizations that go beyond a great plan of aid and prevention of health risks to aim for a Global Green New Deal, or better still, the Ecosocial Pact of the South – in which social justice is always thought together with environmental justice in a North-South dialogue, and in which, for once, the centrality of productive work is replaced by the primacy of life. Undoubtedly, this option is the least likely. But in light of the stakes, it is the most urgent and necessary. ■

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# > Sociologists in the Civic-Political Arena

by **Fredy Aldo Macedo Huamán**, Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO), Mexico City, Mexico



| Credit: Creative Commons.

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**F**rom the beginning, sociologists were involved in the public affairs of their societies (e.g., Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Marianne Schnitger and Jane Addams), whether it was to warn wide audiences of the conditions of inequality, discrimination, and misery, as well as the injustices, abuse of power, trampling on rights, and government neglect of public services suffered by large sections of society, or to motivate informed public debate. Sociologists engaged in relevant social issues by adopting an accessible and stimulating language, without abandoning a critical spirit and an exploratory vocation, seeking to shake consciences and question power. Recently, a sociologist profile that fits well with the reflections expressed here is that of Helen Jefferson Lenskyj. Characterizing the role of academics as public intellectuals, in relation to the research she has done, Helen [says](#): they “tackle social problems such as the damaging impacts of the Olympics, seek to uncover their origins and the systems of oppression that support them. We make recommendations for social change and work with communities to challenge those in power, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Our targets are often ‘sacred

cows’ – the Olympics or organized religion, for example (and there are overlaps) – and our findings often demonstrate that ‘the emperor has no clothes’.”

Today, there is a bewildered but also creative generation of social scientists, very restless in the face of a turbulent and uncertain era. In keeping with their disciplinary legacy, they are sensitive to the daily life of their fellow citizens and communities, in order to create innovative and reflexive frameworks that allow us to face the present moment. This, in my view, is what led David M. Farrell and Jane Suiter in their *Reimagining Democracy* (2019) to immerse themselves in Irish society, participating actively in the construction of a deliberative democracy among its citizens. Their work brought to public attention the citizens’ assemblies in Ireland that served as conduits for the referendums that led to the legalization of abortion and marriage for all.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the theory that emerges in academia is socially fed back, while links with actors are explored that, in addition to stimulating questions and issues, allow dialogues for the redesign of public institutions and cultures.

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If on a daily level many actors converge to get involved in critical issues of their political community – to promote their interests and present their demands, strengthen their learning, collaborations, and organizational models, channel initiatives and action programs, build [spaces of power](#) that seek to incorporate participatory channels and democratic innovations – at their side there are also groups of sociologists and other professionals willing to support and promote them.

### > New roles for sociologists

Thus, between the academic world and the civic-political arena, sociologists with a view to contributing to citizen agency can assume various profiles, in a plurality of spheres of action in contemporary democracies. Considering the above, what contributions, involvements, and rethinking in the training and performance of sociologists can be considered?

In general, the traditional academic-professional division has been far outgrown by the current situation of greater complexity and interpenetration and diversification of spheres and systems of actors. These features are emerging in conditions that will still be worth weighing up.

For sociologists, responding to these complexities will – in principle – involve making their universities and research centers more relevant to civic and political actors, taking into account their needs, limits, potential, and common frameworks. Secondly, sociologists' experiences in these changing arenas will make it possible to scope and refine what is planned in the light of what already exists, drawing lessons and thus promoting the appropriate educational innovation and expertise aimed at citizens.

At the level of democratic politics and citizen practice, a figure worth considering in the discipline is that of the sociologist as a *citizen consultant-mediator*.

By getting involved with citizen sectors, sociologists will have to promote a vision and performance based on significant analytical-operational capacities, and also be guided by creative, pedagogical, dialogical, propositional, and emotional skills, as well as by ways of stimulating self-definition, mobilization, and resilience that will support (or co-produce with) those who take on the role of civic and political actors. In line with this, sociologists' commitment to an ethics based on key values of democratic life (justice, freedom, pluralism, tolerance, solidarity, criticism and dissent, listening, and collaboration), constitutes a guiding axis of their involvement.

In a more specific sense, the preconditions for the emergence of these new social and political sectors suggest that they will be receptive to:

- the acquisition of better elements, skills, and experiences in their internal (or shared) process of organizational evolution, which implies strengthening themselves democratically at different scales;
- a targeted and sustained advance in the achievement of their objectives and the concretization of ideals central to their identity (in accordance with democratic values and human rights);
- the act of assuming a platform of *citizen lobbying*, aimed at building a plan for the reconfiguration of policies under their influence and beyond; and
- the clarification of the contribution they would make through their democratic practice (linked to other social agents and experts) to different arenas, redirecting the rigid institutional frameworks towards inclusive and innovative ways of linking state and citizens.

In the case of sociologists, the relevant and central roles for this type of task stand out; they would act as:

- *decoders* of discourses, narratives, and imaginaries for their reprocessing in communication, cultural, and political projects of greater significance;
- *mediators* of conflict and tensions that are rooted within or outside of organizations;
- *accompaniers* and *translators* of processes of political, civil, and public action against public and private powers; and
- *articulators* (or *co-generators*) of projects of a civil, democratic, and public policy scope that would be adopted by the citizen groups they work with.

In short, situated between two serious threats that prevail today – extreme right-wing populism and the enormous power of technological corporations (linked to government surveillance systems) – citizens will need to respond to them with lucidity and a proactive orientation, articulating both their democratic voices and the capacities for governance that will strengthen and make them sustainable. Thus, with a pressing need to renew the democratic project, they will seek a refocusing of their political learning, integration of knowledge, civic friendship, and organizational orientation. And alongside this, they will need to build bridges with other actors, including practitioners of disciplines such as sociology, political science, and anthropology, who will be encouraged to become involved by combining an argumentative and empathetic approach with a more energetic and assertive impulse. ■

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1. See  
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/irish-referendums-deliberative-assemblies/>.



# > Silence around Intimate Partner Violence

## in Trinidad and Tobago

by **Amanda Chin Pang**, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

**I**n Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), when women, men, and children are killed in intimate partner violence (IPV) or gang-related warfare, this gets immediate attention. However, immediately, the cries of victims and survivors go silent and perpetrators merely put forward trite alibis about their violence, leaving an impending doom of perpetual abuse.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there has been a long-standing silence when women, men and children are killed in intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence situations. The death of one woman, Andrea Bharatt, is a hopeful catalyst that unmuffles cries of victims and survivors of abuse and violence.

### > A culture of violence

Since the call for COVID-19 “stay-at-home” measures, there has been an increase in the cases of domestic violence – domestic violence is sometimes used synonymously with IPV – and many of these cases described as domestic violence are in fact between adult intimate partners.

Victims’ silence and lack of opportunities to escape persistent violence leads me to think about a culture of violence that is deeply rooted in Trinbagonians. Muzzles cover the mouths of friends and relatives, aware of these situations. I call for a break in the silence on violence that has deep colonial roots. Bergner (1995) in “Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*” highlights this historical context, of not only systemic racism, but also the disadvantaged position of women as subjects to men. The lack of direct policies and research on IPV, despite its grave impact on intimate partners and their dependents, leads me to think that some Caribbean people are too comfortable with this pattern of violence. I call this a “culture of violence,” as described by Brereton (2010) in “The Historical Background to the Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago,” because it is normalized in the country.

### > The normalization of violence

We may ponder various questions surrounding this issue. Violence in intimate partner relationships has manifested

as normalized in Caribbean interaction. What is causing violence to be normalized within a small twin island republic like Trinidad and Tobago? Could it be inability to cope with relationship difficulties, or is it that this violence is acceptable to intimate partners, or both? What is it about T&T culture that seems to facilitate and condone this violence, with little or no public protest? Is IPV considered a private issue within relationships? Are men and women afraid?

On a global scale, IPV is prevalent among many couples. Referring to statistics from the WHO Violence Against Women factsheet, one in three women will experience IPV in an intimate relationship and 38% of murders of women worldwide are committed by a male intimate partner (WHO, 2017). While these statistics reflect male violence against female intimate partners, there has also been intimate partner violence by women against men, as well as IPV within same-sex relationships. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence of the USA (NCADV, 2020) states that one in nine men have experienced some form of IPV, sexual contact violence, and stalking. Furthermore, according to this report, male rape victims and male victims of unwanted sexual contact have reported predominantly male perpetrators. This reflects a similar situation in Trinidad and Tobago. Le Franc et al. (2008) in “Interpersonal violence in three Caribbean countries: Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago” provide evidence on reporting of physical and sexual violence in Trinidad and Tobago, finding that 47.7% of men experienced physical violence within relationships and 52.5% of men experienced sexual coercion within relationships.

Interestingly, masculinity is learnt through power, reinforced by family socialization across generations, religion, school, media, and friends, according to Wiltshire (2012) in “Youth Masculinities and Violence in the Caribbean.” Moreover, Wiltshire notes that manliness is expressed through acts of violence and aggression and some men think that women sometimes need to be disciplined by their male partners. While both men and women are perpetrators of intimate partner violence, news reports in T&T are flooded with incidents of women being killed by their intimate partners. This is because there is a larger proportion of men who perpetrate IPV against women compared to the proportion of women who perpetrate these acts on men.

**“Making it a norm to speak out against violence and perceive violence as unacceptable and anomalous in expressions of self and within relationships will break the silence and ultimately change intimate partner relations for the better”**

Notions of masculinity and femininity shared by men and women reflect the inevitability of male violence in intimate relationships and the acceptance and silence on the issue. Furthermore, this abuse is legitimated by labelling women as “not respectable” when they transgress the limits of expectations of Caribbean respectability. However, men’s thoughts on women’s expression of their sexuality and femininity are certainly no excuse to abuse.

**> Silence as a barrier to addressing IPV**

It is noteworthy that there are efforts being made to break the silence and give victims a voice. The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce (TTCIC) Domestic Violence in the Workplace Policy (2018) and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) Gender-Based Violence Unit are policies addressing issues of IPV. The UN’s Spotlight Initiative is highlighting increased instances of domestic violence due to COVID-19. Despite these initiatives, the culture of violence and notions of masculinity and femininity in T&T reflect a general acceptance of a culture of violence in the country.

Empowering and encouraging IPV survivors through safety and support mechanisms, therapeutic options for cou-

ples and for perpetrators not in denial, promoting mental health for men and women, and calling on men to reach out for help can positively change a culture of silence on violence to a culture that speaks out against and publicly disapproves violence.

Furthermore, a resocialization of males and females in their expression of sexuality and gender roles is necessary. I believe the shame and fear associated with IPV for the victim and even for the perpetrator, and a survivor’s false sense of responsibility for their victimhood, leads to this silence on violence. Hence, a main barrier to reporting domestic violence to the police, for male and female victims, was embarrassment/shame, according to Wallace (2019) in “Domestic Violence: Intimate Partner Violence Victimization Non-Reporting to the Police in Trinidad and Tobago.” Despite the reason, the response is silence, which often ends in murder.

Making it a norm to speak out against violence and perceive violence as unacceptable and anomalous in expressions of self and within relationships will break the silence and ultimately change intimate partner relations for the better. ■

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# > On the Capability to Take Care of the World

by **Francesco Laruffa**, University of Geneva, Switzerland



*Individuals should be treated as “agents” who co-decide on the direction of social change. Drawing by seven-year-old Matteo Laruffa.*

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has nourished various discussions on the “world after Corona” and the “future we want.” The idea is that the pandemic is not only a tragic consequence of neoliberal capitalism and its inherent overexploitation of nature (e.g., deforestation): the pandemic also offers the opportunity to rethink our society and the ways in which it is organized. However, there is no agreement on the envisioned future. Some push for “inclusive green growth” and a Green Deal promoting “green jobs.” The focus here is on technological innovation to achieve environmental sustainability without changing people’s lifestyle (e.g., consumerism) or capitalist structures (e.g., the power asymmetry between employers and workers). Others instead aspire to a more profound “social-ecological transformation,” where the economy is subordinated to the satisfaction of social and ecological needs rather than profits.

In what follows, I propose a radical interpretation of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s “capability approach,”

exploring how this could help us to imagine more emancipatory and sustainable futures. Clearly, delineating a valuable future cannot be the exclusive task of sociology (or philosophy): the future needs to be co-constructed in a democratic way, involving citizens’ participation. I argue that the capability approach allows for such a democratic perspective on the “future we want.”

## > For a radical interpretation of capabilities

The capability approach suggests that public action should focus on promoting people’s capabilities, i.e., their real freedom to lead a life they have reason to value. In this perspective, societal progress is not equated with economic growth but with the removal of obstacles to human flourishing: public policies should expand individuals’ freedom to achieve valuable “beings” and “doings,” i.e., to pursue their reasoned conception of the “good life.” This focus compels us to reflect in terms of

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final ends, debating what is intrinsically important. The capability approach also assigns a key role to democracy. Democratic participation has not only an instrumental function (allowing citizens to make their voice heard so that public action better reflects their interests) but also a constructive role, shaping societal priorities and – since conceptions of the good life change during deliberative processes – even individuals' values.

On this basis, I contend that the capability approach can be framed in a more radical way than the one dominating policy circles. Indeed, the link between capabilities and economic growth could be questioned more deeply. The dominant interpretation of the capability approach highlights that growth is not an end in itself but only a means for achieving valuable ends. Yet, given its disastrous consequences on the environment and its poor impact on human well-being, economic growth does not even represent a suitable means and public action should abandon this goal altogether. In many cases the economy grows *through* human suffering and environmental disaster: from an earthquake becoming an engine of economic growth in the construction industry to production-generated pollution triggering various diseases. Even what seems *prima facie* positive is actually disappointing. Opulence, for example, encourages an acquisitive-materialistic and competitive-individualistic vision of the good life, which ultimately undermines well-being. Thus, the Western lifestyle is not only unsustainable: the desirability of this growth-based model of “development” is questionable in itself from a well-being perspective.

Similarly, the idea – central in the capability approach – that individuals should be treated as “agents” has become very influential in the policy world. Yet, people are conceived as agents in a narrow sense, namely as economic actors who participate in markets. Instead, the figure of the democratic citizen who co-decides on the direction of social change is marginalized. In this context, the capability approach is co-opted into neoliberal-individualistic interpretations of “empowerment” that reduce human freedom to the freedom to participate in the economy, especially the labor market. Capability has become a synonym of human capital: the set of skills that individuals need to be successful economic actors.

Rejecting both economic growth and people's inclusion in the capitalist economy as desirable goals for public action, a more radical interpretation of the capability approach would imply giving citizens the power to co-determine the

direction of social change, debating the meaning of development, progress, and quality of life in terms of final ends. This understanding entails reducing the influence of markets in shaping our collective destiny, (partially) replacing them with participatory-deliberative democracy.

### > Centering public action on the “capability to take care of the world”

At this point, the capability approach can be combined with the “ethics of care” developed by feminist theorists. As Joan Tronto suggests, the care perspective highlights what we, as society, care about. Capitalism is a system based on the care for profits, and individuals are rewarded according to their contribution to profits. But we could build a society in which the care for other people (e.g., children, elderly, and ill people), for the environment (in the form of both environmental protection/maintenance and environmental reparation), for democratic institutions, and for oneself (sport, arts, education, etc.) takes priority over profits.

From this perspective, rewards could shift from production to social reproduction and work could be reconceptualized as the activity of *taking care of the world*. The meaning of the latter should be defined through democratic deliberation. Thus, democracy would (partially) replace the market in establishing what a valuable contribution to society is. This understanding of work, based on “societal usefulness” rather than market value, has gained prominence during the pandemic with discussions on “essential” workers. An agenda following this framework would oppose the proliferation of “bullshit jobs” (David Graeber) – green or otherwise – in capitalist societies, promoting individuals' capability to perform *meaningful work*. The latter involves an activity accomplished within or outside the labour market that offers human flourishing opportunities for the individuals performing it and that contributes to society in an “objectively” valuable way – and all citizens are equally entitled to participate in the democratic debate on what is valuable (Ruth Yeoman).

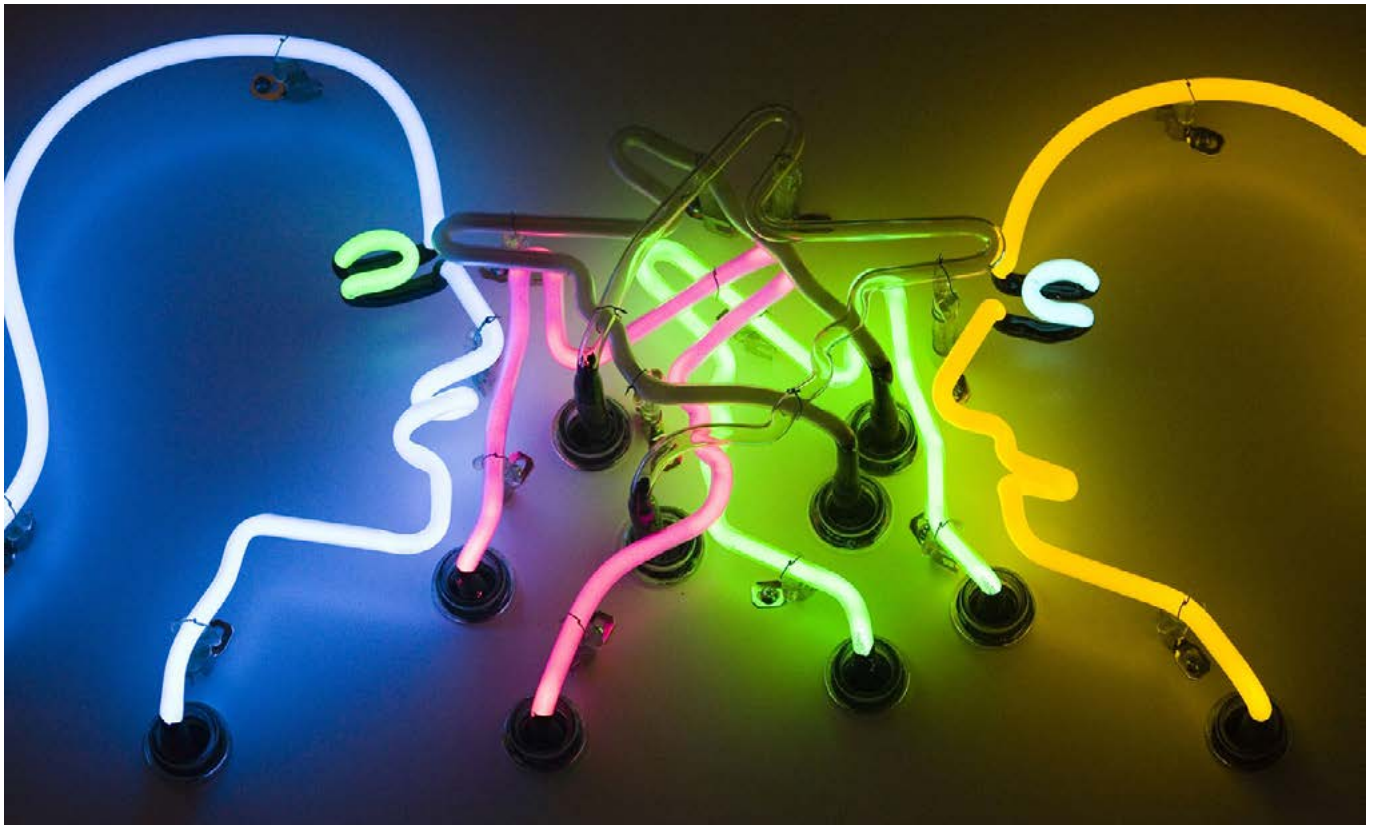
In conclusion, once its critical vision of capitalism is made more explicit, the capability approach can inspire progressives, suggesting to focus public action not on economic growth or on including people in the labor market, but on promoting the “capability to take care of the world” – which also entails the right to participate in the debate on what is worthy of care. ■

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# > Humans as Homo Culturus

by **Mahmoud Dhaouadi**, University of Tunis, Tunisia and member of ISA Research Committees on History of Sociology (RC08), Sociology of Religion (RC22) and Language and Society (RC25)



*Human beings are not only speaking animals but users of different Cultural Symbols. Language needs to be understood as the basis of these Cultural Symbols. Credit: [Flickr/ Thomas Hawk](#).*

**T**he concept of *Homo Culturus* is missing in the social sciences. Economists and those who have a materialist view have described Man as *Homo Oeconomicus*, political scientists have labeled him/her as *Homo Politicus* and sociologists see the human being as a social being or *Homo Sociologicus*. Because of the increasing use of numbers today, some talk about *Homo Numericus*. Despite their great interest in the study of culture, however, contemporary anthropologists have not used terms related to culture to describe Man as first of all a *Homo Culturus*. Positivist epistemology has prevailed in the social sciences. It claims that sensory experience is the bedrock of knowledge. Leading anthropologists are witness to the impact of that epistemology. In his 1973 book *The Concept of Culture* Leslie White mentions

that Ralph Linton, Radcliffe-Brown and others considered culture an abstraction or something that does not exist or that designates no concrete reality. Positivist social scientists would hardly show great interest in culture as a non sensory and ambiguous phenomenon.

## > Positivism's persistent impact

The above reservations about culture are also found among "the founding fathers" of Western sociology. The pre-1960 theorists of culture like Weber, Durkheim, Marx, Parsons, Mills and others are known to have had a "weak program" about culture in their published works. That is, they gave culture minor importance. Furthermore, the Birmingham School, Bourdieu and Foucault have not done

better: they too have adopted a “weak program” for the study of culture. The “weak program” trend still dominates sociological studies of culture today even though the “strong program” of cultural sociology (which gives culture great importance) is gaining growing attention since the birth of the “cultural turn” in the late 1990s.

### > The search for Homo Culturus

My research has incidentally led me to have a long-standing affinity with the study of culture. My intellectual curiosity in the 1990s motivated me to try to work out a theoretical framework which would help understand and explain people's behaviors and the dynamics of human societies. In his 2014 book *The Art of Social Theory* sociologist Richard Swedberg argues that sociological theorizing is not in good standing. I felt I should take the risk in the theorizing adventure. I began by raising this methodological question: which should be the starting point for exploring the puzzle of the forces that lie behind human behaviors and the dynamics of societies? I thought I should start first by identifying *the special traits* which distinguish the human species from other species. I felt that in seeking to identify those traits, I should start my research at square one. In pursuit of potential distinctive human traits I left no stone unturned to finally discover what I was looking for: *Cultural Symbols* (CS), that is, language, thought, knowledge, religion, laws, myths, cultural values and norms. The study of CS thus appears to be fundamental for the understanding and explanation of human behaviors and societal phenomena. My theorizing has led me to look at language as the compelling force behind the birth of CS: *language is the “mother” of CS*. That is, the human being is not only a speaking animal as described by ancient philosophers and social thinkers, but she/he is also a great user of CS. As such, my version of the *cogito ergo sum* would state: I use language, therefore, I am human.

These theoretical assumptions have led to field observations which strongly reinforce the concept of *Homo Culturus*. I have found four distinct human features which may explain why humans are *Homo Culturus* individuals.

### > Basic observations on human distinctiveness

The centrality of the CS in human identity may be considered *new* in contemporary social sciences, as outlined before. My conceptualization of CS at the core of human identities (*Homo Culturus*) was reached as follows:

1) The growth and maturation process of the human body is *slow* compared with that of most other living beings. For instance, on average human babies start walking at the

age of one year, while animal babies may walk right away or within a few hours or days after their birth.

2) Humans have a *longer life span* than most animals.

3) The human race has an uncontested *dominant role* on the planet.

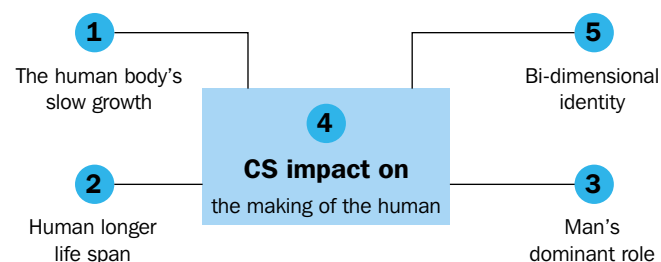
4) Humans are *privileged* by CS.

5) The human identity is made up of two parts: *the body* and CS. It is a bi-dimensional identity which is often referred to in religions and philosophy as a dual identity made up of body and soul.

### > Insights offered by CS

Humans grow and mature slowly on both the body and the CS fronts. So humans are *bi-dimensional* in their overall development. In contrast, the growth and maturation of non-human species are largely *uni-dimensional* (body-only) because of their lack of CS in the broad and sophisticated human sense. The need to progress on two levels is seen to be behind the slow body growth and maturation of humans. That is, the process of the human body's growth and maturation is slowed down, so to speak, because humans are involved in a *second process* of growth and maturation represented by CS.

CS should contribute to answer the puzzle inscribed on the cover of the Special Issue of *Scientific American* (September 2018) : “Humans: Why we are unlike any other species on the planet.” As pointed out above, humans are distinctive from other species by virtue of CS. Thus, CS is what makes them *unlike* other species. The following drawing illustrates why the human being is a *Homo Culturus*.



### > Homo Culturus and the parsimony principle

It has just been illustrated that CS can explain the four distinctive human features. CS can explain countless further specific behaviors of human individuals and groups as well as the variety of the dynamics of societies and civilizations. Thus, CS is compatible with the Principle of Parsimony: the use of the lowest possible number of variables in order to explain the maximum possible number of phenomena. ■

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# > The Norway Terror Attacks of July 22, 2011

by **Pål Halvorsen**, journals editor at Scandinavian University Press, Norway



*The main building at the island of Utøya, on whose grounds 69 people were killed. Credit: Pål Halvorsen.*

## **“Things happen, but their representation is up in the air”**

Alexander, J. C. & Gao, R. (2012)

**F**jotolf Hansen, most known by his former name Anders Behring Breivik, conducted two terrorist attacks in Norway on July 22, 2011, one at the executive government quarter of Norway, and the second at Utøya, where the Worker’s Youth League had their summer camp. Now, ten years later, the Norwegian society still grapples with questions that were raised in the aftermath. The attacks killed 77 people and wounded

many more. They struck Norway as a nation, but also the world. International visitors attended the summer camp, and international media covered the attacks. The questions instantly posed regarded for instance the international inspiration for the attacks. However, Norwegian society had enough with coping with practical decisions in the immediate aftermath. Many underline in their accounts the timing of the attacks, the middle of the summer when Oslo is pretty empty and most people are on vacation. It made society even less prepared for something as horrible as this, and the response not as quick as expected or wanted. With a terrorist who had surrendered under his full name



and had distributed a “manifesto” widely just ahead of the attacks, the search for answers could begin with the material available. The psychological question as to whether Breivik was sane or not was handled with by two psychological forensic expert committees in the same manner, albeit with two contrasting conclusions. The first committee found him paranoid schizophrenic, while the second found that he had a narcissistic personality disorder but still was sane during the attacks. The trial in Oslo District Court ended with Breivik being found sane and guilty. His sentence is the maximum penalty in Norway: 21 years in prison, with possible extensions. During his time in prison he has changed his name. On March 15, 2019 Brenton Tarrant carried out a terrorist attack against Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand. He explicitly named Breivik as a source of inspiration, and the “22nd of July” became international news again.

“22nd of July” has become a metonym for the cultural trauma emerging after the events. It does not merely reflect a historical occurrence, but also the process afterwards, like “9/11”. The events made questions about collective identity pressing and challenged previous conceptions of Norwegianness. As the Norwegian confederation of trade unions asked: “How could ‘one of our own’ end up as a mass murderer?” This way of opening collective foundations for discussion is one of the indicators of cultural trauma.

There is a wide and growing international – and not only Norwegian – literature on “22nd of July”. Perhaps most well-known is the non-fiction book *One of us* by Åsne Seierstad, with its telling title. In the academic literature, the anthropologist Sindre Bangstad wrote a book called *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* in 2014 which delved explicitly into the question of the ideological motivation for terrorism. Whereas Bangstad is explicit on studying the dangers of Islamophobia as an important contextual factor, Sveinung Sandberg studies the self-narratives presented in Breivik’s “manifesto,” and finds four different ways of analyzing them, “either as strategic or determined or unified or fragmented.” He also points out how the different ways of describing Breivik reflect a struggle between anti-Islamists trying to focus on Breivik’s agency and leftist actors underlining structural approaches. Other lines of research that could have been mentioned are for instance studies of the media, debates on multiculturalism, trust and civic engagement, and counterterrorism policy. All

these examples typically try to study the effects of 22nd of July. One important consequence to mention is that in the wake of the terrorist attacks the Norwegian government provided financial support for the establishment of the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), located at the University of Oslo, which according to Cynthia Miller-Idriss “is now widely recognized as the most comprehensive center for scholarly and public policy expertise on far-right extremism globally.”

This is not the space to provide the full account of scholarship on, or relating to, 22nd of July, but the following articles are brought forward as examples of the landscape in which I and Tore Rafoss have been working on a thematic issue of the *Norwegian Journal of Sociology* on “22nd of July.” The articles are to cover different aspects. The first article, “Trust in the aftermath of terrorism in Norway, France and Spain,” studies the importance of narratives as a part of citizens’ trust in politicians and society after terrorist attacks. The comparative cases are the terrorist attacks in Nice in 2016 and in Barcelona in 2017.

The second article is about memory work and is entitled “National memorials as a response to terrorism.” It studies the process of establishing national memorials in Oslo and Utøya by comparing with the Oklahoma City National Memorial and New York’s National 9/11 Memorial. The article ends with a discussion on how, paradoxically, national memorials often veil the political dimension of historical events and acts of remembering.

The third article, “The role of the court after 22nd of July,” sketches out a research agenda within the sociology of law by documenting the relationships between the court and survivors, and memory work and reconstruction. The ambition is to provide further understanding of how the court responds to extraordinary events.

The books that will be reviewed are Cynthia Miller-Idriss’ *Hate in the Homeland*, Anne Gjelsvik’s edited anthology *Bearbeidelser* [Ways of Working Through] Eirik Høyer Leivestad’s *Frykt og avsky i demokratiet* [Fear and Loathing in Democracy], and Hallvard Notaker’s *Arbeiderpartiet og 22. Juli* [The Labour Party and the 22nd of July].

As these articles and book reviews illustrate, the strength of sociology relies on its breadth when it comes to studying “22nd of July.” ■

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