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in Ukraine

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> Editorial

In this issue of *Global Dialogue* the section 'Talking Sociology' features an interview with Shruti Majumdar, a sociologist from India who works as a Gender Violence Specialist for the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. From her current position at the United Nations, she explains to Sebastián Galleguillos how her sociological lens has proved useful for working within international organizations, and also gives advice to sociologists interested in combining research and practice in the international field of development.

In the meantime, after more than half a year since the war against Ukraine broke out we are witnessing deep ongoing changes in international relations and politics. *Global Dialogue* initiates in this issue a reflection on this situation by inviting ISA president Sari Hanafi to look back on the past decades, the wars in many parts of the world and their disastrous effects, and to analyze the break marked by Russia's war of aggression in terms of geopolitical consequences.

The first symposium elaborates on theories of capitalism, showing a wide range of approaches and arguments for understanding contemporary capitalist societies. While Patricia Ventrici offers concrete analyses of the connection between technological change, precarization and unionization, Esteban Torres brings the concept of "mundialization" into the theory of capitalism in order to explain the increasing complexity of global class structures. In reference to Brazilian society, Fabrício Maciel shows how, in addition to precarity, indignity and degradation must also be taken into account in order to better explain the rise of authoritarian and right-wing movements. William I. Robinson takes a global approach to show the evolution of geographic stratification between center and periphery, as well as its slow shift worldwide towards increasing inequalities within states.

Since the early 1990s, higher education institutions have been affected by the neoliberal restructuring of the public sector and are increasingly marketized. The articles in our second symposium, organized by Johanna Grubner, examine these ongoing transformations in different parts of the world. Stephanie Ross and Larry Savage analyze the effects of the ongoing neo-liberalization of the Canadian higher education sector in terms of the

commodification and reorganization of work regimes. Ka Ho Mok takes a look at job opportunities for higher education graduates in light of the massification of the East Asian higher education institutions and a highly competitive labor market. Elizabeth Balbachevsky discusses the challenges arising for universities in the face of neo-populist governments and shows how in the case of Brazilian universities semi-autonomous decision-making processes can ensure the stability of universities. Yusef Waghid critically examines the trend of remote teaching put forward by the COVID-19 pandemic and argues for a restructuring of (South) African universities along the African ethic of *ubuntu*. In this sense universities should be autonomous as well as connected and positioned with society.

The theoretical section brings reflections on capitalism. Here Michael Burawoy takes up Erik Olin Wright's concept of real utopias and relates it systematically to the thought of Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi. Showing what can be won if all three approaches are taken into consideration he nevertheless puts his finger on the desiderata they have in common: "who will form the collective actor to save humanity from capitalism? This is the problem Marx, Polanyi and Wright have left us to solve."

The country focus in this issue is on sociology from Turkey. This collection of articles organized by N. Beril Özer Tekin deals with diverse topics, ranging from gender inequalities to white-collar labor and their work-life habits during the pandemic, the impact of the pandemic on the elderly, and the Turkish government's current approach to issues of environmental destruction.

In the 'Open Section' Hans-Jürgen Urban's article and a photo series granted to *Global Dialogue* shed light on industrial development while Bruna de Penha and Ana Beatriz Bueno give insight into the delivery work organized by digital platforms. Other topics included in this section are a Polanyian perspective on right-wing populism and sociological reflections on homicide perpetrators. ■

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

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This symposium brings together current debates and perspectives on topics such as class, digitalization, and social inequality and how they can be captured for theories on capitalism.



The articles in this symposium discuss challenges faced by higher education and pick up current transformation processes in the higher education system and their consequences.



In this country focus, insights into different areas of sociology in Turkey are presented, covering an engaging thematic breadth of gender, technology, and environmental sociology.



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“My advice to junior sociologists would be to read widely
across disciplines and across the spectrum of theory and practice.
And to not be afraid to ask big questions.”

Shruti Majumdar

> Using a Sociological Lens to Address Violence Against Women

An Interview with Shruti Majumdar



Shruti Majumdar¹ is currently the acting Programme Manager for the Ending Violence against Women portfolio in UN Women's Afghanistan office. She has over a decade of field experience at the World Bank and the United Nations at the intersection of programming and research on women's empowerment programmes in multiple countries such as India, Bangladesh, Serbia, Jordan and Uzbekistan. Shruti has an MA and PhD in Sociology from Brown University, and a BA in Sociology from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University.

Here she is interviewed by **Sebastián Galleguillos**, a doctoral student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY), where he also completed an MA in International Crime & Justice. He is a Youth Representative for the International Sociological Association (ISA) to the United Nations and Research Associate at the Centro de Estudios de Derecho Penal, Universidad de Talca, Chile. His research interests include comparative criminology, social media and crime, and alternatives to incarceration.

SG: Can you tell me about your current position at the United Nations? How long have you held that position and what are your principal duties?

SM: Since 2018, I have been working at the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women at [UN Women](#). We support and invest in civil society organizations across the globe working to eliminate violence against women. The UN Trust Fund is 25 years old and has a long history of working with women's rights organizations and women's movements. In 2020 alone, we supported 150 civil society-led projects in 71 countries and territories that worked on a range of issues: providing services to survivors of violence; strengthening the implementation of laws, policies, and action plans on violence against women; and preventing violence from occurring altogether by tackling the root causes of violence and gender inequality.

In my role as a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, my work can be broadly divided into two parts. First, I work directly with civil society organizations to build their research and evaluation capacity and to make data central to their programming. I help them arrive at the most appropriate, ethical, and safe methodologies for measuring the impact of their programs in their communities. A second and major piece of my work is to grow the internal research function and capacity on violence against women at UN Women. This work is critical because violence against women and girls is devastatingly pervasive – [globally one in three women report physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner](#), and this number has remained unchanged in the past decade. At the same time, we know that violence is preventable, so it is critical that we learn from organizations that have been working on the front lines for decades. I am involved in writing research proposals, mobilizing resources, managing teams of external

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researchers, and co-producing knowledge in partnership with frontline organizations. This research then also feeds back into my daily support to these organizations. In a nutshell, my work involves constantly moving back and forth between sociological research and development practice – something that I have been always passionate about.

SG: You have spent several years studying sociology, including a bachelor's, a master's, and a PhD in sociology from different universities. How do you apply your sociological lens and skills at UN Women?

SM: Indeed, I spent almost ten years formally studying sociology, and still remain a student of the discipline! I received my BA in sociology from Delhi University in the early 2000s. Like many young Indian sociologists, I was deeply inspired by the work of M.N. Srinivas and his unshakeable belief in the discipline and the tools and methods it offers in understanding the world we live in, especially in understanding social structure and change. I knew quite early on that I wanted to pursue sociology *and* that I wanted to apply a sociological lens to real world problems. Which is why right after my BA, I moved to the United States to pursue a master's and PhD in sociology at Brown University, which is a wonderful hub for both development sociology and interdisciplinary work on pressing developmental challenges. I got very interested in structural violence and social movements during my time at Brown and in questions of why some groups are more likely to be marginalized (or get mobilized) in certain times and spaces versus others. In addition, while I trained in both qualitative and quantitative methods, I was really drawn towards good ethnographies. Through my PhD and eventually as a sociologist at the World Bank, I was fortunate to spend time conducting ethnographies embedded in large-scale development projects in India, Bangladesh, Serbia, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Liberia, Afghanistan and other countries.

In terms of applying these skills to my current work at the UN, I use them every day because a sociological lens is absolutely critical for the field of violence against women: for diagnosing the root cause of the problem, that is, the social structures and norms that buttress violence; for co-creating contextually relevant projects with governments and civil society organizations; and for evaluating whether these projects have been effective for those for whom they are meant, and if so, how and why. For instance, I am currently on an assignment in Kabul as the acting Programme Manager of the Ending Violence against Women portfolio of UN Women and am in different provinces where, in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover, services and prevention programmes for survivors were ceased – a bulk of my work is re-building these services in a safe and ethical way, which requires a rapid and constant back and forth between research and practice.

You can find [here](#) some of my most recent work, which is a series of papers co-produced with 100+ practitioners and

social scientists across the globe in three languages on preventing violence against women and girls, noting what kinds of solutions have worked best. It is the first of its kind of systematic review of qualitative and mixed methods research that unpacks some really hard questions – e.g., on intersecting vulnerabilities and why some women and girls are more likely to experience violence than some others, how communities can mobilize to prevent violence, what kinds of resistance and backlash civil society organizations experience daily against their work, and how they adapt strategies to keep the work going. The field is still largely the arena of public health economists and, consequently, of questions around *what* works to end violence. Complementing it with sociological research on *how* and *why* things work, and doing research on stigmatization, power, and structural violence makes clear that more work is needed to develop long-term, holistic, and sustainable solutions to this problem.

SG: Based on your experience, what challenges might sociologists face when working in international organizations? How do you overcome those challenges?

SM: There are more opportunities than challenges in my opinion! Sociologists have so much to offer when it comes to upstream analysis, design, and downstream evaluation of development programs, and there are plenty of avenues for fruitful collaboration across disciplines. A few challenges that I can think of nonetheless (some true for all researchers and some more true for sociologists perhaps) is transcending not just the disciplinary boundaries but the boundaries between development research and development practice. In other words, how to leverage sociological theory effectively for practice, and then, vice versa, how to use practice to inform theory, and how to create more spaces for meaningful dialogue between the two?

Research and practice generally tend to have different rhythms; finding ways that we can dialogue effectively in order to co-produce solutions on the front lines that are grounded in the needs of survivors and at-risk women and girls is important. More researchers need to be involved in rapid implementation research that draws on the types of problems civil society and governments are grappling with every day but is still grounded in theory – I was fortunate to be part of a team at the World Bank called the [Social Observatory](#) where we did exciting cutting-edge embedded research in South Asia. It is absolutely critical that we learn from and document the daily praxis of civil society organizations, especially women's rights organizations, that have been working on the front lines for decades but struggle to document their work, and allow it to inform sociological theory. In an upcoming book with Cambridge University Press on building women's movements, my co-authors and I try to do exactly this – we are documenting four years of fieldwork in one of the poorest states in India on the nuts and bolts of how movement building work is done incrementally by a World Bank supported



project in a hard context and the types of gender and cultural norms that are undone in the process.

A second challenge, and this one is specific to sociologists, is how to use rigorous ethnographic research as a basis to rethink some of the major questions asked in development practice. A few years ago, *The New York Times* carried a wonderful, thought-provoking article titled [“What if Sociologists had as Much Influence as Economists?”](#) As Michèle Lamont argues in the article, too often the questions asked of projects are questions economists are equipped to answer; with more sociologists in the room, the very questions being asked will gradually shift. They will shift to the *how* and *why*, i.e., how and why projects led by civil society organizations or governments are having an impact on wider social systems and structures.

SG: What policies have you promoted at UN Women to strengthen women’s rights during the pandemic? What areas are we overlooking, in your opinion?

SM: The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures in countries across the globe have led to a notable rise in several forms of violence, notably intimate partner violence (as more women are locked in with their perpetrators), non-partner sexual violence, online sexual harassment and, in certain regions, even harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and early and forced child marriage. At the UN Trust Fund, in collaboration with many civil society organizations, I have been writing about these trends regularly to bring them to the attention of policy makers and donors. As lockdowns continue indefinitely or are re-imposed, civil society organizations across the globe are likening the situation to a prolonged crisis and want to build their emergency preparedness and resilience. They, especially the smaller and grassroots organizations, need flexible and core funding – for salaries, health insurance, communication, and transport – to build their capacity to adapt. The lockdown has severely weakened civil society organizations’ capacity and threatens their survival. Several of their premises have been diverted for COVID-19 testing, their shelters and staff are overwhelmed, and several have had to close offices, downsize, and lay off staff exactly when they are most needed. They are needed because women are still reaching out to their local women’s rights organizations and community-based structures for help – through WhatsApp, social media, helplines, word of mouth, or directly, women are seeking support from their local shelters, self-help group leaders, community health workers, faith leaders, community-based counsellors, and paralegals.

In light of this, at UN Women we have continued and further amplified our support to civil society, raised more resources, and provided flexible funding to these organizations. We are also listening and learning from them² – because in this moment these organizations, as first responders, have a lot of textured and real-time data and we must get policymakers and researchers to listen and

work closely with them to unpack and act on that data. In short, the voices of survivors and grassroots civil society organizations *have* to be the starting point for policy, and ending violence against women and girls policies need to be tailored and extremely localized at this time.

SG: Finally, do you have any advice for junior sociologists and social scientists who are starting a career in the international field? Do you have any recommendations or information about locating job opportunities?

SM: My advice would be to read widely across disciplines and across the spectrum of theory and practice. And to not be afraid to ask big questions! Sociologists are well-equipped to thoughtfully and critically engage with development practice through their theoretical knowledge and methodological tools, and to further the field. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of progress on gender equality and the scale of the challenges that persist. We are now at a critical juncture where there is a heightened recognition that transformative approaches that require deep and lasting changes in power across domains are needed. We need to create more holistic programs that establish patriarchy and deep-rooted gender inequality squarely as the challenge to overcome, and we need to ask: What are the systems, ideologies and institutions that create, embody, and perpetuate patriarchy? How can we transform them in sustainable ways in specific contexts and times? I strongly believe sociologists can contribute to this, both in research and practice.

I also encourage young sociologists who are starting their careers to gain as much field experience as possible – UN country-level programs are where one can gain a grounded understanding of complex developmental challenges. These postings can be found at the [UN careers website](#). Also, while it’s important to stay current on development challenges, it is equally important to stay abreast of cutting-edge research in the field, especially if you plan to wear both hats! And in this regard, I cannot emphasize enough the potential for learning from other sociologists within organizations like the ISA. It is a fantastic platform for staying current, disseminating your own research, and creating relevant collaborations.

And finally, do not hesitate to reach out to sociologists who are wearing both hats. I found that reaching out to alumni from graduate school was a great way to fully understand the nature of the work. And they still remain my support system in navigating the complex and ever-evolving field of development. ■

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1. The views expressed in this publication are those of the interviewee and do not represent the views of UN Women or the World Bank.

2. [United Nations Women \(2020\). Voices from the ground: Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women.](#)

> Ukraine, Putin's Imperial Paradigm, and Euro-America

by **Sari Hanafi**, American University of Beirut, Lebanon, and President of the International Sociological Association (2018-2023)



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The Russian criminal invasion of Ukraine that has rocked the world is not only an isolated war but also an exceptional one. It is exceptional based on its capacity to turn into a third World War and more specifically, in its risk of becoming a nuclear one. The eastward expansion of NATO is a provocation, or at least what the Palestinian philosopher Azmi Bishara (2022) called “determination to not avoid the road to war,” yet it does not at all justify this furious invasion and the unilateral stepping over the sovereignty of a country. The International Sociological Association (ISA) released a statement¹ at the beginning of this war expressing its deep concern about the Russian military offensive in Ukraine. For the ISA, and for me personally, war is never an acceptable solution and is against all the values we uphold. The ISA stands in solidarity with the Ukrainian social scientists and with our colleagues elsewhere, including in the Russian Federation and Belarus, who have raised their voices against this war, and have defended democracy and human rights.²

> Putin's imperial paradigm

Putin's Russia is persistently undermining the liberal democratic ideals that humanity has long been developing. Not only has Putin been in power effectively since 2000, but he has also been actively waging war against any attempt at democratization by other countries (Georgia, Syria, Ukraine, etc.). He has partially imitated some of America's unilateral displays of power (e.g., the invasion of Iraq), but the difference is that Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime was indeed dictatorial. Ukraine is a democratic country, although highly divided over the issue of joining NATO. According to recent surveys, while more than half the population are in favor of joining the EU, only 40

to 50% are in favor of joining NATO (Bishara 2022). This ambivalent position is wise as it takes into account the pathetic “great power nationalism” of Russia, which is based mainly on three vectors: Russian identity forged by the Orthodox church and the Tsars; Slavic ethnicity (thinking Russia, Belorussia, and Ukraine as the same space); and, to a lower degree, Eurasia (necessary for the grandeur of Russia through an alliance with former Asian Soviet Union republics and China). While Marx referred to nineteenth-century Tsarist Russia as the bastion of reaction in Europe, Putin's populist Russia again plays this pitiful role,³ despite the economic success of his era. This is a role I witnessed (and lived through) earlier during the Russian (and Iranian) war in Syria: an exercise in “great space” power projection beyond the nation-state and “identitarian democracy” based on a worldview that reflects Carl Schmitt's categories in Putin's (domestic and imperial) paradigm (Lewis 2020) and popularized to him by the Russian philosopher Aleksandr Dugin.

> Four lessons

In this piece, I share my analysis not only as a sociologist but also as someone who lives in the Middle East, bringing four lessons we may learn from this war.

First, there is the double standard of Euro-American international relations discourse and practice. In the Global South, terms such as resistance, boycott, and solidarity fighters have been banned while these same terms have a positive connotation when describing the war in Ukraine. As the President of the Israeli Sociology Society, Lev Grinberg,⁴ bluntly wrote: “how is it possible that Israel has been a military occupier in the Palestinian territories for 55 years, in clear violation of international law, yet no Western countries have ever imposed sanctions against it?” In the same vein, while criminalizing the Palestinian's Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement in some Western countries, many European scholars call for a total boycott of Russian scholars, institutionally and individually.

Second, how is it that the brutality of war in other areas of the world did not get the same Euro-American reactions as the war on Ukraine? There are different ways of narrating my life as a Palestinian who grew up in Syria. One of them is to see my life as having been lived through wars in a region with only brief moments of peace: Arab-Israeli wars in 1967

and 1973; Israeli war on the Palestinian territories – the Second Intifada, 2000-2005; Israeli war on Gaza in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021; Israeli wars in Lebanon in 1982, 2006; Iraqi-Iranian war in 1980-88; invasion of Kuwait, 1991; war on Iraq in 1991, 2003; war on Syria, 2011-present; war in Yemen, 2014-present; and the war in Libya, 2014-2020. These ferocious wars unleashed levels of mass destruction, suffering, displacement, and ultimately death much higher than in Ukraine. The Western powers reacted and continue to react mildly and oftentimes to support the colonial power (Israel) or the dictators (Gulf and Egypt) in the name of stability and for economic reasons.

Third, some postcolonial critiques focusing on historical imperialism or the current Euro-American neocolonialism have been unable to see the effect of other emerging empires and the extent of brutality in conquering spaces of allegiances. Russia, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and the Gulf monarchies are very important empires operating in the Middle East, some of whose military actions have generated colonialism, misery, and authoritarianism. In this regard, Laura Doyle's concept of "inter-imperiality" is helpful as she invites us to understand empires not only as consecutive but often as they operate in parallel, making the "mutually produced, highly contingent, and interactive politics of contemporaneous imperial histories, with their unanticipated, sometimes ironic effects" (Doyle 2014). Thus, there are not simply ripple effects in these multi-vectored dynamics or rhizomatic empires, but they are often violently interactive, institutionally situated, and strategically pursued.

Fourth, the call for the total boycott in academia of Russians or Belarusians is against the values that academia seeks to promote. I do believe in the moral obligation to carry out an institutional boycott against any institution that has a relationship with colonial or authoritarian powers, but not at the individual level. Engaging with involved individuals is important in order to listen to different approaches to conflicts and promote a state of open, active dialogue. This means it is not enough to simply support those who have liberal democratic ideals but we, in academia, also need to listen attentively to those who refuse to embrace, partially or totally, these ideals and to play a mediating role, bridging positions and promoting an affective, moral, and political strategy. Against a radical critical social theory, I call for a situated critical one that, while criticizing powers, is also able to simultaneously open up a dialogue with the very forces it critiques. Needless to say, academic discourse should be carried out with some rules related to intellectual integrity and social responsibility. This responsibility, which preempts propaganda, incitement, demonizing the culture of others, and hate speech, makes academic freedom more delicate than the simple freedom of expression it is purported to be. The role of academia is to liberate politics from its Schmittian conception of friend and enemy – that where the ultimate degree of association is the willingness to fight and die, together with other members of one's group; and the utmost degree of dissociation is the willingness to kill others, those being members of a hostile group. I fully agree with the historian

Amit Varshizky that if political liberalism wishes to survive, it needs to take seriously the ideas of its adversarial critics and not dismiss them disdainfully. He reminds us what the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer wrote after World War II: "In order to fight an enemy you must know him. That is one of the first principles of a sound strategy. To know him means not only to know his defects and weaknesses; it means to know his strength. All of us have been liable to under-rate this strength.... We should carefully study the origin, the structure, the methods and the techniques of the political myths. We should see the adversary face to face in order to know how to combat him."⁵

> Conclusion: enhancing the level of solidarity

Finally, in adamantly confronting social suffering, we must exercise the humane moral reasoning tied to our innate Maussian gift for social love in order to generate different levels of solidarity towards kin, neighbor, nation, and humanity as a whole. While we should all aim to have the greatest form of solidarity, i.e., towards this humanity and to what Jan-Christoph Heilinger (2019) called "cosmopolitan obligations," we must admit that the European reaction towards the consequences of the war in Ukraine patently demonstrates a level of solidarity that is fueled far more by cultural, Judeo-Christian affinities and ultimately nationalist identities as opposed to cosmopolitan ones. I bring this to the fore in order to nuance some of the criticism that we've heard in academic work as well as in the mainstream and social media on the differentiated treatment of refugees, i.e., how Syrian, Afghani, and African refugees have been received compared to Ukrainian ones. One should also acknowledge these different moral reasonings preempt any simplification such as looking at the differential treatment only from a racial point of view, or considering this as a manifestation of pure racism.⁶ Having said that, Western scholars should also be prepared to accept cultural/religious affinity among Arabs or Muslims and should not consider this systematically as dangerous sectarian feelings. ■

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> Capitalism and Global Inequality

by **William I. Robinson**, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA



Street scene in Ghana in an urban environment where poverty is ubiquitous. Credit: Jenna/Flickr, Creative Commons License.

In 2018, according to the international development agency Oxfam, the richest 1% of humanity received 52% of the world's wealth and the top 20% received a full 95%, while the remaining 80% – the vast majority of humanity – had to make do with just 5%. And if such glaring inequalities appeared as mind-boggling when the Oxfam report was released, they have continued to deepen in the intervening years. In the first six months of the coronavirus pandemic, the global rich increased their wealth by an astounding \$10 trillion, while almost every country in the world saw an increase in inequality during the contagion, according to a follow-up report by Oxfam in 2021.

> Capitalist expansion and uneven development

Radical sociologists who study such inequality observe that, contrary to the system's apologists, such social polarization is inherent to capitalism, as the capitalist class owns the means of producing wealth and therefore appropriates as profits as much as possible of the wealth that society collectively produces. They also note that the system has constantly expanded outward over the 500-plus years of its existence in the relentless search for new opportunities to accumulate capital (to maximize profit). Capitalism expanded out of its original heartland in Western Europe through ongoing waves of colonialism, imperi-

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alism, and more recently globalization, eventually coming to engulf the entire planet. By the start of the twenty-first century, there were no longer any nations or peoples that remained outside of the system.

Sociologists note that the world capitalist system generates two interwoven forms of inequality. One is among the rich and the poor worldwide, as Oxfam has noted in its reports, that is, inequality *among people*. The other is the stratification of the world's people into rich and poor countries, or inequality *among countries*. The average annual income in the Congo stands at \$785 per capita, whereas in Belgium, the country that colonized the Congo in the late nineteenth century, it stands at \$47,400, according to World Bank data. In the academic lexicon, the world became polarized through colonialism into a rich "First World" core, encompassing the nations of Western Europe, North America, and Japan, while those regions in Latin America, Africa, and Asia that suffered centuries of colonialism and domination by this core were relegated to the "Third World" periphery. In more recent years, academics and pundits have referred to the former Third World as the Global South and to the former First World as the Global North.

Drawing on Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism and on classical theories of imperialism put forth by V.I. Lenin – the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution – and his generation of socialist revolutionaries, radical political economists and international relations scholars in the post-World War II period developed new theories of dependency, world-systems, and underdevelopment. They argued that colonialism organized the world economy in such a way that the wealth generated in the periphery was siphoned back to the core, leaving the former impoverished and the latter enriched, and that this explains inequality between the Global South and the Global North. Hence, they argued, capital accumulates unevenly in space and leaves some peoples developed and others underdeveloped.

> The changing pattern of global inequality

However, by the turn of century, several new tendencies called into question such a facile division of the world's countries and peoples. First, some countries in the former Third World, especially in East Asia, became industrialized and joined such rich-country clubs as the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Second, even in the poorest countries there emerged powerful

capitalist classes and significant high-consumption middle classes that became integrated into the global consumer culture. And third, in the traditionally rich countries, the working classes that had seen prosperity in the post-World War II period have experienced, as a result of recent globalization, a rapid downward mobility, socioeconomic destabilization, and erosion of their once comfortable living standards – what some sociologists have called the "Thirdworldization" of these working classes.

A recent report issued by the Swiss bank UBS noted that most of the world's billionaires are in the United States but the number of ultra-wealthy people is growing fastest throughout Asia. In China, which now accounts for one in five of the world's billionaires, two new billionaires are minted every week. Brazilian, Mexican, Indian, Saudi, Egyptian, and other capitalists who belong to what I have termed the transnational capitalist class now invest trillions of dollars in the global economy. Another report by *Forbes* noted that wealth is growing faster among the super-rich in the former Third World than elsewhere. "Between 2012 and 2017, Bangladesh saw its ultra-rich club grow by 17.3%," it noted. "Over the same time period, growth in China was 13.4% while in Vietnam it was 12.7%. Kenya and India were among the other nations recording double-digit growth of 11.7% and 10.7% respectively."

Some have made the argument based on these tendencies that it may make more sense to refer to the Global North and the Global South less in terms of geographic regions or territories than in terms of transnational population groups. From this perspective, the Global South refers to the impoverished peoples of the former Third World but also symbolically to the poor and the excluded in the rich regions of the world, while the Global North refers to the centers of power and wealth that may still be disproportionately concentrated in the traditional rich countries and also to the rich and powerful all over the world who sustain, manage, and enjoy these centers of power. While sociologists continue to debate these matters, one thing is clear: from any social justice perspective we need a radical redistribution of wealth downward to the poor majority of the world's people. And this, whether we wish it to be so or not, requires a confrontation with the powers that be in the world capitalist system, as the transnational corporate elite that controls the global economy – that one percent of humanity identified by the Oxfam report mentioned above – will resist any challenge to its wealth and power. ■

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> Platform Capitalism in Latin America

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A gig economy worker in Uruguay. Food delivery services are a particular example of the link between digitalization and precarity. Credit: Ted McGrath/Flickr, Creative Commons.

The dizzying growth of technological corporations, exponentially increased by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, has amplified the development of platform capitalism in Latin America and deepened some debates and phenomena around capital, labor, and their mutations in the Global South.

> Digital meritocracy and the “leap into development”

Several countries of the region – Argentina is a clear example of this – have seen a consolidation of the public discourse that supports the idea that the “economy of knowledge” provides a historic opportunity to achieve the longed-for “leap into development” and get a new place in the international framework. The capacity of certain countries in the region – Argentina, Brazil, Mexico – to generate digital corporations of global relevance (called Unicorns,

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they trade in over a thousand million dollars in the American stock market) is at the base of this narrative.

This qualitative leap would be led, moreover, by a new entrepreneurial elite, socialized in the Californian spirit, which is opposed to the local and traditional oligarchy that is mainly linked to agri-businesses and, to a lesser degree, to some basic areas of heavy capitalism. This new fraction of young leaders, by definition driven by a global vocation and spirit and native to the time's dominant language, defines itself in opposition to the traditional "national bourgeoisie", which is characterized as an elite eternally dependent on state subsidies, reluctant to competition, provincial, conservative, excessively rigid, and always slightly anachronistic.

In this way, the dreamed-of Schumpeterian economy could finally land in these latitudes by the magic of digital meritocracy. The ecosystem of digital economy presents itself as the overcoming of the old rent-based oligarchy. *Startups* and *unicorns* are the new names of the capitalistic progress that is desirable for our peripheral countries.

> **Two-faced future: digitalization and precariousness**

However, the accelerated but still incipient development of this type of business in the region shows a fragmented and contrasting reality, that is, the interlocking between digitalization and precariousness as a material base for the development of the platform economy. This movement towards the deepening of social duality is evident, at other levels, in the reconfiguration that digital platforms have produced in the world of labor. At present, the debate about the "future of work" in the region is dominated by two apparently opposing images: on the one hand, the sophistication of the new jobs linked to the software industry and, on the other, the hyper-precariousness of platform workers who work on demand through apps (Uber, Glovo, and Rappi drivers, domestic services, etc.). The first, at the top of the pyramid, are highly qualified, and even if they are notably cheap when considering their salaries in dollars, they enjoy working conditions that are privileged in the local context, mainly due to the lack of workers for this type of jobs (software engineers, web designers, data scientists, system analysts). This deficiency constitutes the main problem for local companies requiring the labor force for the expansion of their business. At the other end of the spectrum, the extreme instability of micro-jobs implies the consolidation of a model of deregulation and extreme flexibility in work relations that in some countries, like Argentina, implies the resounding deconstruction of considerable

historical achievements in the protection of work. In that direction, the advancement of the *platformization* of work strongly prepares the ground for the crystallization of a very high level of informality in the labor market, where these new types of "independent" jobs are a novelty.

> **Epochal speech: entrepreneurship**

At the level of symbolic operations a guiding thread links these aspects that are materially so distant: the *entrepreneurship* discourse. This is a largely symbolic construction of corporate roots that has become an official ideology of sorts, of which platform companies are the best and most efficient incarnation. It entails the vindication of merit in the figure of a hyper-individualized subject, under the illusion of an absolute freedom from social conditioning, motivated by a diffuse idea of freedom, audacity, innovation, autonomy, risk, and hyper-productivity. The large technological corporations of the region have found in this discursive device a tool that is very efficient in the construction of a common sense instrumental to their interest, which strongly permeates the world view of the most distant sectors of social structure. In the context of Latin America's present profound crisis, *entrepreneurship* operates to actualize, with its techno-liberal-digital spirit, a late neoliberalism that is frankly emaciated and decadent.

A notable paradox is therefore produced in this exacerbated vindication of a diffuse idea of freedom – essentially, market freedom – within a context of collapse of minimal social support and of unforeseen capital concentration by corporations against the weakening of states in general, even more so in the "failed" states of peripheral capitalism. The operation of entrepreneurship discourse seeks to transform the pain of the day-to-day experience of instability into the adrenaline of risk, and to transform distress into supposed individual opportunity. This gamble on "empowerment" devolves, then, into a privatization of social suffering and a higher degree of blame on the subject, doubly gripped by their pauperized material conditions and unfulfilled mandates of hyper-productivity.

The advancement of this new social configuration adds a new complexity to the great challenge of our time that implies the generation of new horizons of common sense and collective organization. Trade unions and social movements, protagonists of resistance, are the main agents of this challenge but their potential – which is going through a critical moment – depends on their capacity to deconstruct an anachronistic logic and to reinvent collective forms that can match the dilemmas at play. ■

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> The Intercapital System:

Molecular and Organic Classes

by **Esteban Torres**, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba-CONICET, Argentina

To offer an explanation of the progression of processes of social change, it is necessary to pay attention to the historical evolution of a world appropriation game (WAG), which takes place simultaneously in the national, regional, and global spheres of world society.¹ I could define the WAG – or world power game – as a variable field of interactions that is shaped at the intersection between six historical systems: the capitalist system, the state system, the communicational system, the racial system, the patriarchal system, and the natural system. The capitalist system constitutes the central material dimension of world society since the 19th century. This makes it – in simplified terms – the dominant system.

The central transformation that the capitalist system has undergone as a result of the evolution of the WAG is the constitution of a new world class structure. The social classes in question have little to do with the groupings of the first European industrial cities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, paradigmatically conceptualized by Marx and Weber. If the Marxian class structure was defined at its core by a simplified antagonistic relationship between capitalist and working classes, the class structure of today's world society is defined primarily on the basis of a dialectic between molecular and organic classes. If what was at stake in the former was the ownership of the means of production, what determines the constitution of the latter is in the first instance the source of income.

> Molecular classes

The molecular class can be defined as a mode of dependence and economic deployment of the individual, associated in the first instance with his or her income structure. The subject of molecular class is the individual and not the group. At least since the end of the twentieth century, each national sphere of world society has been shaped by a molecular class structure.

In this physiognomy it is possible to distinguish the existence of four types of classes: the profit-dependent class (PDC), the labor-dependent class (LDC), the assistance-

dependent class (ADC), and the crime-dependent class (CDC). What defines an individual's membership of a certain molecular class at any given time is his or her main source of income. If the main source of income changes, the individual is "reclassified." In turn, each individual not only belongs at a given moment to a certain molecular class but also to a certain stratum of that class.

The class stratum of an individual is defined on the basis of an economic position associated with a volume of income. As of the twenty-first century, it is possible to identify the existence of five class strata in the national spheres of world society. From top to bottom, I call them upper, high, middle, low, and inferior class strata. A person belonging to the upper class stratum is part of the supra-elite, the growing and scandalous universe of the billionaires. The individual who belongs to the high stratum is part of the infra-elite. This pair of top class strata make up the elite field. On the other hand, individuals belonging to the middle, low, and inferior class strata make up the popular field. The latter is a field with important internal differentiations.

Thus, unlike what modern theories of class suggest, class is not an indicator of stratification; every class is stratified and every stratum is a stratum of classes. A molecular class can be realized in more than one stratum and a stratum can bring together more than one class.

> Organic classes

If molecular class relations derive from the modes of structuring and interaction between classes of individuals within each national sphere, organic class relations are based on the modes of structuring and interaction between classes of countries and regions in the global spheres. An organic class is equivalent to a national and/or regional structure of molecular classes. The organic class is a mode of subjection and economic deployment of a national system that is defined primarily on the basis of its income structure. By becoming aware of the existence of a world web of organic classes, it becomes possible to move from a generic and singular notion of a capitalist economic system to the idea of an *intercapital system*. Thus, from my

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**“What we usually call ‘capitalist system’
is a metasystem, a system of capitalist systems
in asymmetric interaction”**

perspective, what we usually call “capitalist system” is a metasystem, a system of capitalist systems in asymmetric interaction, internally differentiated in its form of organization but not in its abstract logic of maximization.

Three paradigmatic types of organic classes interact in the intercapital system: (i) the knowledge-dependent class (KD=informational capitalism); (ii) the industry-dependent class (ID=industrial capitalism); and (iii) the commodity-dependent class (CD=commodity capitalism). In turn, it is possible to recognize the existence of two mutually determining organic class strata: the central and the peripheral. The fact that a sub-region, a country, or a continent belongs to one of these strata reflects its global economic position, which depends on the size of its economy.

Since the mundialization² of the intercapital system in the nineteenth century, the KD and ID organic classes have reproduced themselves in the central stratum, while the CD organic class has reproduced itself in the peripheral stratum. Thus, the class of countries or regions is defined on the basis of their double membership to an organic class and a stratum. An important fact to underline is that organic classes define the core of the world materiality of molecular classes. This implies that every individual, or rather all classes of individuals, are recreated as such from a central or peripheral system. Such a localization

implies an additional source of material determination, of a supra-individual character. Thus, each class of individual in world society is configured from a double subjection and a double deployment, molecular and organic.

The process of contemporary mundialization that has been expanding since the 1980s is also associated with a growing mundialization of the class structure of the intercapital system. With this expansion, class inequalities ceased to be exclusively inequalities between classes of individuals in the economic structure of the different national societies, but also, centrally, represented inequalities between classes of countries (and regions) in the world division of labor.

It is essential to note that in this new approach molecular classes and organic classes are not considered as actors. Unlike modern social class theory, there is no logic of action inherent in class. Classes of individuals and classes of countries are not social actors, let alone with predetermined interests. At least since Bourdieu this social fact has become evident. Classes of individuals become individual actors when they actually act, and they become collective actors when they create or subsume themselves into companies, states, trade unions, social movements, etc. Social action can in no way be explained without taking this world class structure into account³. ■

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1. The differentiation between the “global” and the “worldly” is of central importance here. As I understand it, the global is that singular sphere that is shaped in an expansive or retracted way from each national location of the world society, while the worldly is built from the set of global spheres. More precisely, the worldly is constituted from the set of national, regional, and global spheres (See Torres E., “World Paradigm. A New Proposal for Sociology”, *Global Dialogue* 11.1, <https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/the-world-paradigm-a-new-proposal-for-sociology/>.)

2. Expansion of a world society, as distinct from globalization.

3. This theory of capitalism is developed in my book *The Intercapital System: The New Economy of World Society* (forthcoming).

> Undignified Capitalism

by **Fabrizio Maciel**, Visiting Professor, Friedrich-Schiller University Jena, Germany

Understanding capitalism is not a simple task, precisely because it is an economic system and a way of life that is constantly changing. Throughout the twentieth century, there were many attempts to define and classify the stages of capitalism. Now, in the twenty-first century, the technological dimension of the system is already showing its most aggressive face, producing on a global scale a new kind of digital underclass. In this scenario, the coronavirus pandemic only made clearer and deepened the inequality between social classes around the world.

To understand how we got here, we need to escape the illusions of the conjuncture, underpinned by the novelization of politics. This has become the main specialization of the global mainstream media, transforming the political field into a great spectacle and systematically hiding what is happening in the economic field. Here, we need to reconstruct the larger structural and historical scenario that brought us to the present moment.

> The rise of a global underclass

Since the 1970s, capitalism has undergone a “great transformation,” updating here the famous expression of Karl Polanyi. The collapse of the welfare state in the United States and Europe, after its glorious 30 years, is the main starting point for understanding this “brave new world of work,” as Ulrich Beck provocatively defined it.

During the golden years of the welfare state, from the end of World War II to the mid-1970s, capitalism was still trying to prove to the world its capability of promoting social justice. With the failure of welfare, marked by the arrival of precarious work in central countries like Germany, France and Great Britain, it became clear that capitalism will never be a system capable of promoting any kind of justice.

Since then, the construction of a new capitalism has begun on a global scale, which I call undignified capitalism. Its main brand is the production of a global under-

class, both in peripheral and central countries. The existence of an underclass has always been the hallmark of peripheral countries and even entire continents such as Latin America and Africa. Now, with the massive arrival of immigrants, but also with the internal impoverishment of the popular classes in central countries and continents, as in the case of the United States and Europe, the production of a global underclass becomes the main characteristic of undignified capitalism.

With that, this new capitalism is specialized in producing and naturalizing the lack of value of human life. The idea of dignity, present in the Brazilian constitution, for example, reminds us of the minimum that individuals need to preserve their material survival and moral existence. When this minimum is not guaranteed either by the chance of a job or by state policies, what we have is the immersion in the condition of indignity that defines the life of the global underclass. In Brazil, this underclass, which does not have any work, reaches the mark of 30% of the economically active population, living a kind of sub-citizenship, as defined by Jessé Souza. Another 30%, an undignified working class, lives in the kind of work insecurity that we normally define as precarious.

> Precariousness or indignity?

Here, it is worth reflecting on the concepts of precariousness and precarious work. They just describe situations and working conditions that are obviously bad. I propose the concept of undignified work, precisely because it allows us to shed light on both material misery and the humiliating moral and existential condition experienced by millions of people in the world today. In the Brazilian case, 30% of the population lives on the edge of dignity, because at least they still have some work, even if undignified, while another 30% are below the line of dignity, for not having any work.

In the European scenario, especially in the French case, Robert Castel has offered important points for the understanding of undignified capitalism. For him, the decay of

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“Most Brazilian executives adhered to the authoritarian sentiment in the 2018 elections based on an ultra-meritocratic market mentality”

the welfare state means the rupture of the wage society. Its main feature is the process of social disaffiliation, in which the labor market expels an increasing number of people, without creating new conditions for their insertion. The result is the social production of what the author calls “leftover,” that is, the European underclass, which will now be part of the statistics of the global underclass.

> Undignified capitalism and the extreme right

In this context, we need to examine the relationship between undignified capitalism and the rise of the extreme right on the global political scene. Here, we need to break with the prevailing thesis that it was the mistakes of the left and its parties that allowed the emergence of neo-authoritarianism on a global scale. Once again, we need to break with the illusions of the conjuncture and rebuild the analysis of the deep structures that brought us here.

In the German case, Klaus Dörre showed a direct connection between the increase in precariousness of work and the adherence to the mentality and sentiments of the extreme right. With this, we can understand that authoritarianism is an effect, and not a cause, of undignified capitalism, even though it can deepen indignity in circum-

stantial scenarios, as in Brazil and several other countries in the world today.

Thus, while the popular classes adhere to the authoritarian sentiment for fear of being forced into a condition of indignity, the ruling classes flirt with authoritarianism out of the panic of losing their condition of socially guaranteed privilege. This is what shows in the empirical research I have been carrying out for some years with executives in Brazil. With a privileged class origin, high salaries and a luxurious lifestyle, most Brazilian executives adhered to the authoritarian sentiment in the 2018 elections based on an ultra-meritocratic market mentality, clearly materialized in the discourses of Jair Bolsonaro.

Now, with the deepening of indignity produced by the government’s ultra-neoliberal policy, linked to its policy of death in the face of the pandemic, the Brazilian people are sending a strong message: Lula da Silva, arrested in 2018 for the supposedly biggest political and legal fraud in the history of Brazil, appears now in 2022 in first place in voting intentions for president. We’ll see if the near future will allow some reversal in this undignified history, and what the world can learn from it. ■

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> Neoliberalization, Marketization, and Precarization in Higher Education

by **Johanna Grubner**, Johannes Kepler University, Austria and Assistant Editor of *Global Dialogue*

Since the 1980s, fundamental transformation processes, understood as processes of neoliberal restructuring, have been set in motion, restructuring economy, politics, and society. The higher education sector and universities have been part of this general reconstruction of the public sector since the early 1990s, and have since been more and more permeated by economization and neoliberalization. A shift from state-bureaucratic regulation to an increased orientation toward market and business organization and control mechanisms can be observed in many countries. This has had severe consequences on different levels.

Three relevant realignments may be mentioned here: First, in many countries a standardization of study programs and restrictions on the freedom of choosing courses based on interest have been set in place, which has fundamentally changed the mode of studying for students. At the same time, universities have undergone a massification that has had an impact on job opportunities after graduation and lowered the importance of academic degrees. Second, in many higher education systems, a de-secured employment system has accompanied the neoliberal turn from welfare- to workfare-state and therefore forced precarization. With the marketized form of ranking universities and academics, competition has generally increased and has created a type of working subject that (seemingly) meets the requirements of a flexible, deregulated labor market and workplace arrangement by increasing productivity in a highly efficient manner. And third, these new requirements have had a new impact on gender arrangements in higher education systems while appearing as gender neutral, since everyone is ranked equally. Structurally, those with greater ability to manage their own time and without care responsibilities are favored.

The articles in the symposium pick up these transformations and trends in the higher education system and focus on different consequences of these trends. In the first contribution, Stephanie Ross and Larry Savage examine the effects of the ongoing neoliberalization of the Canadian higher education sector in terms of the commodification of higher education and the reorganization of work regimes. They look at the adaptations made dur-



| Illustration by Arbu.

ing the COVID-19 pandemic and the opportunities and necessity for change they have made visible. Ka Ho Mok takes up the topic of job opportunities for higher education graduates in light of the massification of East Asian higher education institutions. He examines the consequence of the highly competitive labor market this development has brought forward. In her contribution, Elizabeth Balbachevsky discusses the challenges universities are facing vis-à-vis a neo-populist government that is trying not to transform but to defeat higher education systems. She shows how in the case of Brazilian universities semi-autonomous decision-making processes can ensure the stability of universities when administration collapses due to the government's mismanagement. Critically looking at the trend of remote teaching, Yusef Waghid examines the idea, accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, of universities as institutions solely in charge of knowledge transfer. He argues for a restructuring of (South) African universities along the African ethic of *ubuntu* to make universities autonomous institutions that are at the same time connected to and positioned within society. ■

> Neoliberalization in Post-Pandemic Higher Education

by **Stephanie Ross**, McMaster University, Canada and member of ISA Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44), and **Larry Savage**, Brock University, Canada



In February 2022 the Faculty Association at Acadia University (AUFA) in Nova Scotia, Canada was on strike. Credit: Can Mutlu.

Few people working in higher education today could fail to notice three major trends. First, the purpose of higher education institutions has turned emphatically towards the needs of the market. Second, the content, organization, distribution, and rewards of work in higher education have changed in dramatic and deeply felt ways. Third, the effects of these two interrelated processes continue to drive waves of collective organizing and struggle in higher education, even while such resistance is uneven and intertwined with individual strategies of coping, consent, or exit. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education institu-

tions has further intensified these trends, raising questions about what post-pandemic higher education will look like and who it will serve.

> Neoliberalization as the commodification of higher education

The past three decades have marked a neoliberal transformation of higher education. In terms of purpose, higher education is now oriented to the needs of the market. Higher education institutions must increasingly serve the needs of private employers for research and labor supply that will al-

low them to succeed in a competitive global economy. Higher education institutions themselves have become subject to market discipline, competing for students, their tuition dollars, and whatever government funding accompanies those students, as well as the investments or philanthropy of private donors who shape the university's purpose with their financial clout. Most observers of the "corporatization of higher education" note that transformations in internal decision-making norms and procedures have ensued, with corporate-style structures centralizing power in the senior administration and displacing collegial governance in which faculty and other constituencies played a greater role. Market orientation also takes the form of both budgetary constraint and the use of performance indicators to structure internal and external competitions for resources. These transformations are also evident in the content of educational programs, which now must attract students seeking a valuable credential in the labor market and must therefore prove their job relevance rather than their development of critical skills and perspectives.

> **Work reorganization: the implementation of neoliberal work regimes**

Work reorganization is an essential component of the neoliberalization of higher education because new academic labor processes and power relations are needed to implement this vision of market-oriented education. Concretely, higher education labor processes have been subject to fragmentation of academic labor into its teaching, research, and service components, the deskilling of those assigned to these different components, and the cheapening of their increasingly replaceable labor. The rise of temporary contracts in both teaching and research is evident throughout higher education, a change that both saves money and heightens administrative control, as precariously employed contract holders rarely participate in collegial governance. Work intensification accompanies fragmentation and the heightened climate of competition for both the scarce "good jobs" as well as the precarious contracts on offer. This intensified work also entails a significant component of emotional labor. Students' evolving expectations of what their education is meant to provide is also driven by neoliberal conceptions of the university, and this requires faculty to manage those expectations in new ways. Finally, we see the elaboration of forms of upward accountability and downward surveillance as workers' productivity becomes central to the bottom line of higher education institutions. The *curriculum vitae* becomes the academic's stopwatch, which they use to discipline themselves to the neoliberal labor process.

> **Post-pandemic higher education: more of the same or space for alternatives?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has served to further intensify these three trends – commodification and centralization,

work reorganization and intensification, and conflict and resistance. Emergency conditions have allowed higher education administrators to further centralize decision-making during the pandemic and do end runs around collegial bodies to develop policies and practices. Decisions about whether and when to return to in-person teaching and what workplace health and safety protections would be provided have been flash points of conflict. Faculty's concerns about the factors driving the return to work – namely administrators' desire to protect market share and budgets rather than the health and well-being of community members – and a lack of meaningful influence over these decisions – have led to growing feelings of mistrust, anger, resentment, and disengagement.

The pandemic has also resulted in a significant intensification of work. Faculty have had to quickly adapt to emergency online teaching and operations, learning new technologies and skills. Faculty were also faced with heightened expectations to perform emotional labor and respond to a range of student needs as they attempted to pursue education while coping with illness, death, job loss, and generalized anxiety about the future. Faculty had to absorb and manage student feelings while managing their own fears, often in a context where working from home meant the need to mind children who were also engaged in online school from home. All this has taken place in a context where research productivity expectations have not been reduced, which itself further advantages faculty who are structurally more privileged in this already highly stratified sector.

COVID fatigue, heightened faculty resentment towards administration, and the austerity measures meant to restore the sector's finances are leading to forms of collective resistance. While the incidence of strikes in higher education took a nosedive in the early days of the pandemic, we now see an uptick of militancy and labor disruptions on campus. This is most evident in the post-secondary strike wave spreading across Canada and the UK in early 2022. While pandemic conditions work to make collective action more difficult, they also have created some fertile ground as higher education workers feel more alienated than ever from their administrations.

Whether resistance through strike action will transform the neoliberal university post-pandemic is still an open question. What is clearer, however, is that external political and economic pressures will almost certainly continue to shape and drive demands from university administrators to reorganize work and decision-making processes in ways that will breed anger, resentment, and potentially even more militancy among academic workers. ■

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> Higher Education and Employment: East Asian Trends¹

by **Ka Ho Mok**, Lingnan University, Hong Kong



The increasing expansion of higher education has led to pressure on graduate employment as well as an increased competitive focus on the labor market. Credit: Lingnan University.

In recent years, labor markets in East Asia have experienced a massive influx of college-educated workers, as graduates of a massified higher education system have sought jobs. The massive expansion of higher education in East Asia has unquestionably created pressure on graduate employment, thereby making the labor market highly competitive. Table 1 presents unemployment rates in East Asia (selected countries/regions) in 2020 by educational attainment. The figures may not directly reflect a causal relationship between higher education massification and rising unemployment rates, as the unemployment rates remain relatively low. However, there is increasing evidence that recent graduates have been unable to obtain strong competitive employment positions during the massification in recent years, raising questions about the quality of jobs graduates are entering, including whether they are in the formal or informal labor market.

> Massification of higher education and challenge for graduate employment

With the acceleration of globalization and the transformation towards the knowledge-based economy, many

emerging countries expanded their higher education system to improve their global competitiveness. However, contrary to expectations, graduates have yet to demonstrate strong competitiveness in the labor market. Although global unemployment rates decreased, more than 170 million people remain unemployed (International Labor Office, 2019). Statistics from the World Bank show that the young employed population exhibited a downward trend after the start of the twenty-first century. Compared with Europe, Northern America, and Africa, the decline in youth employment rates in Asian countries, especially in East Asia, is more pronounced (see Figure 1). Data from East Asia reveal a fluctuating increase in youth unemployment rates, which intensified under the current COVID-19 pandemic recession.

Recent studies consistently suggest that the new generation of higher education graduates in Western and East Asian countries have trouble finding jobs and are confronted with underemployment or unemployment. Figure 2 presents the growing trend of youth unemployment in East Asia. Furthermore, higher education graduates may secure employment by accepting low-paying jobs requir-

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Unemployment Rates in East Asia in 2020 by Educational Attainment (Selected Countries/Regions)

Country/Region	Education Level	Unemployment Rate (%)
Hong Kong	Post-secondary education	5.10
Japan	College & university	2.90
South Korea	University & higher	3.50
Taiwan	University & graduate school	4.92

Table 1. Data source: Hong Kong SAR, <https://www.statistics.gov.hk/pub/B10100062020AN20B0100.pdf>; Japan, <https://news.yahoo.co.jp/byline/fuwarai/20210325-00228342/>; Korean Statistical Information Service, <https://kosis.kr/eng/search/searchList.do>; Census and Statistics Department, National Statistics, Republic of China (Taiwan), <https://eng.stat.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=42761&ctNode=1609&mp=5>.

Youth Employment-to-Population Ratio

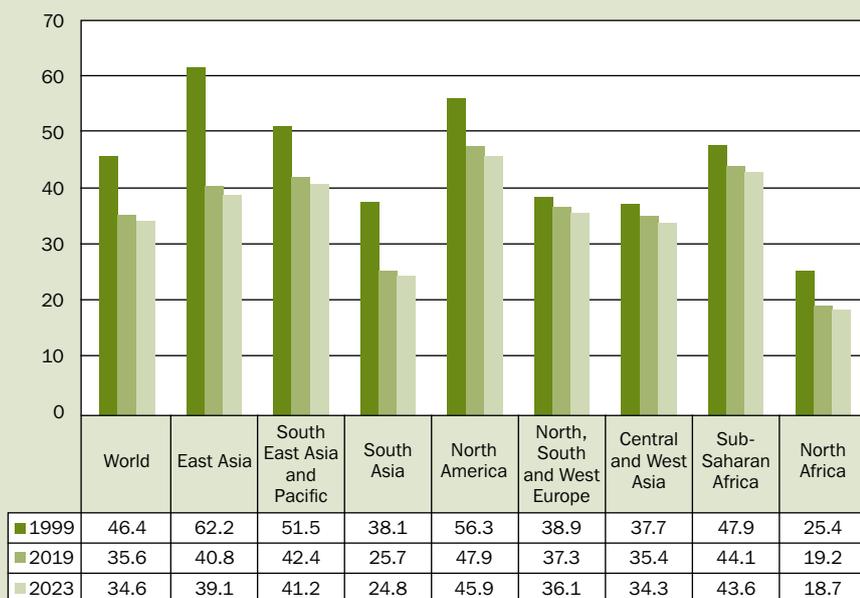


Figure 1. Data source: The World Bank, <http://datacatalog.worldbank.org>.

Youth Unemployment Rates in East Asia

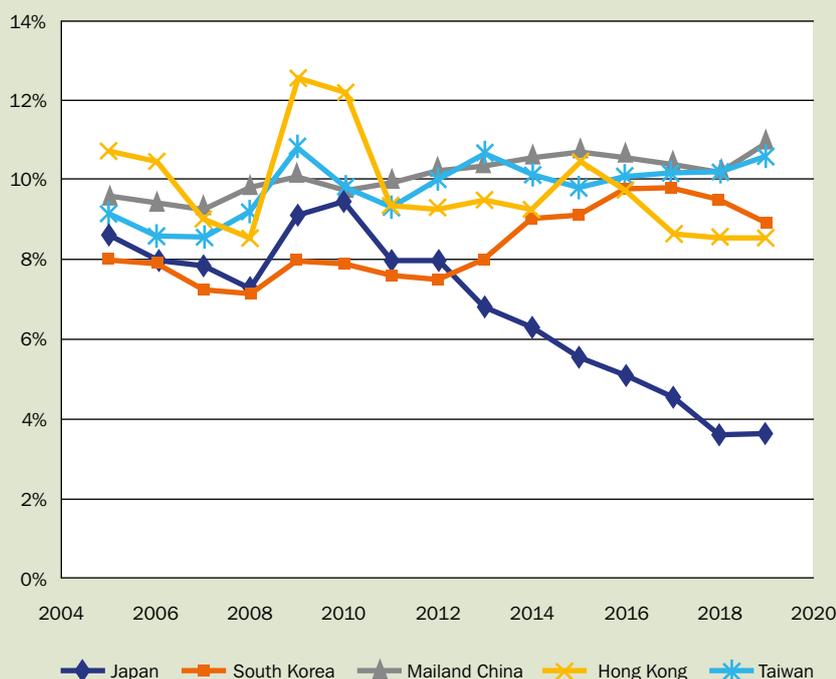


Figure 2. Data source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, <http://www.stats.gov.cn>; Hong Kong SAR Census and Statistics Department, <http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/sc>; National Statistics, ROC (Taiwan), <http://www.stat.gov.tw>; National Statistical Office of South Korea, <http://kostat.go.kr>; Statistics Bureau of Japan, <http://www.stat.go.jp>.

ing low education levels, thereby leading to the so-called “over-qualification” problem in the labor market. The effect of over-qualification and massification may lead to high unemployment rates, low monthly salary, and precarious work. The over-supply of higher education graduates reveals not only the “broken promise” of human capital theory, which posited that more investment in higher education would enhance social mobility, but also uncovers the cruel reality confronted by young university graduates of the mismatch of available jobs with their qualifications. Increasingly, unhappy youth are on the rise, complaining about precarious work.

Taking Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China as examples, the unemployment rate of college graduates has fluctuated from 2004 to 2020 (see Figure 2). Note that the trend towards massifying higher education has failed to address the youth unemployment issue in East Asian areas, which shows no signs of significantly abating. That is, graduates face difficulty in finding jobs even though they have obtained higher education degrees. Japan performed well in reducing unemployment rates amongst young graduates, although there was a minor rebound after 2018. Therefore, how higher education graduates can obtain decent job opportunities has become a common concern throughout East Asia.

> Policy implications

This article has shown how the massification of higher education has adversely affected graduate employment, especially with the unfolding mismatch between graduate skill sets and changing labor market needs. The present

research shows the importance of matching university graduates’ knowledge and skill sets with the needs of the labor market. The skills that young graduates acquire from higher education institutions do not necessarily translate into employability in the labor market. Moreover, some supply-side approaches tend to lay responsibility on higher education institutions to enhance graduates’ skills. However, well-developed and well-executed employability provisions may not necessarily equate with graduates’ actual employment outcomes. Hence, higher education institutions must critically assess their curricula to cater to the rapid socio-economic changes.

The intensification of graduate unemployment and underemployment, combined with the “broken promise” made by human capital theory, has given rise to discontent among young people. Recent studies frequently show self-reported unhappiness among young people across East Asia. Similarly, unhappy youth in the United Kingdom and Europe have forced governments in the West to recognize the “crisis of young people.” Governments across different parts of the globe should carefully handle the intensified intergenerational conflicts, particularly when a growing number of unhappy young individuals see the root of the problem as *generational inequalities in education, work, housing and welfare*. ■

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1. The paper is a revised and adapted version of the author’s recent paper: Mok, KH, Ke, GG and Tian, Z (2022) “Massification and privatisation of higher education in East Asia: Critical reflections on graduate employment from sociological and political economic perspectives,” In: Brown, P et al (eds) *International Handbook for Graduate Employment*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. (in press).

> University Resilience under Populism in Brazil

by **Elizabeth Balbachevsky**, University of São Paulo, Brazil



Paste-up street art on a wall with the words “Populism” written on it. Credit: Dr Case/[flickr](#).

This paper addresses the challenges public universities face under a neo-populist government. It achieves this goal by exploring the contemporary experience of Brazilian public universities in the face of President Bolsonaro’s government.

In the past few decades, higher education worldwide has faced many challenges from government initiatives. Neoliberalization, marketization, managerialization, and other terms describe the many aspects of the changing dynamics that shape the relationship between higher education, governments, and society. However, the experience of a neo-populist government goes one step deeper: under this kind of government, universities do not experience only an adversarial policy environment pressing for changes. Instead, they face an enemy environment, where the government is interested not in transforming but in defeating universities.

Populism is an old term used in political analysis to describe leaders that ascend to and stay in power by mobilizing the direct support of large parts of the population. They achieve this mobilization by carefully crafting different discourses addressing the grievances and resentments of various sectors in society. Presently, the widespread resentment mushrooming in sectors marginalized by the dynamics of the knowledge society represents an excellent opportunity for political entrepreneurs to profit from invest-

ing time and resources to give voice to and organize this dissatisfaction. They do that by employing the old populist toolkit: nurturing a personal nexus between the leader and followers and promising to include and protect the “long-neglected people.”

> The neo-populist attack on universities

In this discourse, universities, among other entities, represent the enemy: they are the cradle of the post-materialist culture and values that challenge the “people’s” core beliefs. Universities embody science and technology, which are among the main threats to the old traditions. The skeptical approach that science nurtures when addressing established truths is another source of suspicion. These perceptions make the university an enemy to be brought to its knees. In the more totalitarian version of neo-populism, policies for controlling university life have a deeper meaning: they aim to convert the university into a tool to spread the dominant ideology sustained by the neo-populist regime.

The neo-populism that threatens today’s democracy in Brazil also has roots in the impoverishment and insecurity brought by globalization. But it goes deeper: it feeds into the insecurity brought by the precarity of access to quality education and the widespread deficit in training for modern skills and competencies. This resentment was explored

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by candidate Jair Messias Bolsonaro in his victorious campaign for the presidency in 2018. He achieved this feat by mobilizing different social media channels and designing diverse narratives directed to his supporters. Each narrative explored sources of hate and resentment and presented the candidate as the righteous expression of all grievances, and the fighter for the old, traditional values.

Once in office, Bolsonaro has governed by combining the support of a large, dispersed, and diverse network of followers mobilized through social media and the enthusiastic backing of a vast collection of members of Congress from different parties. A conservative agenda mobilizes Bolsonaro's political support. Its main goal is the dismantling of regulatory frameworks in place in all areas: environment, health, education, infrastructure, and welfare.

Bolsonaro's government has also deemed public universities an enemy. On different occasions, government members have portrayed public universities as nests of communists and atheists and accused the university authorities of tolerating marijuana plantations on their campuses. Accordingly, his government imposed stringent cuts in federal universities' budgets. The Ministry of Justice mobilized an old law, dated from the authoritarian years of the 1960s, to launch legal processes against academics and university higher administration staff whenever they dared to criticize the government in public talks. Using the pandemic as an excuse, the government also froze hiring of new academics and employees. There were moves for intervening in academic autonomy on different occasions: cuts in the resources to support social science and humanities and actions directed towards jeopardizing the continuity of graduate programs focusing on gender and racial inequalities. Finally, the government managed to disorganize the internal governance of universities on many occasions, bypassing established rules and appointing leaders of small conservative movements as university heads.

> **Resistance from the universities**

Despite this adverse environment, Brazilian universities survived. They were able to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic, found resources to reinvent teaching and learning using the available tools for distance education, and launched programs enabling students from poor backgrounds to access the internet. Research and graduate programs from different areas reinvented themselves, focusing on understanding the pandemic's multiple consequences, which justified the university's presence in the eyes of Brazilian society.

University resistance comes from different yet complementary sources. First is the presence of strong allies in Brazilian society, in particular, the media and the judiciary. This is a heritage of the significant role played by public universities in the fight for the country's democratization between the 1970s and 1980s. Second is the role played by peer-review procedures in science and graduate education policies. When facing threats of persecution, academics from all areas closed ranks in support of academic freedom. Finally, there are the collegial rules that still form the basis of university governance in Brazil. Collegiality means that university decision-making instances are dispersed, with many semi-autonomous decision centers overlapping. Departments, faculties, laboratories, institutes, programs all share some degree of autonomy in the internal decision-making process. When the central administration collapsed because of the government's mismanagement, these centers stepped up and, by creating ad hoc connections, steered the university out of troubled waters. Thus, the Brazilian experience shows how the old governance models are still relevant for sustaining the university's resilience in the face of the storms created by neo-populist authoritarian governments. ■

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> On the Possibility of an Ubuntu University

by **Yusef Waghid**, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

In this article, I argue for a reconsideration of the idea of a university in light of the African ethic of *ubuntu*, literally, human dignity and interdependence. Globally, universities have evolved into institutions concerned with knowledge (re)production for various purposes that range from individual autonomy, to public accountability, to serving the interests of the economy and markets. However, my primary concern is that universities have not always responded to the goals of being publicly accountable or responsible.

> The public university under threat

Despite claims that the public university in (South) Africa is significantly transformed, its unwillingness to sufficiently and boldly tackle matters such as ongoing student protests against rising tuition costs; institutional corruption and mismanagement of resources; gender inequality and exclusion; sexual harassment; malpractices that involve bribes for marks, academic plagiarism, and indiscipline; and excessive student drinking and delinquency exacerbate the crises in university education. Yet, by far the most disconcerting aspect of university life is related to the pedagogical activity of higher teaching and learning itself. Teaching and learning seem to have remained overwhelmingly concerned with knowledge transfer and acquisition, with limited opportunity for critical pedagogical practices. With the introduction of emergency online remote teaching during the coronavirus pandemic, it seemed as if critical learning had again been sacrificed for online remote and blended learning as if these approaches to higher pedagogy in themselves can build confidence in university education. In this way, the public responsibility of the university seems to be under threat and, without being too alarmist, the institution appears to be teetering on the brink of collapse.

In response to the dire situation in which the university in (South) Africa seems to find itself, I propose that the idea of a university should be rethought in light of the African ethic of *ubuntu*. In my view, *ubuntu* is both a philosophical and politico-ethical concept that can contribute, firstly, to thinking about the university differently in troubled times; and secondly, to enacting practices that can realign institutional and transformational purposes with an idea of community in which academics and students can cultivate relations of individual freedom, collaborative engagement,

and co-belonging. An *ubuntu* framing can engender a higher education institution that reconsiders the transformative potential of the institution itself.

The distinctiveness of *ubuntu* lies in its internal connection to human action and the external enactment of relations with other humans, contexts, and entities of a non-human kind, such as computers and other technological devices. Underscored by the dictum “I am because we are,” *ubuntu* implies having intra- and inter-relations with the self and others, including other things, so that the actions implied by *ubuntu* are a matter of doing things *with* others and not always *to* and *for* others. I argue that an *ubuntu*-inspired university can offer the institution an opportunity to remain autonomous yet publicly responsible for its actions. In the main, such a university would not only consolidate the institution’s transformation agenda but would, firstly, extend it to matters of public concern. Here I refer to issues that involve its transformation in relation to claims of knowledge and reason and lines of inquiry not thought about previously. Secondly, such a university would consider its engagement with the broader community not as service provision or an activity with impact but, rather, as an act of genuine collaboration in the interest of both the institution and the broader public. Thirdly, the university would lay claims to cultivating a moral attentiveness to local and worldly concerns in and about matters that would enhance human dignity, social and restorative justice, and peaceful human coexistence.

> Decolonization/decoloniality and an ubuntu university

By far the most crucial aspect of higher education transformation that the public university ought to consider more urgently is the notion of decolonization. When we talk about the decolonization of higher education, we refer to practices of resistance that are offered to disrupt the skewed understandings of power-sharing that inform higher education practices. Together with decolonization, the notion of decoloniality can be considered as restoring the cultural values, economic aspirations, and knowledge interests of (previously) colonized communities. By implication, the decolonization of the public university is an attempt to oppose and undermine the imperialist legacy and devaluation of the cultures and knowledge interests of

“An ubuntu framing can engender a higher education institution that reconsiders the transformative potential of the institution itself”

marginalized communities. In this way, the decolonization of higher education can be couched as a re-articulation of the underlying value systems of excluded communities. This is where the decolonization project connects with *ubuntu*, in the sense that the latter likewise insists that the values of the other in their otherness should be attended to. Hence, the decolonization of higher education is synonymous with reshaping it according to the moral values of *ubuntu*.

The question can legitimately be asked: Is an *ubuntu* university different from an entrepreneurial university, thinking university, and ecological university? While these different understandings accentuate both the epistemological and moral imperatives of the university in relation to itself and the societies in which they manifest, I argue that it is through the *ubuntu* university that emotivism in the forms of dignity and humaneness will enhance a university's capacity for autonomy, responsibility, and criticality.

What makes an *ubuntu* university what it is? Firstly, the use of the dictum, “I am therefore we are,” in particular the phrase, “I am,” accentuates the university's claim to autonomous action. What makes a university a university in the first place is its allegiance to cultivating and securing autonomous individual action – an idea that resonates with the phrase “I am.”

Secondly, the phrase “we are” in *ubuntu* is pertinent for pursuing collective human action. However, this collectivity permitted by *ubuntu* is based on deliberative engagement. The point is, an *ubuntu* university advances deliberative

action on the part of its constituent members – its intellectual inquirers. This kind of deliberative engagement is both an educational and a political one. Deliberative engagement as an act of higher education is conditional upon autonomous inquirers that can proffer claims of judgements within and beyond a university. The condition of higher education is that people work and act together in a spirit of openness, reflexivity, and connectedness whereby they explore things together for both their intrinsic and extrinsic worth. The point is, *ubuntu* cannot be confined to doing higher education for intrinsic purposes alone, as that would deny the university's responsibility towards the public, social, and global.

Thirdly, an *ubuntu* university should be forward-looking and consider local and global imperatives. It makes sense to argue for such an understanding of an African university because an *ubuntu*-inspired university remains in the process of becoming. Such a university ought to become concerned with more than just a scholarship of local and social concerns but also address global problems in the quest for co-existence, recognition of plurality of voices, and co-dependence on all others for peaceful cooperation and advancement. It is such an *ubuntu* university that would go some way to addressing global concerns and dystopias.

Finally, it might be wise to rephrase the dictum of *ubuntu* from “I am therefore we are” to “I am therefore we are and can become.” This implies that an *ubuntu* university should always be considered as one in becoming, with an open-ended rather than conclusive set of possibilities. ■

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> The Necessity of Real Utopias

by **Michael Burawoy**, University of California, Berkeley, USA

Erik Olin Wright was a pioneer in the reconstruction of Marxism. His work on contradictory class locations – intermediating relations between Marx’s fundamental classes – turned into a global project, and inspired class analysis across the globe. He wrestled with the logical foundations and empirical correlates of class until his dying days. Among his most important books are *Classes* (1985), *Class Counts* (1997), and his final reflections *Understanding Class* (2015). Most mortals would have been satisfied with one such major global project, but beginning in the early 1990s, Wright embarked on a second global project, the Real Utopias Project. It was a time of the collapse of actually existing socialism in the Soviet Union and its satellites, the transition of China to state capitalism, as well as the consolidation of neoliberalism.

With these historic events many pronounced Marxism dead. Wright, however, took the opposite view. Liberated from its association with the party-states of the Soviet Union and China, he saw this as an opportunity to revitalize Marxism with grounded visions of a real socialist future – visions founded in actually existing institutions growing in the interstices of capitalism or arising from capitalism’s dependence on labor. He built an elaborate theoretical architecture for real utopias in his magnum opus *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010) and later presented his ideas as a manifesto, entitled *How to be an Anticapitalist in the 21st Century* (2019) published posthumously in thirteen languages.

But Wright was not just a theorist of real utopias, he was also a practitioner of real utopias, traveling the world in search of challenges to capitalism wherever they may appear, conversing with activists who were trying to realize their promise. He was an inspiration not just to academics but to a far wider public fighting for social justice. In dialogue with the protagonists of these real utopias, Wright would ferret out their underlying principles, their internal contradictions, and the conditions of their existence and dissemination. He would hold seminars in his own department at the University of Wisconsin but also in the furthest corners of the world to discuss the possibilities and limits of real utopias, seminars that would end up in his book series published by Verso.

For all the progress he made, Erik Wright left us with the unfinished task of bringing unity to real utopias as an anti-capitalist project. In *Envisioning Real Utopias* Wright lists the destructive features of capitalism that real utopias were intended to dissolve, claiming that their roots are to be found in civil society. He sought to restore the social to socialism. In *How to be an Anticapitalist in the 21st Century* he grounds real utopias in the values they espouse – equality, democracy, social justice, and solidarity – values that have been deployed to legitimate capitalism but can be realized only partially under capitalism. Still, there is an ambiguity about the driving force behind real utopias and in what sense they are anti-capitalist. In this short article I will suggest that one answer to these questions can be found in Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* (1944). As I shall argue, Polanyi’s ideas are themselves limited; they need to be infused with a dose of Marxian theory on the dynamics of capitalism. The circle is complete when we recognize that Marxian theory needs Wright’s turn from imaginary to real utopias.

> Searching for the unity of real utopias

The architecture of Wright’s *Envisioning Real Utopias* is elegantly simple: critique of capitalism (diagnosis); alternatives to capitalism (solutions); the transformation problem (treatment). Wright has 11 criticisms of capitalism. In summary, capitalism perpetuates unnecessary human suffering; blocks conditions for human flourishing; limits individual freedom; violates egalitarian principles; is inefficient in crucial aspects; has a bias toward consumerism; destroys the environment; threatens broadly held values; fuels militarism and imperialism; corrodes community; and limits democracy. This is a quite an indictment! The elements are closely connected to one another but they do not provide any unifying theme or core critique.

If there is unity, it lies not in the critique of capitalism, but in the solution, namely the empowerment of civil society vis-à-vis the economy and the state, restoring the social in socialism. Dispensing with the idea of *imaginary* utopias that had dogged the history of socialism, he set about discovering “real utopias”: actually existing formations – institutions, organizations – of an anti-capitalist character that grow up in the interstices of capitalism or in symbiosis with the development of capitalism.

“Who will form the collective actor to save humanity from capitalism? This is the problem Marx, Polanyi, and Wright have left us to solve”

Some of his favorite real utopias were: the basic income grant, cooperatives, Wikipedia, participatory budgeting, the social economy. His project was to work with practitioners, formulate the real utopia abstractly, and examine its conditions of existence and dissemination as well as its internal contradictions. The real utopias were anti-capitalist in as much as they challenged one or more of the destructive features of capitalism. Wright formulated a set of strategies of transition – symbiotic, interstitial, exit, and rupture – but was rather reticent about the agents of such transformation. No less important, he failed to tie these real utopias to a theory of the dynamics of capitalism, a theory that might explain their appearance as well as their challenge to capitalism as such. I turn to Karl Polanyi and Marx to rescue Wright’s project.

> From Wright to Polanyi

Polanyi, too, was enamored of real utopias – Robert Owen’s communalism, the growth of cooperatives, and the embryos of guild socialism. They were all embedded in nineteenth-century English social movements, contesting the unregulated commodification of labor. As we shall see, Wright’s real utopias can also be seen as counter-movements to commodification. What is less clear is their relationship to capitalism.

Polanyi regarded fascism, Stalinism, social democracy as state-led reactions to unregulated marketization. But what is the logical connection between the periodic assertions of market fundamentalism and capitalism? An interesting clue to the answer lies in the famous Polanyi Paradox – his failure to anticipate a third surge of marketization beginning in the 1970s, what we call neoliberalism. I call it *third-wave marketization* – because Polanyi’s own historical account contains not one but two waves of marketization – one in the nineteenth century largely focused on reactions to the commodification of labor and another in the twentieth century driven by the commodification of money (finance capital). The first led to a reaction of social movements, the second to reactions of the state – some progressive and some pathological. Polanyi was especially wary of the fascist response.

Polanyi thought that humanity would never again dare to experiment with market fundamentalism. Humanity would never risk the destructiveness of unregulated markets, creating what he called “fictitious commodities” – labor, money, and nature – commodities whose use value is destroyed when subject to unregulated exchange. He was wrong. There was yet another round of marketization beginning in the 1970s. Why was he blind to this possibility?

The answer, I believe, is that he had an idealistic notion of market fundamentalism – a dangerous utopia that sprang from the head of misguided liberal economists.

Polanyi’s idealism also appears in his hostility to Marxist analysis of capitalism – hostility to the laws of development of capitalism and the resulting class struggle. In Polanyi’s view Marx overestimated the possibility of class struggle driven by exploitation. Indeed, there *is* a paradox in Marx’s account: how can there be class struggle when exploitation is not palpable but mystified and when workers have a material interest in the maximal expansion of capitalism?

Rather than wrestle with these Marxian paradoxes, Polanyi takes the view that alienation under capitalism is better understood through the lens of commodification rather than through the lens of production. Whereas for Marx commodification serves to mystify exploitation in production, for Polanyi the destructiveness of commodification, particularly of “fictitious commodities,” creates dispossession and disaffection. But in throwing out Marxist dynamics and in focusing on commodification at the expense of exploitation, on markets at the expense of production, Polanyi is left without a theory of capitalist dynamics, a theory of (dis)accumulation. Therefore, he cannot see the roots of marketization in the contradictory expansion of capitalism itself. This requires us to return to Marx.

> From Polanyi back to Marx

Commodification is not an incidental feature of capitalism, created by fallible liberal economists. Rather it is the way capitalism manages to resolve its systemic crises of overproduction and profitability. Overproduction is offset by the search for new markets, and this is not just at the inception of capitalism but continues throughout capitalism, and, one might add, it involves a good dose of violence. We can think of imperialism as the extraction of raw materials made possible by cheap labor in the colonies which thereby creates new consumer markets. In other words, it is through waves of marketization – the expansion of commodification – that capitalism overcomes the crises it generates. That being the case, movements opposing commodification *can* be a challenge to capitalism: anti-commodification *can* be anti-capitalist. Thus, if we experience the destructiveness of capitalism through recurrent waves of commodification, *then* commodification could be the terrain for an anti-capitalist strategy.

Marx does offer us a theory of the dynamics of capitalism, indeed one that makes ever deepening commodifi-

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cation necessary for the survival of capitalism. However, Marx only sees resistance to capitalism as emanating from struggles in production, he doesn't see marketization itself, the commodification of everything, as a more powerful source of collective resistance. If Marx offers us a materialist theory of the necessity of waves of marketization under capitalism, Polanyi gives us a theory of a resistance to capitalism emanating from marketization.

Armed with Polanyi and Marx we can now return to Wright. We can look upon his real utopias as anti-commodification projects. The basic income grant challenges the commodification of labor, participatory budgeting and public banking challenge the commodification of capital, Wikipedia stands against the commodification of knowledge, rural cooperatives threaten the commodification of land as well as labor. I'm suggesting, therefore, that anti-commodification is a unifying frame for his disparate real utopias. They become part of what Polanyi calls the counter-movement.

> The Question of Agency

Marx did Marxism a profound disservice in refusing to fill communism with institutional content, thereby allowing any regime or any movement to call itself "communist." Wright offers an important corrective with his real utopias, but they need a unifying rubric. Polanyi's critique of commodification provides that unity, but he fails to see the connection between the dynamics of capitalism and successive waves of marketization. Even if Marx underestimates the destructiveness of commodification, he provides the final glue by tying accumulation to marketization. But this theoretical synthesis raises further problems.

First, as Polanyi points out, anti-commodification, so-called counter-movements, can end up feeding authoritarianism, fascism, thereby sacrificing the democratic charac-

ter of Wright's utopias. What can guarantee a democratic rather than an authoritarian solution to marketization?

Second, Polanyi assumed that when commodification threatened society, society would react back. We can no longer take that for granted. In other words, we have to worry not just about the form of the counter-movement – authoritarian or democratic – but whether a counter-movement is at all feasible.

Third, when anti-commodification becomes a form of *de-commodification*, it can be an effective absorption strategy. Thus, the creation of a welfare state can elicit the consent to capitalism, not its supersession. Under what circumstances does anti-commodification become anti-capitalist?

Fourth, marketization may go much further than commodification, it may expel fictitious commodities, factors of production, from the market altogether, that is the production of waste, what I call *ex-commodification*. Commodification can lead to the destruction of labor, land, money, knowledge, environment. This is especially true of the third-wave marketization of the last fifty years.

Fifth, the challenge of today is to scale up counter-movements to the global level. Counter-movements are still lodged at the local and national levels without tackling the global frame of commodification. We are still wedded to responses to second-wave marketization when we are in the midst of third-wave marketization.

All these questions turn on the vexing question of agency: who will form the collective actor to save humanity from capitalism? This is the problem Marx, Polanyi, and Wright have left us to solve. ■

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> Turkish Sociology: Challenges and Possibilities

by **N. Beril Özer Tekin**, Doğuş University, Turkey, and member of ESA Research Network on Sociology of Health and Medecine (RN16)

Sociology in Turkey has a very dynamic character, and some specific issues and areas of discussion. In this regard, civil society, politics, policies, environmental problems, everyday life and consumption are among the most discussed issues. Along with the differences brought by the unique culture, socio-economic characteristics, political dynamics, and institutional characteristics of Turkey compared to other countries in the world, the pandemic has also affected the practices of doing sociology. With the pandemic, the social and economic difficulties experienced by different segments of the society, and the changing ways of doing business and of daily life have brought a pandemic perspective to the issues currently being studied and a greater concentration on inequalities.

The articles in this section provide a better understanding of Turkey's social reality and practices of sociology.

Aslı Telsezen discusses the feminist movement from past to present in her article titled "Gender In/Equality and Feminism in Turkey." Along with a historical perspective, she points to current challenges and shows how pandemic-related processes have deepened the gender gap and increased gender-based violence, and femicide. The article also suggests that the pandemic has revealed the importance of women's labor – both paid and unpaid labor.

Dicle Koylan discusses the new working patterns of white-collar workers following the pandemic in "COVID-19 and Middle-Class Consumption in Turkey." The article focuses on the changes brought by working from home in terms of

working atmosphere and habits, increasing expectations from managers in terms of longer working hours, increased pressure and stress on employees, and changes in consumption habits.

In "The Sociology of Environmentalism in Turkey," Özkan Öztürk discusses the historical process of social reactions to environmental problems in this country. He suggests that the politics of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) administration, the current leading political party in Turkey, increased environmental problems, causing them to affect wider segments of the population, as seen in energy projects such as hydro-electric power plant projects. This has enabled the environmentalist discourse to resonate with a wider audience, due also to the influence of the internet.

İlknur Hacisoftaoğlu discusses the state of gender inequality in her article titled "Women Caught in Turkey's Ideological Clashes." She draws attention to gender and the construction of the body in the arena of sports. Finally, the article emphasizes that while women's bodies continue to be instrumentalized in political debates, women struggle to draw their destiny.

In "The Pandemic and 'Digital Immigrants' in Turkey," N. Beril Özer Tekin discusses increasing ageism during the pandemic and points out the possibilities of the internet and smart digital technologies for the elderly, the so-called "digital immigrants." She shows that exclusion, social isolation, and inequalities can be reduced in Turkey through the internet, and offers suggestions.

I hope you enjoy the section! ■

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conomic system. Thanks to their efforts, public awareness of the existing problems based on gender inequality grew, along with information about resources and mechanisms to solve them.

> Contemporary challenges

Due to the efforts of feminists in the 1980s and 1990s, the feminist movement grew stronger socially and politically. In the 2000s and afterward, it seems that all women, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age, who see patriarchy and the patriarchal social structure as a problem are the protagonists of the feminist movement. As Hill-Collins (1990) argues, gender, class, and ethnicity are among the most ambiguous and politicized social relationships in the modern world. Having seen that class, sexual orientation, age, religion, state of health, citizenship ties, etc. differentiate women's experiences, feminists continue to systematically question the link between intertwined power relations and women's social and political experiences. The intersectional character of the feminist movement in Turkey can be seen as the root cause of the movement's strength.

When we look at the policy-making process in the 2000s, it is apparent that the gender politics was coherent with the European Union accession process that had begun following the Helsinki Summit in 1999. In this period, Turkey experienced several signs of progress in women's rights, including the amendments of the Turkish Penal Code and Civil Code, and the hosting of the Istanbul Convention. Turkey became the first country to sign the Istanbul Convention, the first European convention aimed at securing a region without violence against women and domestic violence, regardless of sexual orientation. The document could be seen as an assurance for LGBTIQ+ individuals. Just after ratifying the Convention, Turkey passed its own corresponding law no. 6284 in 2012.

However, with the de-Europeanization policies after 2012, these reforms have slowed down. This period co-

incides with the transition from an egalitarian discourse to a conservative one. The neoliberal policies of the period have been accompanied by rhetoric on the importance of family and the role of women within the family, an essential tool for reconsolidating patriarchal social structure. In 2021, Turkey became the first country to leave the Istanbul Convention; this was done even without the approval of the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Despite the progress over the last decades, many challenges remain, including the underrepresentation of women in politics and in the workforce, the high rate of unemployed women, gender-based violence, and femicide. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on gender equality. The data show that the pandemic has led to an increase in violence against women. Many women had to stay in unsafe conditions because of the lockdown measures, making it difficult for them to access services.

In countries like Turkey, where traditional and stereotypical divisions of labor are common, and where the care work predominantly falls on women while men provide for the household, despite the significant changes and developments that have taken place in practice, the COVID-19 epidemic has deepened the gender gap and caused women to bear a disproportionate burden. Although recent studies³ showed that men also spent more time on housework during the pandemic, the same studies revealed that men's participation in domestic labor did not reduce the burden of women. In fact, the pandemic revealed the importance of women's labor. Although life outside homes has come to a standstill, as Melda Yaman⁴ points out, women have continued to work, in paid and unpaid capacities, to reproduce labor power, and to provide care for children and the elderly at home. They have been hit harder by the economic impacts of COVID-19, as they disproportionately work in insecure labor markets. All these factors make women fragile both in public and private spaces and constitute a significant obstacle to achieving gender equality. ■

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> COVID-19 and Middle-Class Consumption in Turkey

by **Dicle Koylan**, Doğuş University, Turkey



| Credit: Tran Mau Tri Tam, Creative Commons.

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed societies, institutions, and everyday life in a sudden and very rapid manner. One after another, restrictions on social life by governments around the world have made the concepts of social distance and social isolation a part of everyday life. Life has been rearranged in all areas where we come together socially, from doing business to leisure activities, and this has entailed a change in routines, lifestyles, and consumption habits.

This sudden shift has been witnessed especially among middle-class white-collar workers who, prior to the pandemic, routinely commuted to work, struggled with traffic jams, held face-to-face meetings, worked for set hours in an office, and regularly entered public spaces. Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all segments of society and their daily lives, but the change is much more evident in the lives of white-collar workers who have switched to working at home. Of course, this transformation of work, made possible by the digitalization efforts of large firms and organizations, was perceived as a luxury during the pandemic. It is an option that middle- and upper-class white collars have had while lower classes have not.

Blue-collar workers and healthcare personnel have been the most vulnerable groups in Turkish society during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of them are low-skilled workers with low-paid jobs and poor working conditions, such as delivery drivers, meat industry workers, supermarket cashiers, and construction workers, with a high risk of catching infection. Their working conditions are generally not suitable for digitalization, working from home, or being flexible; therefore the COVID-19 pandemic did not change their working life that much. On the other hand, their social routines, lifestyles, and consumption habits, including human interactions like gathering in a café or participating in a crowded wedding, have been of course affected by the pandemic. We should not forget that the main focus of a capitalist society is on the sustainability of work, so the working life of the lower classes has continued, as much as possible, as before.

> The impact on white-collar workers

As opposed to the upper class and wealthy elite who have survived the pandemic in their habitual luxury, the lower and middle classes have almost solely witnessed its negative impact. My emphasis is more particularly on the

middle class, especially its white-collar workers; they were not unemployed during the pandemic but nevertheless suffered as much as others. But their sufferings are not recognized, and even ignored. They have been witnessing difficulties while their jobs have been digitalized. Changes in their working conditions and the qualifications required to work in these conditions have affected their whole life.

White-collar jobs generally necessitate going to an office and participating in face-to-face meetings, actions requiring human interaction. However, the pandemic shifted these requirements in a very rapid way. Actions requiring human (face-to-face) interaction in all areas of life, including working life, were prohibited or limited. Therefore, white-collar workers who were suddenly confined to their homes and trying to adapt to working from home, have had to build a new daily life, resulting in a change of consumption habits on a massive scale.

It is not surprising that in the context of the social isolation brought by the pandemic, people have remained largely confined to their homes and have tended to consume less. Confinement, restrictions, and lockdowns decrease one's visibility in the public sphere. People rarely go out for a meal or gathering, or participate in a wedding, see a friend, or shop in a big shopping mall. This has meant that luxury and conspicuous consumption (spending money on and acquiring luxury goods and services specifically as a public display of economic power) has decreased. People usually don't buy expensive clothes, high-heel shoes, a luxurious perfume or cosmetics unless they go out. If they are not seen by others in a public sphere, such as a shopping street or an office in a plaza,

they tend not to indulge in conspicuous consumption. If there is no opportunity for public display, there won't be any conspicuous consumption.

Another finding regarding the transformation of everyday life and consumption habits has to do with the distinction between the workplace and home. With the pandemic, the workplace has become a room in the house. Work time and leisure time are also getting closer together than ever before – the boundaries between office place and office hours, and home and leisure times are blurred. Home has become an epicenter that encompasses a complete life. As a result of the increasing intermingling of work and home life, there has been a deterioration in the family relations of middle-class white-collar workers. Shifting from working in an office to working at home has meant that the individual has to be ready to work at any time. White-collar workers stated that since the pandemic, their superiors and managers send them e-mails even at night, expecting an immediate response. Managers' expectations have changed – they want all white-collar workers to be ready at any time for any task, such as meetings, making marketing plans, writing e-mails, preparing reports, etc. These ambiguous working hours end up leading to problems in private life. Workers cannot make plans with their family or friends, or even planning to watch a live broadcast. This has led to lack of motivation and increasing rates of stress and depression.

In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic has directly affected and transformed the everyday life and consumption habits of middle-class white-collar workers in Istanbul. ■

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> The Sociology of Environmentalism in Turkey

by **Özkan Öztürk**, Karabük University, Turkey



Environmentalism can bridge the gap between environmental activism and civil society mobilization against authoritarianism. Credit: congerdesign/Pixabay, Creative Commons.

The course and forms of environmentalism in Turkey have progressed in parallel with the social transformation of the country as well as with its politics. With the transformation of environmentalism, it is possible to follow the struggles for the development of civil society, the ideological forms of neoliberalism, and the social divisions created by class differentiation, in addition to political debates.

Although the history of social reactions to environmental problems in Turkey can be traced back to the end of the 1970s, the emergence of an organized environmentalism was only possible at the end of the 1980s. This first period of organized environmentalism contributed both to the destruction of the psychological barriers to social organization produced by the 1980 military coup, and to the formation of a new political ground by reclaiming the language of protest in the 1970s, which associated environmental problems with politics and economy. The environmentalist discourse, with an emphasis on integrity beyond the political language of the period, was sought to be represented directly in politics by the Green Party. However, this attempt was short-lived because early environmentalism, although it had an innovative perspective, was stuck in a

narrow middle-class practice and did not reach the masses. After this unsuccessful political attempt, environmental discourse continued to be produced in different forms through environmental non-governmental organizations.

> The 1990s: the institutionalization of environmentalism

The 1990s, when environmentalism turned into a component of civil society, were also years when environmental values were integrated with middle class values and when environmentalism became visible in the public sphere. In this period, environmental organizations went beyond being social organizations producing political demands regarding environmental problems. In line with an expanding civil society dynamic against state authority, environmentalism became a strong component of civil society. There are two main reasons why environmentalism had a strong impact on civil society. First, the social image of environmentalism as non-political enabled people who were depoliticized during the coup process to be re-included in the social organization. Second, the discourse created about the potential risks of the planned nuclear power plant, together with the pollution produced by industry and thermal power plants



Environmental protest in Turkey. Credit: Özkan Öztürk.

throughout the country, made it clearer that environmental problems were not regional but national, and accelerated the social circulation of the environmentalist discourse. For instance, the protests against the Bergama gold mine as the most well-known environmental resistance of the period contributed to the spread of environmentalist discourse among the middle class. Environmentalism, during this period, managed to form a backbone based on the middle class that has survived to the present day.

The emphasis on civil society enabled the formation of different environmental organizations and different perspectives on environmentalism. This period, which might be called the period of institutionalization, paved the way for environmental organizations to develop special interests and to be involved in different social processes. Environmental non-governmental organizations focusing on different and specific issues such as agricultural problems, protecting natural life, and combating erosion acted to increase social awareness and interest in the environment through educational activities as well as to engage in their own fields of interest. Special attention was paid to awareness-raising activities: environmental education activities for children and young adults were part of an effort to create a social group with high awareness in the following years.

Also in the same period, not only environmental non-governmental organizations operating institutionally, but also environmental movements that directly target politics gained strength. Environmental movements, which lack the financial resources and therefore the means of propaganda available to institutionalized environmentalism, have continued to emphasize the political dimension of environmental problems, especially with the creation of joint working groups and local protest demonstrations for the expression of local problems. The common denominator between the political-protest attitude of environmental movements and institutionalized environmentalism, which was eager to separate environmentalism from its political content, was the aim of drawing the attention of a wider audience to environmental problems.

> The 2000s: the professionalization of environmentalism

The institutionalization process, which gained momentum in the 1990s, provided new perspectives for environmentalism in the 2000s. The agendas of environmentalist organizations contained more detailed goals compared to the 1990s, as well as identifying the tools used to reach these goals. As a result of this process, which can be defined as professionalization, environmentalist organizations clarified their political and economic programs as well as the intellectual structure of their ideological position. However, many of the new “environmentalist” organizations that were established under the shadow of big companies produced the propaganda of a domesticated environmentalism compatible with the current economic and political practices of capital. This interest in environmentalism was not limited to organizations established under the control of large companies. Especially in the mid-2000s, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) consolidated its political power, conservatives and religious organizations who wanted to expand their social influence established environmental organizations with a religious-environmental discourse. The reference to a religious discourse suggested reconciliation within the current conjuncture rather than solving environmental problems within the framework of a common good.

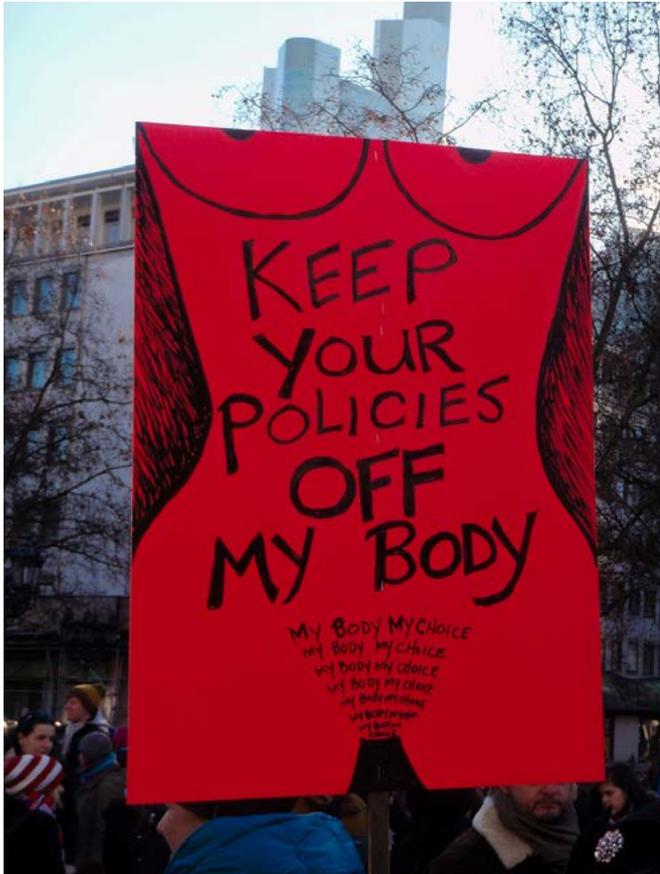
The 2000s were also the years when environmentalism and social interest in environmental problems spread from the middle classes to the lower classes. Communication technologies like the internet had a significant role in spreading environmentalist discourses to a wider social base than ever before. However, more importantly, a larger social group has directly been involved in environmental problems due to the fact that the environmental policies of the increasingly authoritarian AKP, which are far from reconciliation, constantly produce these problems in a deeper way. Many examples, such as the damage caused by hydroelectric power plants built on streams to the regions where they are built and to hundreds of villages in these regions, or the plundering of national parks through mineral exploration works, have led to the local people’s direct experience of environmental problems along with political authoritarianism.

The fact that environmental problems are experienced today by more people brings environmentalist discourses to the forefront both in civil society and in politics. In this sense, environmentalism has assumed a role in the struggle against authoritarian politics as well as in the struggle against environmental problems. Reducing this role to its political nature would mean ignoring the path of environmentalism in its short history in Turkey. As well as direct political struggle, developing civic initiatives with an emphasis on democratic values and initiating awareness-raising activities through environmental education have also strengthened the social quality of environmentalism. ■

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> Women Caught in Turkey's Ideological Clashes

by **İlknur Hacısötaoğlu**, Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey



Poster protesting the policies regulating a women's body at the Women's March in Frankfurt, 2017. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

Women's bodies have been at the center of various political debates throughout Turkey's history as they have been in many other countries. In this paper, I will try to deal with different instances of how women's bodies have become a canvas for different political conflicts.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Turkey's early republican construction period, the regime defined the "new woman" of the Republic. The social status of women and their bodily practices (for example, the choice of clothing, sports, and exercise) were brought together within the same formula. Women would fulfil their duties and responsibilities to the Turkish nation through their bodies and practices.

In this period, one of the focal points in the discussion of the values of the newly established Republic was the cleavage between civilization and culture. The intellectuals and founders of the new regime argued that the civilization identified with the West would come to the country through modernization. However, how to preserve the culture that represented the country's difference and specificity was also a significant concern. In this antagonistic positioning, women simultaneously represented the difference from the West and the similarity to the West. The "old" women, whose access to the public space was controlled through strict rules, were replaced with the "new" women, who had gained equality with men before the law but still maintained their traditional domestic roles.

As Çolak stated in his article "Citizenship between secularism and Islamism in Turkey," every Turkish woman, as the new citizen, had to comply with a series of "idealized" and "civilized" symbols, images, and rituals reflected in their bodies. Sports were considered as the space where the new women were to be exhibited. First rally player Samiye Cahid Morkaya, as well as Halet Çambel and Suat Fetgeri, the first women from a Muslim-dominated country to participate in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, were among the symbolic names of this period.

> Islamism, secularism, and the battle over women's bodies

Women's position in society was not a salient issue between 1950 and 1980. However, the period after the 1980 military coup, in which the regime in Turkey was transformed, witnessed the rise of the women's movement. As Nacide Berber stated, "the independent feminist movement that emerged was, in the words of Sevgi Çubukçu, a 'revolt' movement that did not settle for legal rights, objected to the illusion that gender equality created by Kemalism was realized, and emerged with radical and fundamentalist demands."

Another movement that rose after 1980 was the Islamic movement. This movement expanded in the field opened by the military regime, and increased its influence through the 1990s. After the 1990s, it became a recognized opposition movement with a static position on the political agenda. Once again, with the headscarf issue, women's

bodies were at the center of conflicts in the public arena. The headscarf was a significant part of the rhetoric of the Islamists, and the hegemony of that time viewed the headscarf as a symbol of Islam; they positioned it as an image of counter-secularism. Thus women were not allowed to work with headscarves in public service buildings, such as schools and ministries.

The growing women's movement influenced the Islamic movement as well. With the influence of both the growing women's movement and heated discussions around women's participation in the public space with the headscarf, women took a very active role in the Islamic movement, particularly in local politics. In 2002, the AKP, an Islamic-oriented party, came to power. The struggle of women to take their place in public with their headscarves was an essential part of their rhetoric. They built their discourse on women's freedom to wear a headscarf, framing their message in terms of women's rights to do as they wished with their bodies. While in the early republican period, the rhetoric was based on the cleavage of civilization and culture, and in the current conflict it is based on secularism and Islam, in both cases women's bodies are used as an image representing this clash.

With the rise of the Islamic movement in the following years, the discussion around the female body has gained new layers. Headscarved women are no longer the only debate with regard to the female body. Some Islamic opinion leaders have called on women to stay in line and abide by Islamic values with their bodies. Rights assumed by the women's movement to have been guaranteed have become controversial again. One of these achievements was the 2011 Istanbul Convention that aims to protect women against all forms of violence and to prevent, prosecute, and eliminate violence against women and gender-based violence. After months of campaigns by some seemingly pro-government newspapers, Turkey, which in 2012 had no hesitation in signing the Convention, declared that it had reservations about it and withdrew in 2021. In fact, the Istanbul Convention debates reflected the tension around women's rights in Turkey in different spheres. While homophobia was the most visible theme of the discussions, it was also evident that the political discourse, informed by concerns about changes in the traditional position of women, was calling the liberated women back to their homes.

> Sportswomen as symbols

While the shock waves caused by the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention continued, the Tokyo Summer Olympics started. Almost equal numbers of men and women from Turkey participated in the Olympics. Although they did not win a medal, the volleyball team known as *Filenin Sultanları* ("Sultans of the net") in Turkey attracted much attention. One of the most important reasons for this was that the team's success in the international sports arena took on a different meaning through a tweet posted by one of the Islamic opinion leaders on social media.¹ The tweet called on the girls of Islam not to be like female volleyball players, described as a part of popular culture, but to be sultans of modesty and propriety. The same women became a symbol of modern Turkey for the seculars. The women's volleyball team thus quickly took on crucial symbolic meaning and the female body, once again, was instrumentalized and transformed into a symbol in the Islamic-secular debate.

While these discussions were going on, one of the team's most successful players posted a photo with her girlfriend on Instagram. This time, as homophobic attacks increased, those who defended her with an anti-discrimination discourse and those who saw her as a symbol of moral corruption became polarized once again. However, right after the Olympics, there was the Women's European Volleyball Championship, and the Turkish team was among the favorites. As a result of these developments, the Turkish Volleyball Federation, an institution affiliated with the government, made a statement supporting the player, stating that a person's private life is private and that no topic other than the athlete's success and contribution to the team should be on the agenda. Soon after, the athlete joined a team in Italy. As in other debates around women athletes' sexual identity and as Pat Griffin explains in her article entitled "Changing the Game: Homophobia, Sexism, and Lesbians in Sport" the silence pact was quickly enacted and the issue closed.

In the present, as Asli Telsiren's article in this issue also notes, while women's bodies continue to be instrumentalized for political debates, women continue to struggle to make their own destiny. ■

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1. (in Turkish) <https://twitter.com/ihsansenocak/status/1419296320267997187>

> The Pandemic and “Digital Immigrants” in Turkey

by **Beril Özer Tekin**, Doğuş University, Turkey, and member of ESA Research Network on Sociology of Health and Medicine (RN16)



Digital immigrants' experiences with digital devices during the pandemic.
Credit: Oleg Volovik, Creative Commons.

Turkey was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as much as the rest of the world, causing severe economic and social impacts on various social segments. In particular, the elderly (individuals 65 years and above), who are categorized as a disadvantaged group, were affected by this process differently compared to other social segments. As the impact of the pandemic increased, “ageism” also increased in line with the climate of fear, as Butler (1969) has pointed out. Ageism is defined as discriminating against people based on their age. Although the term has a similarity with racism, the most important difference is that every one of us will be old! The article focuses on the experiences of the elderly during the pandemic-related restrictions and, in particular, their experience of the increased reliance on digitalization.

According to United Nations 2019 data, there are 703 million elderly individuals (65 years and over) in the global population; projections show that this population will increase twofold to 1.5 billion by 2050. Turkey is aging twice as fast as European countries, without matching employment and social services. Considering the “greying” of the population, there is a need for more studies on ageing both globally and in Turkey.

> The elderly as “digital immigrants”

The twenty-first century has seen the speeding up of digitalization, with the number of internet users increasing and many public services becoming available online. But not all individuals have the same access to digital technologies. Besides economic and education variables, age also causes disadvantages. The term “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001) points to the difficulties for the elderly of entering the digital arena. It refers to the generation who were born before computer technologies spread and who met with these technologies at a late age. This is in contrast to “digital natives” – the young children of digital immigrants or their grandchildren who were born at the same time as the new technologies. Digital immigrants started to improve their skills in using these technologies with help from the natives.

TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020) data show that the use of information technologies by individuals aged 65-74 in Turkey increased between 2015 and 2020. The percentage of elderly users grew from 6% to 27%. The most frequently used device is the smart mobile phone: according to research data (Binark et al., 2020), 57% of

women and 60% of men in Turkey use these devices to access the internet.

The elderly have witnessed massive transformations in media and communication, starting with newspapers and radio, followed by smart mobile phones, smart TV, and touch screens. This generation, which previously used to send letters and wait for the phone, is trying to adapt to the new era in which information flow, communication, and speed of communication have all increased. Thanks to digitalization, the elderly were able to find a space of freedom and joy during the difficult restrictions of the pandemic period. On the other hand, digital platforms also have some negative sides, such as information pollution, misinformation, fraud, and use of the wrong language.

> Digital use by the elderly during the pandemic

The participation of the elderly in the digitalization process increased during the pandemic. Strict restrictions were imposed on them, such as curfew around leaving their residence (March 22, 2020) and prohibition on the use of public transport (November 2020). The restriction on using public transport for the elderly caused many problems for their everyday life, especially for those unable to afford a taxi or a private car. Their existing psychological and physiological fragility increased with the pandemic. Despite requiring medications for several health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, kidney problems, and circulatory disorder, they could not visit doctors for a check-up or to regulate their doses.

The elderly are unfortunately faced with labeling, stigmatization, and discrimination in society. Besides existing problems related to health or psychological problems, the discriminatory language that is reflected in media made the elderly feel isolated and excluded from society. They found their biggest support socially and psychologically from their family and children during these hard times; the negative effects may last for years on this elderly population genera-

tion. Besides the restrictions applied by the government, the elderly also faced restrictions imposed by their children on their everyday practices, such as shopping, visiting neighbors, or meeting with friends. The pressure and control added to their fear and anxiety. They stopped seeing their neighbors or friends, and going shopping. Either their children shopped for them, or they started to shop online. This led them to use the internet more often for other purposes besides online shopping, such as for online video communication programs and socializing with their friends. Applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp were among those most preferred by the elderly during the pandemic.

The elderly developed coping strategies such as physical activity, walking, internet surfing, watching movies, and hobbies (reading, sewing, meditating, participating in online courses) in line with the possibilities during the pandemic. These activities helped them to protect their psychological and physical health. Even though most of the elderly did not have walking habits earlier, they adopted and sustained walking practices during the restrictions.

Finally, the internet and new media technologies have been an important buffer mechanism during the pandemic. The internet and social networks serve an important function in terms of assisting the elderly to cope with their problems and providing opportunities for socialization and entertainment. It was found that the elderly used the internet quite effectively, depending on education, economic, and social factors. New technologies are also crucial for an active aging process, to ease daily chores, and to live a healthy and independent life. Given that current inequalities were deepened during the pandemic for disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, women, and poor, it is important that groups like these be provided internet subscriptions, economic assistance in acquiring smart devices, and education on their use by the relevant institutions. ■

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> Which Paths from Hyper-Globalization to Sustainable Cooperation?

by **Hans-Jürgen Urban**, IG Metall and Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany

The social and ecological distortions of capitalist “hyper-globalization” (Dani Rodrik) have been the subject of much global sociological research, in particular, research on the mode of capitalist production, which generates different working conditions along its global supply and value chains. These chains are usually dominated by transnational corporations that have their headquarters in the states of the capitalist North and their supplier companies in the Global South.

> Asymmetries in global supply chains

Global research has also shown massive violations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) core labor standards and basic human rights in the working conditions along these chains. Along the line from the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) in the capitalist North to the producers of intermediate products (suppliers) in the Global South, a tendency towards poorer working conditions and higher health risks can be observed. This geographical disparity is complemented by different environmental factors that cause health hazards.

Without the elimination of this glaring discrepancy between the reality of work and applicable legal and ethical norms, the transition from hyper-globalization to sustainable cooperation cannot succeed. The asymmetric structure in the distribution of workloads and health opportunities is consequently a recurring starting point for workers’ resistance and trade union initiatives to achieve improvements. However, change is hard to effect because the asymmetrical distribution of burdens corresponds to the unequal distribution of profits and costs. The economic advantages of undisturbed supply and production relations are concentrated with the owners of the OEMs in the countries of the capitalist North, thus benefitting those with global power and privilege. So far it has been possible only in a few cases to build up trade union power structures along the supply chains or to persuade the governments of the metropolitan states to introduce effective social and ecological regulations.

> Capitalistic globalization at the tipping point?

However, the Great Financial Crisis of 2008 as well as the global COVID-19 pandemic have made the dark side of capitalist hyper-globalization perceptible even to the profiteers of this constellation. The renaissance of an uncoordinated “wild protectionism” tore apart global supply chains and value creation processes. Sales markets were abruptly closed and a lack of primary products led to interruptions in production. Even though in some cases it was possible to find new suppliers and open up alternative sales regions, rising procurement costs and additional market development costs still put pressure on profits.

There has also been a second development. In the capitalist metropolises, the segmentation and precarization of dependent gainful employment have given rise to zones of underprivileged labor. They exist in the social form of wage labor or as dependent self-employment, with different degrees of disadvantage in terms of work, health, and environmental burdens. In Germany during the Corona pandemic, this became evident in the scandalous working conditions of workers from Southeastern Europe in the meat industry. Here, even the minimum legally prescribed hygiene and infection protection measures enacted by German legislators, not least due to pressure from German trade unions, were lacking. Media coverage of these unlawful and inhumane conditions put considerable pressure on the corporate and political actors responsible.

A third development is the legislative interventions in Europe that impose new due diligence obligations on corporations headquartered there. This could open up opportunities for positive effects on the working conditions of suppliers in the South. In Germany, for example, a so-called *Supply chain law* (“Lieferkettensorgfaltspflicht-Gesetz”) was pushed through under pressure from a social alliance. And in 2021, the European Parliament approved the draft *Directive on Corporate Due Diligence and Corporate Accountability*. Even if the effectiveness of these rules

“So far it has been possible only in a few cases to build up trade union power structures along the supply chains or to persuade the governments of the metropolitan states to introduce effective social and ecological regulations”

is by no means certain, they can be starting points for company and trade union initiatives.

The vulnerability of global supply chains, which has once again become apparent in the pandemic, has spurred a debate on the risks and rationality of an overstretched globalization. The German economist Sebastian Dullien, for example, has questioned whether the globalization of the production economy has passed its optimal point and the marginal utility of further globalization can no longer compensate for the risks. In view of the massive damage and suffering that the financial market crisis and the Corona pandemic have caused, especially in the Global South, trade unions and other actors are faced with the task of identifying a possible change to the path of globalization. The costs of an increasingly fragile globalization, the heightened sensitivity to the over-exploitation of migrant workers, and initiatives to strengthen the due diligence of transnational corporations are creating new conditions for activities aimed at social and ecological regulation of the global economy.

> Research lines of a global public sociology

What should this mean for global sociological dialogue? How can critical social science contribute to the improvement of working conditions in this historical constellation? First, researchers in the countries where global value chains are located would have to agree on a common sociological self-understanding and on common lines of research. Michael Burawoy's dictum of a global public sociology, which has already produced impressive research findings, would be a suitable basis. From a labor sociology perspective, a line of research oriented towards the ecology of work would be useful. More research is needed into the interests, strategies, and obstacles to the implementation of social-ecological regulations and minimum standards along global value chains.

The interconnectedness of economic, ecological, and legal problems also requires research in which political economy, socioeconomic, and human rights approaches are intertwined. Aspects of sustainable reproduction of labor, societies, and nature must be bundled into common research questions. Research under the label of *working-class environmentalism* or *environmental labor studies* could provide starting points here.

A line of research oriented towards an organizational sociology would also be necessary. So far, attempts to combine the power resources of national trade unions by forming transnational umbrella organizations have remained unsatisfactory. Efforts to build up trade union power structures along global value chains also face major obstacles, such as insufficient financial and human resources, especially in the Southern trade unions and company-based interest groups, and cultural cleavages fed by national and trade union traditions. Research must explore whether the experience of being jointly affected by the consequences of hyper-globalization can also promote joint strategy-building processes.

> Outlook

Sociological research has shown that the transition from hyper-globalization to a regime of sustainable cooperation is blocked less by a lack of knowledge than by interest and power structures. These cannot be eliminated by new research efforts alone. But the growing skepticism about the rationality of production and value-added linkages in global capitalism may have opened a window of opportunity. If global sociology accompanies this new awareness with critical research, new fields of cooperation and new opportunities for a global public sociology could arise. ■

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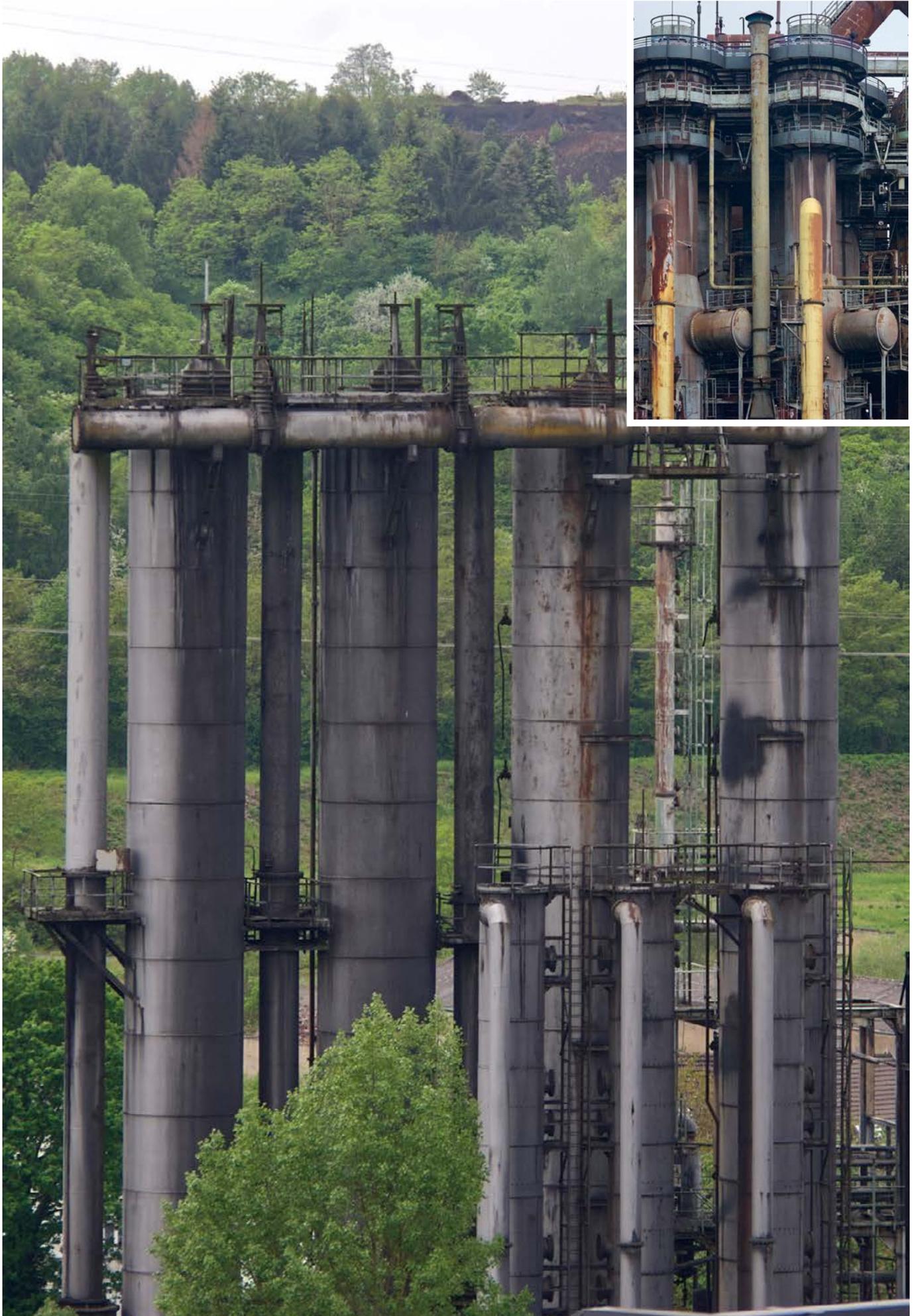
> Nature Comes Back: UNESCO World Heritage Site Völklinger Hütte

The Völklinger Hütte <https://voelklinger-huette.org/en/> is the only fully intact ironworks of the industrial era and UNESCO World Heritage Site, showing this place of production as well as how nature comes back.

Photos by Max Aulenbacher. Publication of the photos in *Global Dialogue* by courtesy of the department of communication, media and press of the Völklinger Hütte UNESCO World Heritage Site. ■

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> Why Look Up?

Karl Polanyi on Right-Wing “Populism”

by **Sang Hun Lim**, Kyung Hee University, South Korea



Credit: Ivan Radic/[flickr](#).

The recent rise of radical right-wing politics is often interpreted as a populist social protection movement by those left behind by neoliberal globalization. Social critics criticize progressive politicians and intellectuals who have accepted the market economy in the name of “the third way,” and who have instead focused on identity politics, such as gender and ethnicity, while ignoring social and economic class inequalities. As a solution, they suggest promoting “left-wing populism” as a way to reorient the lower-middle and working classes from radical right-wing rhetoric towards a more open and egalitarian progressive populism.

The motivation for my article (“[Look Up Rather Than Down](#),” *Current Sociology*, 2021, online first) stems from questioning this idea that the distraught “people” are to blame for the rise of right-wing politics. The identification of radical right-wing politics as populism cannot explain the fact that many upper- and middle-class “elites” also support radical right-wing parties and policies, and that most radical right-wing parties support a neoliberal work ethic. They blame welfare recipients regardless of their nationality. Karl Polanyi’s (1886-1964) writing on fascism during the inter-war period is revealing for understanding the puzzle of radical right-wing politics. As is well known, Polanyi was a critic of the modern capitalistic market economy. He explains the development (and, in his view, collapse) of the modern capitalistic civilization with his idea of the

“double movement” – conflicts between the progress of the self-regulating market and counter-movements for social protection. Accordingly, Polanyian scholars often interpret radical right-wing politics as a kind of social protection movement by the masses against the harms of capitalism. However, Polanyi himself viewed fascism as an extreme movement by capitalist elites for protecting the self-regulating market economy.

> Karl Polanyi’s double movement and fascism

Polanyi argues that liberal economists and capitalists have attempted to insulate the economy from intervention by the “masses.” The self-regulating market encroaches on the basis of people’s human and social lives through the commodification of labor, land, and money. Those who are deprived of their livelihood and social relationship because of this “fictitious commodification” may well want to protect themselves from this encroachment by the self-regulating market. For those wishing to protect the self-regulating market, the masses’ protective influence on the economy distorts the “natural” functioning of the market, which leads to low productivity and eventually, Malthusian apocalypse.

Historically, capitalists have found a compromise between the protection of the free market and democratic politics. However, steep economic downturn leads to increased pressure from democratic forces and, ultimately,

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a stalemate between the two sides. This was the situation during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Fascism appeared as an “easy way-out,” saving the capitalistic market economy by destroying democracy and transforming capitalism from an individualistic to a corporatist system that disciplines people to contribute productively for the “common good.” Polanyi reminds us that none of the inter-war fascist leaders, even Hitler, gained political power without the support of political and economic elites.

Of course, fascism in the 1930s is not identical to the current political situation. A frequently pointed-out difference is that current radical right-wing politicians often openly embrace democratic institutions. However, it should be noted that radical right-wing politics in new democracies often cause their democracy to degenerate into “illiberal democracies” or even “electoral dictatorships.” Moreover, the political unrest after the recent US presidential election shows that even the election, a fundamental democratic institution, may be challenged in a seemingly stable democracy.

> Polanyi’s fascism and current right-wing politics

As the title of my article suggests, Polanyi tells us to “look up” rather than down in diagnosing the empowerment of radical right-wing politics. To prevent the victory of radical right-wing politics, we need to divide the upper and middle classes, at least as much as to unite the lower and lower-middle classes. In this way, we can prevent the concentration of resources and information that capitalist elites can mobilize for frustrating social protection policies promoted by progressive governments, which, in the inter-war period, worsened the deadlock between democracy and capitalism and tilled the ground for a fascist solution. How can we divide the upper- and middle-class elites? In a sense, realignment along identity politics have blurred the link between social class and party ideologies. This realign-

ment divides members of the upper and middle classes, drawing many of them to the progressive side. Of course, as in Nancy Fraser’s critical term “progressive neoliberals,” there is the danger of ignoring class conflicts and economic inequality. However, it should not be overlooked that issues of identity politics have aligned many upper- and middle-class members with progressive parties.

Another possible way to divide elites can be found in universalistic social policies. Thomas Piketty famously showed that grave asset inequality surpasses income inequality. Many young professionals who are income-rich but asset-poor may want to be insured against future income losses as well as against the possible decrease in the value of their professionalism due to technological and industrial transformations. Progressive parties could promote universalistic welfare policies, which benefit not only the lower classes but also upper-middle class professionals. In particular, an earnings-related social insurance scheme combined with a flat-rate egalitarian redistributive system is likely to appeal to those high-income and low-asset professionals.

> Conclusion

Interpreting right-wing politics as a “populist” social protection movement makes us “look down,” dumping responsibility for such politics on the victims of neoliberal globalization. Polanyi’s diagnosis of fascism pushes us to “look up” to capitalist elites, without whose provision of resources and information, radical right-wing politicians could hardly grab political power. Polanyi reminds us that, for all their populist rhetoric, radical right-wing politicians have been supportive of the market economy. If we accept Polanyi’s diagnosis of the political empowerment of fascism as the attempt of elites to protect the self-regulating market, we should consider how to divide capitalist elites as much as how to promote unity among the lower classes. ■

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> Learning from the Stories of Homicide Perpetrators

by **Martín Hernán Di Marco**, Oslo University, Norway and member of ISA Research Committee on Biography and Society (RC38)



*San Martín Penitentiary (small picture), and Devoto Federal Penitentiary (bigger picture), in Buenos Aires.
Credit: Martín Hernán Di Marco.*

Homicides have been addressed by a wide range of fields, from social sciences and psychology to law, literature, and cinema. The fascination with violence, as Oriana Binik says, is illustrated by the array of academic and lay theories that raise questions about how we think about this topic. However, demonizing, mythologizing, medicalizing or starting from the premise that the perpetrators' actions are irrational has undermined the possibility to fully comprehend the social processes behind it.

A central paradox in this topic is that homicide offenders' stories and biographies are rarely studied, taking into account their own terms and logics. Extensive academic research has broadened the knowledge about the characteristics of violent deaths at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

While this emphasis has justifiably broadened the knowledge of statistical trends and key variables (such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status), it has been detrimental to the comprehensive analysis of narrative processes.

> **The worldview of homicide offenders: a plea for an empirically-based understanding**

David Riches, a pioneer in the field of anthropology of violence, stated that a key feature of this field is that "violence" is a term employed by witnesses and victims, yet the subjective explanation of its performers is usually missing. Since greater attention has been given to quantitative data, the specific ways in which offenders rationalize and experience violence are less known.

What can we learn from the offenders' perspectives? How do their stories and lives contribute to understanding male-male homicide? Drawing on narrative criminology, the aim of my PhD research has been to understand the narratives employed by offenders and analyze the importance that these events have in their stories. This approach, by its design, avoids an essentialist analysis and tries to highlight that the meanings attached to violent practices are historically and culturally shaped in each social group.

> A narrative and biographical approach

The data in this study was derived from a sample of 72 narrative interviews with male perpetrators in Metropolitan Buenos Aires, Argentina. To fit the sampling criteria, participants were those charged with intentional male-male homicide in the context of quarrels and interpersonal disputes. Interviews followed the discourse and time periods that the men chose to explore. The bracketing process – setting aside personal experiences and beliefs – was critical in the analysis. Fieldwork was conducted in federal and provincial prisons, as well as in the homes of men who had completed their sentences.

Each participant received the transcripts from the interviews conducted with him, and a short reconstructed life story was written collaboratively with the participant. An open and axial coding process was followed. This article focuses on two domains: biographical turning points (moments identified as a crossroads) and rationalities (participant explanations giving meaning to events).

> Violent deaths: meaning and stories

Exploring the ways in which offenders gave meaning to the homicide turned out to be an interesting and fruitful endeavor. Three main points stand out regarding how the men presented and signified violence and violent death.

First, physical violence was talked about and presented in diverse and shifting ways. Violence was described as spontaneous, natural, a logical result of an emotional state, or a situational dynamic; it was seen as a necessary device, a form of punishment, and a restorative practice of honor, manhood, and status; it was also an unintended action, or an unfortunate event forced by social circumstances. Violence, as a practice and a resource, is a polyvalent action. In order to neutralize and rationalize it, men resorted to minimizing agency, deflecting feelings of remorse and aligning themselves with certain dominant scripts (“I didn’t have a choice,” “He had it coming,” “I was out of control,” “It was my upbringing, not me”). Violence, therefore, never lacked meaning, and it was ultimately a legitimate resource employed by actors.

Second, contrary to my initial hypothesis and hegemonic theories in the mental health field, which medicalize violence performance by stating its “traumatic” nature, homicide was predominantly not presented as a turning point. Their parents’ abandonment, job loss in the context of economic crisis, romantic break-ups, gaining or losing friends, and, most notably, being imprisoned represented significant transitions in their life stories. These events changed their “self” and the way in which they saw themselves and others. However, the homicide itself was rarely presented as the crossroad moment.

The fact that imprisonment, more than killing, was described as the major event was related to what this institution meant to them. It was presented as the “rock bottom” moment of their lives, an opportunity to change and reshape their life course, the redemption from a previous self, or even an event determined by society.

Third, prison, homicide, and prior harsh vital events were predominantly presented as “learning experiences.” The prevailing discourses employed by interviewees tended to appraise harmful experiences positively. Imprisonment, fights, losing contact with relatives and friends were decoded as moments of maturity, personal growth, subjective transformation, or strengthening. A violent death can inaugurate a new “self.” This rationality is deeply connected to hegemonic masculinity, but also to the circulating discourses in prison (i.e., psychology, coaching, religion, rehabilitation, and social work devices) that shape the stories.

> Concluding remarks

As social interactionists have stressed over the decades, safeguarding the perspective of social actors is necessary to understand social reality and to avoid replacing it within pre-established scientific categories. While there is a plethora of scholarly theories about homicide – referencing the almost universal “traumatic” impact of death in the life of the offender – only empirical explorations about sense-making can contribute to the comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In academia and common sense, killing is associated with an existential moment and an irrational, deranged, or immoral act. This research shows otherwise.

Revisiting existing data, theories, frameworks, and institutional devices that ascribe certain meanings to violence without having empirical grounds for them constitutes a worthy path of inquiry, still vastly unexplored. ■

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> Delivery Work via Digital Platforms in Brazil

by **Bruna da Penha** and **Ana Beatriz Bueno**, Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ), Brazil



Delivery workers in Brazil at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Marcelo Renda/[Pexels](#).

Drawing on primary empirical data and sociological reflection, we investigate the impact of the pandemic on the working conditions of delivery workers in Brazil. We also seek to analyze whether this impact can influence workers' subjective understanding of inequality. We start from the hypothesis that the health crisis has not created such inequality (internal to capitalism), but aggravated it. That is, it has potentialized the degradation of working conditions, focusing on working hours, payment and risks, and deepening the contradictions of the labor-capital conflict. In our empirical research, we use an original database, with a sample of one hundred digital platform deliverers in Brazil. These data were obtained

by answers on *Google Forms* through social networks, focusing on groups of deliverers in the southeast, north-east, and mid-west regions of Brazil. The responses were received between March and May 2021, and include quantitative and qualitative data.

> Uberization and labor-capital conflict

Far from understanding the Uberization of labor as a complete historical novelty, we must situate it within social materiality. That is, it does not represent an incompatibility or deviation from the way the pattern of capitalist accumulation has been maintained since its origin. The social relationship that characterizes Uberized work is that of a commodification of labor power, whose necessity is explained by the previous expropriation of the means of living. This is the social condition of subordinate labor in capitalism and therefore independent of legal status.

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While Uberization is not to be understood as a historical novelty, it is necessary to understand the contours of this phenomenon in the contemporary scenario. In the case of delivery workers in Brazil, the perception of inequality in the relationship between workers and platforms seems to be largely based on the sharing of the daily and urban experience of work. Even though the fragmentation of the work process is increasing, the ways of riding through the city and meeting others produce meanings of their own about this relationship.

Moreover, by being eminently relational, the activity of delivery makes explicit the most basic characteristic of human work: the fact that it is a process of mediation of reality and of development of intersubjective relations. This is an important aspect for the construction of perceptions about inequalities, as well as for the collective articulation of protest movements. In what follows, we present the main results obtained from our empirical research.

> The Google Forms questionnaire

When asked about the number of hours per day they delivered during the pandemic, most respondents (42%) said they worked nine to twelve hours, followed by those that indicated working eight hours (20%) and thirteen hours or more (13%). When asked about the working hours in the period before the pandemic, and if we take as the sample the number of respondents who were already making deliveries in that period (66 respondents), 39.3% worked nine to twelve hours, 22.7% eight hours, and 9% thirteen hours or more. There is, therefore, an increase in hours worked.

As for their monthly income from deliveries, during the pandemic the largest portion (25%) said they earned on average less than the Brazilian minimum wage (which was equivalent to 1,100 *reais* at the time of the answers), followed by 23% who indicated earning between 1,100 and 1,650 *reais*. In comparison, 15.3% stated that they received a lower remuneration than the current minimum wage in the period before the pandemic (considering the same value of 1,100 *reais* for the minimum wage). Most respondents (about 37%) stated that before the pandemic they earned between 2,750 and 3,300 *reais*, while during the pandemic only 15% earned this average remunera-

tion. This shows a significant drop in monthly remuneration, even though the demand for these services and the average working hours have increased.

There is, therefore, a clear increase in the proportion of respondents who work thirteen or more hours per day, as well as those who earn less than the minimum wage per month. Remuneration, by the way, seems to be a determining factor in the subjective perception of the inequalities of platform work, especially when considering that for about 84% of the respondents this is their only source of income. That is, far from serving as a source of complementary remuneration, this work is an integral part of workers' income in Brazil.

In terms of demands, the demand for an increase in payment (91% of the answers) takes absolute prominence, followed by the end of unjustified blockades, accident insurance, food allowance, greater autonomy, labor benefits, and a signed employment contract. Less than 20% of the respondents signaled this last element (regulation via employment contract) as part of their demands. A possible explanation is that, in a moment of exacerbation of a broad social crisis, the most visible aspects of inequality stand out. The monetary dimension of this relationship has the power to embody, most explicitly, the social contradictions of the dynamics of this labor.

As for the reasons given for seeking delivery work, almost all our respondents mentioned the need to earn an income. Regarding the socio-demographic profile, 98% of the respondents were men, 54% identified themselves as brown or black, and most of them were young. A majority of respondents (24%) were between 31 and 35 years old, followed by those between 21 and 25 (19%), between 35 and 40 (18%), and between 25 and 30 (17%). This seems to reflect, to a large extent, the fact that young people are the group most affected by unemployment. As for education, 77% of the respondents had a high school and/or college degree. Finally, 33 respondents stated that they had already suffered accidents at work, but only one had received some support from the platform. These data show that the COVID-19 pandemic has made the contradictions and inequalities of the labor-capital conflict in Brazil more explicit, amplifying the precariousness of the working conditions of delivery workers. ■

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