

GLOBAL DIALOGUE

13.2

3 issues a year in multiple languages

Talking Sociology
with Sidney Tarrow

Angela Alonso
Breno Bringel

Liberalism, the Other,
and Religion

Cécile Laborde
Azmi Bishara
Frédéric Vandenberghe
Anna Halafoff

Revitalizing
Social Theory

Mikael Carleheden
Arthur Bueno
Richard Swedberg
Anna Engstam
Nora Hämäläinen
Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen
Sujata Patel

Theoretical
Perspectives

Luna Ribeiro Campos
Verónica Toste Daflon

Open Section

- > **Open-Access, Predatory, or Subscription-Based Journals**
- > **Health Seeking Behavior in Bihar**
- > **Mental Health Crisis in Spain: Why Sociology Matters**
- > **Recognizing Subliminal Violence**
- > **A Khaldunian View on the Invasion of Ukraine**

MAGAZINE



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> Editorial

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Global Dialogue*, the second under my editorship with Carolina Vestena and Vitória Gonzalez. During my first few months as editor, I have initiated a wide-ranging discussion on the future of the magazine to reflect together on the changes needed to consolidate and expand it. New developments will be introduced from the first issue of 2024 and I encourage you to share your ideas and suggestions with us.

This issue begins with an interview with leading scholar Sidney Tarrow, led by Angela Alonso and myself. We talk about the many facets and challenges of the relationship between social movements and political parties, such as, for example, how to think about them relationally, what the heuristic potential of the concept of movement parties is, how recent political events relate to new academic research agendas, or what some of the key challenges are for continuing to promote a global research agenda on the topic.

The first symposium, entitled “Liberalism, the Other, and Religion”, brings together various texts prepared for one of the presidential sessions of the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne. Cécile Laborde opens the debate with a creative discussion on the relationship between the state and religion and, more specifically, between secularism and liberal legitimacy. Meanwhile, prominent Arab intellectual Azmi Bishara analyses the variations of liberalism in academic debate and its political uses. In a more internal approach to the sociological debate, Frédéric Vandenberghe suggests rethinking sociology as a continuity of moral philosophy, which implies examining the political and moral presuppositions of the discipline, including its repertoire of ‘liberal communitarianism’. Finally, Anna Halafoff discusses some trends of the conservative peaks and religious nationalism in the context of a confrontation between cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism.

The second symposium, organised by Mikael Carleheden and Arthur Bueno, is entitled “Revitalising Social Theory”.

In addition to a brief introduction to the topic, it contains six articles that deal with how we can revitalize our way of theorising social phenomena. While Richard Swedberg and Anna Engstam make a call for creativity, Mikael Carleheden defends theoretical pluralism. The relationship between theory and empiricism/practice then appears in different ways in the articles signed by Nora Hämäläinen and Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen, and by Arthur Bueno. In the first case, the crisis of theory as ‘grand theory’ is discussed, and proposals for theorising lived practice, or fieldwork in philosophy, are put forward. In the second, the paradox of conceptions of practice in contemporary social theory is discussed. This set of articles concludes with a piece by Sujata Patel discussing the growth of anti-colonial thinking in social theory and its contributions to global sociology.

In the “Theoretical Perspectives” section, we open space for a topic of growing concern: What are the main contributions of women to classical social theory? What are some of the main contemporary challenges to thinking beyond the canon? By answering these questions, Luna Ribeiro Campos and Verônica Toste Daflon contribute not only to make the role of women visible in social theory, but also to generate a global dialogue on the substantive themes of their contributions.

Finally, the “Open Section” brings together five articles on different but relevant contemporary issues: the disputes between open access, predatory journals and subscription-based journals (Sujata Patel); the importance of contextualised health education in addressing health crises and the Covid-19 pandemic exit itself (Aditya Raj and Papia Raj); the role of sociology in addressing the mental health crisis (Sigita Doblyte); the failure of the human rights discourse to address the complexities of gender violence and the importance of recognising hidden everyday violence (Priyadarshini Bhattacharya); and, lastly, alternative critical readings of the Russian invasion of Ukraine beyond realism and liberalism (Ahmed M. Abozaid). ■

Breno Bringel, editor of *Global Dialogue*

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Renowned scholar **Sidney Tarrow** talks in this interview to Angela Alonso and Breno Bringel about the relationship between social movements and political parties, and how to understand them relationally.



This section on **“Liberalism, the Other and Religion”** presents the contributions of four prominent scholars, invited to the presidential sessions of the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology.



The **institutionalization and masculinization of sociology** is analyzed here, highlighting the importance and challenges of mapping women’s systematically invisibilized contributions to classical sociology.

Cover picture: Roof of the Federal Senate of Brazil. Credit: Carmen Gonzalez, 2023.



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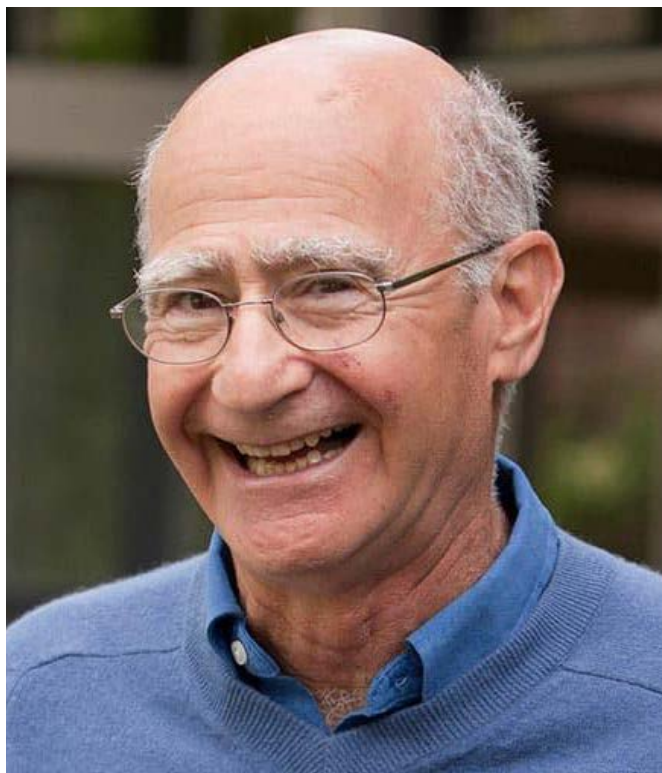
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**“Political cycles with high levels of public engagement
are likely to produce at the same time
anti-democratic and pro-democratic movements”**

Sidney Tarrow

> Rethinking the Relationship Between Movements and Parties

An Interview with Sidney Tarrow



Sidney Tarrow is Maxwell M. Upson Professor Emeritus in the Government Department at Cornell University, where he specializes in social movements, contentious politics, and legal mobilization. His work, in political sociology and comparative politics, is known worldwide. His extensive and outstanding trajectory begins in the 1960s. Since then, he has not ceased to contribute to the debate on social movements. His best-known book, *Power in Movement*, was republished in a new, updated edition last year, including new chapters and a new conclusion

considering contemporary events and recent scholarship. Tarrow has recently published the book *Movements and Parties: Critical Connections in American Political Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), seeking to answer questions such as: How do social movements intersect with the agendas of political parties? When integrated with parties, are they co-opted, or are they more radically transformative? While the book's focus is on American politics, it contributes to discussions of wider interest. It serves as the basis for this interview.

Professor Tarrow is interviewed here by **Angela Alonso** and **Breno Bringel**, both leading social movement scholars in Brazil with a broad international trajectory. Angela Alonso is Professor of Sociology at the University of Sao Paulo. Her research and publications focus on the relations between culture and political action and on social and intellectual movements. She is the author of the book *The Last Abolition: The Brazilian Anti-slavery Movement, 1868-1888*, Cambridge University Press, 2021). Breno Bringel is Professor of Political Sociology at the Institute of Social and Political Studies at the State University of Rio de Janeiro and Senior Fellow at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain. His recent research focuses on social movements and ecosocial transitions, and Latin American thought. His next book, with Miriam Lang and Mary Ann Manahan, is *Beyond Green Colonialism: Global Justice and the Geopolitics of Ecosocial Transitions* (Pluto Press, forthcoming).

Angela Alonso and Breno Bringel (AA & BB): Can you summarize the advantages and difficulties of analyzing movements and parties in relational terms?

Sidney Tarrow (ST): To answer this question properly, I need to go back to my PhD research in Southern Italy

in the long-ago 1960s. For young progressives like me, movements were outside the polity and were good, while parties were inside and were bad. But when I encountered the Communist Party's relations with the peasant movement – which had exploded in the region after World War II, this seemed wrong: there were movement-like features

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of the party in the South that were no longer present in the North, where a well-structured labor movement accompanied the party. The dilemma of the party in the rural South was that it tried to implement a strategy that was designed for an advanced industrial country. My first book, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy*, published in 1967, was an attempt to understand the contradiction between the party in the North and in the South, and tried to explain its failures in the latter region.

Two decades later, inspired by the work of Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam, I turned back to Italy with an effort to understand its cycle of contention in the 1960s and 1970s in a book called *Democracy and Disorder* (1989), which employed the then-new methodology of protest event analysis. Unlike sociologists like Alberoni, who still saw movements outside of politics, I found deep connections between what was happening in the streets and what was happening in the party system. These two experiences led me to participate in the foundation of what came to be called “the political process” approach to social movements.

And more recently, another twenty years later, terrified by the critical juncture of the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, I turned away from Europe to carry out research on the anti-Trump resistance in the book *The Resistance* (2018), edited with David S. Meyer, and then to the book we are discussing in this interview, *Movements and Parties*. In this book, I argued that the relationship between movements and parties has been central to American democratization – at times expanding it and at other times, like now, threatening it.

To summarize these experiences, I found that studying movements and parties in relation to each other gave me the advantage of looking outside the institutional world of political parties and helped me to understand why parties have often behaved in ways that were unfortunate for their electoral fortunes: they did so because they were trying to appeal to a more ideological movement base. The “difficulty” in your question was that I was trying to talk to two traditions that used different methodologies, and that saw the political system in different ways. This was more of a “trouble” in the United States than in Latin America, which might help to explain why my work has had a positive reaction in your continent.

AA & BB: *In recent years one way of understanding the relationship between parties and movements has been through the concept of movement parties. What is your position on this concept?*

ST: In Europe, the concept was defined narrowly by Kitschelt in his 2006 chapter, thinking mainly of the Green parties in Western Europe. Then, in 2017, it was defined more broadly by della Porta and her collaborators in their book on *Movement Parties Against Austerity*. Closer to my

own concept is Santiago Anria’s recent book on the Bolivian MAS.

The concept – if not the exact wording – is more familiar in Latin America than in the US, but as my book argues, movement parties have appeared throughout American history – starting with the link between the Abolitionists and the Republican Party in the 1850s, as Angela knows well from her own book on antislavery.

To define the term analytically, it is important to begin with each part separately. Parties, as I argue in my book, are primarily transactional in that they seek to gain or retain power. Movements are more ideological. This means that a movement party has both ideological and transactional reflexes. This conflict is most often resolved by movement parties turning to institutionalization in order to survive. When they do not, they often split – as the American Populist Party did in the 1890s, when one faction supported the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan, and the other insisted on its agrarian movement strategy.

Exceptions, such as the MAS in Bolivia, are rare and depend on forms of organization that can accommodate both their movement and their party reflexes. In the United States, the Democratic Party maintained this dual character in the 1930s as the labor-based faction took hold in the North and the segregationist faction remained in control in the South. But this eventually led to a split when the more progressive faction joined the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the segregationist faction moved to the Republican Party, where it remains today.

AA & BB: *Your book also emphasizes the importance of the dynamic interaction between movements and countermovements. This approach takes on a dramatic tone in the book when it comes to the Trump phenomenon and the movements that support and oppose him. How did the contemporary political conflicts in the United States influence your research agenda at the point where you decided to devote a significant part of the book to this topic? In other words, how do you see the relationship between current political events and the academic agenda?*

ST: Much of the work on countermovements focuses on right-wing movements, but I find this operationalization reductive. In the US, this has been common in research on the Tea Party and today’s MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement. Both have mostly been described as movements representing people who are experiencing the costs of social and racial change. A second descriptive dimension often added is between high and low levels of politicization. Italians like Alfio Mastropaolo emphasize the anti-political nature of many far-right voters, and supporters of Donald Trump often claim that what they like about him is that he is “not a politician.”



In my book, I use the term countermovement, as David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg do in their important 1996 article, to characterize how the rise and apparent success of one movement – whether left or right – triggers the reciprocal rise of an opposing movement. For example, in our collaborative work, *The Resistance*, David Meyer and I characterized the rise of the anti-Trump resistance as a countermovement.

What seems to be crucial about countermovements on both the left and the right is that they are, to a large extent, captured by the discourse and scope of action of the movement they have risen to oppose. For example, the anti-scientific discourse of the anti-vaccine movement in the United States has influenced a pro-vaccine movement that draws on the testimony of doctors, scientists, and public health experts to counter the anti-scientific ideology of its opponents.

But many of these movements have grown in the shadow of both pre-existing and broader ideological movements. For example, when social scientists have tracked the rate of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, they have found that it closely tracks the level of support for Trumpism in the electorate. States that gave Trump a large majority of their votes also have the highest rates of COVID hospitalizations and deaths. These current political events affect the academic agenda, and we need to provide answers.

AA & BB: Many social scientists had viewed democratic and authoritarian institutions as corresponding to different types of societies. Later, a wave of studies emphasized particular “political cultures” as responsible for either authoritarian or democratic political paths. Your book looks for political mechanisms that explain the interactions between movements and parties in culturally very different countries, such as Chile, Italy, South Korea, and the United States, without relying on values or beliefs. Does your book question the concept of political culture?

ST: This question takes me back to the beginning of my career, when Gabriel Almond and his collaborators developed the concept of “political culture.” They saw the United States as what they called a “civic culture,” defined as one in which agreement on the rules of the democratic game outweighed differences in policy. They defined Italy as a “subject political culture,” lacking this agreement on fundamentals. Their Italian colleague Giovanni Sartori went further, defining his country as a “centrifugal democracy,” as opposed to “centripetal” ones like Britain or the United States. The greatest threat to democracy, they argued, was the Communist Party, which I had studied in southern Italy. I tested these ideas by comparing the attitudes to democracy of so-called “centrifugal” Communist and centrist Christian Democratic voters, and found that the former had much greater confidence in democracy than the

latter. From then on, I became suspicious of definitions of democracy based on political culture and began to look for mechanisms that support or undermine democracy.

In *Movements and Parties*, among other things, I looked briefly at post-Pinochet Chile, which North American writers had considered a “strong” democracy based on its strong party system and the “democratic” belief systems of its voters. But Chile, as you know, was a political system with very little vertical accountability. Accountability was a key to ensuring democracy, and as we now know, the system was much weaker than it seemed to the advocates of the importance of political culture. So, both at the beginning and at the end of my academic career, I was doubtful about the importance of political culture.

AA & BB: Movements and countermovements are also related to processes of democratization and de-democratization, as Tilly argued. For a long time, we have seen these processes as waves related to different temporalities. But how do we deal with the ambiguity, complexity, and contradictory elements of contentious politics, that is, democratization in some aspects and de-democratization in others during the same historical period?

ST: Tilly was one of the few North American scholars of democracy who also studied social movements. It is striking that the wave of studies of the current crisis of democracy in the United States never refers to his book *Democracy* (2007). But this book inspired me to try to link my work on movements and parties to the dynamics of democratization and counter-democratization.

The historical cases I studied taught me that pro-democratic and anti-democratic movements often overlap at the same critical junctures. To put this in the terminology that Breno uses in his own work, I would say that ‘political cycles’ with high levels of public engagement, such as the current one in the United States, are likely to produce both anti-democratic and pro-democratic moments at the same time.

In writing *Movements and Parties*, I encountered several such intersections in US history. First, as the pro-women’s suffrage movement developed in the early twentieth century, an anti-women’s suffrage movement arose to oppose it. Second, the Great Depression of the 1930s produced both a movement to expand democracy – Roosevelt’s New Deal – and several anti-democratic movements, such as the anti-Semitic movement of radio priest Father Coughlin. And, of course, the civil rights movement of the 1960s led to a widespread anti-Black rights movement. These were not just movement/counter-movement interactions: both sides mobilized in the name of what they considered to be democracy.

Let me complete my answer by referring to the Trump/anti-Trump dynamic – which culminated in the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. On that occasion, progressives like me saw the mob that helped Trump launch an *autogolpe* (a term that entered English as a result!) as an expression of authoritarianism. And it is true that Trump and his enablers wanted to overturn the results of a legitimate and overwhelming electoral victory by Joe Biden. But if we listen carefully to the rhetoric of the insurgents who attacked the Capitol in support of Trump's false election claims, many of them justified their violent actions in the name of democracy and freedom.

AA & BB: *When you talk about contemporary society, you point out how increasing inequality affects collective action. But the intellectual tradition to which you belong has set aside the relationship between social class and political action as a central problem to be addressed. How do you see this issue now?*

ST: You are right that the political process approach tended to underestimate the importance of structural factors such as inequality, class, and even capitalism in contentious politics. This was in part because scholars like me were reacting against the tendency in the neo-Marxian tradition to reduce all forms of contestation to reactions to capitalism (note that this is still largely true of the world-systems approach of Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi and their disciples). The focus on political and institutional factors such as the opportunity structure led to an underestimation of the deeper influence of class and class conflict.

In recent years, with the work of della Porta and her collaborators on the Great Recession and the ensuing austerity policies in Europe, there has been a return to the study of class and inequality as driving forces of movement mobilization. There is also a revival of Marxism as a mas-

ter key to interpreting movement mobilization in the work of the Manchester School, including two Americans – Jeff Goodwin and John Krinsky. And in the fourth edition of *Power in Movement*, I have tried to redress the balance to some extent.

AA & BB: *In our conversation, we talked a lot about bridges between the United States, Latin America, and Europe. Fortunately, these dialogues have grown, and social movement studies have become more global. What do you think is still missing to have more (and better) global dialogues on contemporary social movements?*

ST: Too many things to mention in this short interview. Apart from the careful work of scholars like Hansperter Kriesi and Donatella della Porta, there is a lack of structured cross-regional comparisons; apart from the historical reconstructions of scholars like Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, there is a lack of cross-national comparisons of how populist movements have attacked and destroyed democracy. And apart from the pioneering work of a few younger scholars, there is a dearth of cross-regional research on the intersection between movements and the legal system.

But if I had to guess, I think the next step in comparing movements across continents would be to move beyond micro- and meso-analytical perspectives to the macro-structural effects of contentious politics. Donatella della Porta and her group in Florence have begun to take this step, growing out of their work on the anti-austerity movements in post-recession Europe, but apart from these scholars, few have attempted to return to the macro-structural perspectives that characterized earlier decades of social movement research without losing the valuable insights of today's political process approaches. I look forward to the next generation's progress in this direction. ■

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> Minimal Secularism: A Defense

by **Cécile Laborde**, University of Oxford, UK



| Illustration by Arbu, 2023.

Should the liberal state be secular? Does liberalism demand a strict separation between state and religion? The issue is not merely a theoretical one. Most Western states are secular states and accommodate various forms of religious establishment and arrangements. Yet the great majority of people in the world live under regimes that are either constitutional theocracies – where religion is formally enshrined in the state – or where religious affiliation is a pillar of collective political identity. In countries otherwise as different as Egypt, Israel, Turkey, India, Indonesia, and Poland, to mention just a few, politics and religion are interconnected in ways that belie any simplified model of secular separation. Many such states, for example, appeal to religious tradition when making the law, provide material and symbolic advantages to members of the majority religion, and enforce conservative norms in matters of sexuality and the family. Are they *ipso facto* in breach of liberal legitimacy? Is

there a minimal secularism – or separation between state and religion – that is required of liberal legitimacy?

In my book *Liberalism's Religion*, I argue that there is such a requirement. Secularism, however, is a more complex political ideal than is commonly realized. I disaggregate the different strands of secularism, and show how they relate to different dimensions of what we (in the West) have come to call religion. Instead of asking the question: Can secularism travel? – which invites answers measuring how well non-Western countries fare in relation to a presumed model of Western secularism – I start from liberal democratic ideals and assume that these are not ethnocentric: human rights, freedom, equality, and democracy are universal aspirations. I then ask how much, and what kind of, separation of state from religion is required to secure these ideals. In brief, I extract the minimal secular core of liberal democracy.

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> The four liberal–democratic ideals

In my perspective, it is a mistake to assume that liberal democracy requires a strict separation between state and religion along the lines of the French or US model. There is a broader range of permissible secularisms. Four liberal–democratic ideals underpin and justify minimal secularism: the *justifiable* state, the *inclusive* state, the *limited* state and the *democratic* state. Each picks out a different feature of religion: religion as *non-accessible*; religion as *vulnerable*; religion as *comprehensive*; and religion as *theocratic*. Let me analyze these in turn.

The *justifiable* state draws on the idea that state officials should only justify their actions by appeal to public, *accessible* reasons. In the theory of minimal secularism, only state officials are under the obligation to provide public reasons: secularism is a constraint on state action and justification, not a duty on the part of citizens. State officials should not appeal to the authority of sacred doctrines or to personal revelation to justify legal coercion of citizens. Accessibility defines what citizens need to share, in particular societies, in order for public deliberation about the reasons for laws to be possible at all. Importantly, not *only* religious ideas are inaccessible, nor *all* religious ideas are inaccessible: the accessibility condition does not rule out the public presence of religion.

The *inclusive* state draws on the idea that the state should not associate itself with one religious identity, lest it deny equal civic status to dissenters and non-members. Merely symbolic recognition is wrong if – but only if – it infringes on equal citizenship. The dimension of religion that this picks out is different from the previous one: here religion has nothing to do with personal revelation or inaccessible belief or doctrines. It is, rather, structurally similar to *other politically divisive or vulnerable identities*, such as race, and sometimes culture or ethnic identity. A liberal state must not be a Christian state or a Hindu state when such identities are – as they are in many states today – factors of political salience and vulnerability. But in societies where religion is not a socially divisive, vulnerable identity, there are fewer grounds for secular separation.

The *limited* state draws on the idea that a liberal state should not enforce comprehensive ethics of life on its citizens. The dimension of religion that this liberal value picks out is that of religion as *comprehensive personal ethics* covering education, sexuality, eating codes, work, dress, and so forth. Many liberal rights are the product of hard-won struggles, against the authority of traditional religious authorities, to construct and preserve a sphere of individual liberty. Consider the range of liberal laws in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as laws concerning marriage and divorce, women’s rights, and sexuality; and contemporary conflicts over abortion and gay rights in Africa and both South and North America. Yet not all religion is about comprehensive personal ethics. Religious traditions also provide

collective norms of coordination and cooperation (e.g., holidays) which represent less acute threats to individual liberty.

Finally, a *democratic* state is necessary as long as citizens profoundly disagree about the boundary between personal and collective ethics, the public and the private, the right and the good. John Locke argued that the state should deal with ‘civil’ interests while leaving ‘spiritual’ matters of the salvation of the soul to individuals in their private lives. But who is to decide what pertains to the civil, and what pertains to the spiritual? In areas such as church autonomy and anti-discrimination laws, the nature of personhood, the family, marriage, bioethics and education, general liberal principles do not generate uniquely determinate and conclusive solutions. In such conflictive cases, the democratic state – as opposed to competing authorities such as churches – has the final sovereign authority. It decides where the boundary lies between the this-worldly and the other-worldly, between the religious and the secular. This, I argue, is what is radical about liberalism’s secularism: it is democratic in that it locates its legitimacy in the will of the people, not in extra-political, divinely ordained or philosophically grounded authority.

> Democratic sovereignty

Therefore the most radical challenge posed by liberalism to religion is not that liberalism maintains a wall of separation between state and religion but rather that it assumes democratic sovereignty. Within the bounds of basic liberal legitimacy and human rights, deep reasonable disagreements are to be solved democratically. Of course, democracy is not to be equated with majoritarian tyranny, and must provide for minority representation, separation of powers, and judicial review. This democratic conception of liberal legitimacy allows for more variation in permissible state–religion arrangements than both secular liberals and religiously minded liberals have assumed.

Just as secularized majorities can impose their own conception of the boundary between state and religion, so can religious majorities, *provided they honor the other three liberal principles of accessible justification, civic inclusiveness and individual liberty*. In secularized societies, state law will naturally reflect and promote the non-religious ethics of the majority; for example, via the dismantling of structures of traditional family and marriage and the expanding reach of norms concerning human rights and non-discrimination. Likewise, in societies where religious citizens are a majority, these citizens can shape the public sphere of their societies, but only within the constraints of what I have called minimal liberal secularism. Beyond that, minimal secularism has no ambition to provide final substantive answers to key questions of political, public, private and sexual morality. ■

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> On Comprehensive Liberalism, Political Liberalism, and Ideology

by **Azmi Bishara**, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Qatar



Oil and acrylic on canvas. Credit: Bela Righi ([instagram.com/belafrighi](https://www.instagram.com/belafrighi)), 2020.

The heated debate (in academic circles at least) over the difference between comprehensive liberalism and political liberalism eludes applied liberal thought, in whatever corner of the globe such thinking takes place. The Rawlsian categorization of liberalism as political or comprehensive is superfluous. Rawls' political liberalism is built on liberal axioms which constitute most of the values of

“comprehensive” liberalism, except that it takes them not as core values but as epistemological givens. On the other hand, when comprehensive liberalism finds itself in power, it perforce becomes political liberalism. The latter is, in practice, akin to a political ideology and, in this sense, it is comprehensive. The political version of any doctrine has to become more comprehensive than the non-political version.

> A first thought

It is claimed that political liberalism manages a pluralist state system that protects the right of citizens to live by, adhere to, and detach themselves from comprehensive doctrines concerning the good life, given that these doctrines can be presented and defended with reasonable arguments. As political liberalism does not impose a liberal doctrine, it presumes that the overwhelming majority agrees on the constitutional principles from which it proceeds in practice.

Liberals in power are politically liberal. Outside of government, they have the right to practice their liberal beliefs as they understand them. But they cannot run the state according to a comprehensive doctrinal liberalism with a stance on what constitutes “the good life,” because they would need the institutions of the state to impose it.

John Rawls’ claim that comprehensive liberalism is more inclined to be imposed through the instruments of state coercion cannot be validated either theoretically or empirically. People who hold comprehensive liberal beliefs are (despite my reservations about this designation) the most likely to oppose the use of state coercion to impose their beliefs. Their commitment to civil liberties and their firm convictions concerning restricting the powers of the state prevent this. These liberals are the most averse to government intrusion into society, the most inclined to limit state interventions that could infringe upon individual liberties, and the most eager to empower people to avail themselves of their freedoms. It is this logic that led these liberals not only to accept but to demand social welfare policies.

Since political liberalism is concerned with running the state and has little meaning unless it is performing or actively striving to perform this task, it needs constitutional safeguards from the volatility of majority rule in democratic systems. Take, for example, the recent populist tide sweeping across democratic societies where the illiberal right is taking advantage of democratic rules and principles to push through legislation that contradicts political liberalism. Or take the spread of a general mood that is hostile to the existence of constitutional guarantees for rights and liberties which guide the work of unelected bodies. Crises stemming from the conflict between liberalism versus democracy, i.e., between governance according to liberal values and governance according to the will of the majority, have recurred with near regularity since these two aspects of liberal democracies converged in the twentieth century. Ultimately, such crises are useful in that they enable the system to readjust in their wake, but only on the condition that state institutions protect the values of political liberalism.

One reading of conditions in liberal democratic countries could lead to the antithetical conclusion that it is politi-

cal liberalism that needs to be enforced by the state (at least in times of outbreaks of the above mentioned crises), while comprehensive liberalism could be allowed to turn into a subculture and even a lifestyle based on certain values that the middle classes choose to live by, to defend or not, or to observe with varying degrees of authenticity or hypocrisy. Such a trend might find itself insulated from sociopolitical processes unfolding among broader segments of society. For instance, when attempting to dictate the mores of political correctness upon society at large, so-called comprehensive liberals are shocked by the populist tide and the growing influence of groups who resent such attempts as patronizing.

Comprehensive liberalism, which defends a particular concept of “the good life,” in my opinion is liberalism outside of government. This is because attempts to impose its ideology – beyond protecting and enabling access to freedoms and personal autonomy – will prove self-defeating and risk lapsing into illiberalism.

Political liberalism is no more or less than liberalism in power; a liberalism that has been put to the test of governing. Philosophical discussions abound (within moral and political philosophy and jurisprudence) about the dilemmas different liberal currents face when in government regarding the degree of state intervention in the economy, the meaning of equality, whether there is such a thing as collective rights or whether only individual rights are valid. Advocates of collective rights are themselves split between those who see these rights as derived from the individual’s right to voluntary association and those who accept that group rights can be attributed to a community. The latter, in turn, are divided concerning the extent to which the rights of the group take precedence over the rights of the individual and over the protection of individual freedoms within groups.

Discussions contributing to such debates have been published in hundreds of books and thousands of articles. I know of no more “comprehensive” range of issues, and this is the challenge that faces liberalism. Do political liberal approaches differ in their ethical judgements on these issues? They do. From this perspective, political liberalism is more comprehensive than comprehensive liberalism as it deals with different aspects of the life of individual societies and the state, in addition to having to contend with the ambiguities of comprehensive liberalism regarding the relationship between values and practices.

> A second thought

The foregoing conclusion is consistent with other conclusions that may be reached from the perspective of life under authoritarian regimes, where liberalism outside the power structures may still be classed as political liberalism. Such a classification is possible because it occasionally re-



veals itself within the regime through proposals for reform programs aimed at broadening the scope of freedom of expression and civil liberties or via the demands of political opposition forces.

At the social level in these states, doctrinal liberal thought and lifestyles – as informed by principles of the moral autonomy of the individual, civil rights, and personal liberties (of both men and women) – may clash with authoritarian practices. But they might simultaneously clash with other opposition doctrinal movements seeking to change the system of governance and use the state to impose their creed.

Since the collapse of the communist regime in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, most of the world's ruling authoritarian regimes are no longer totalitarian: they do not impose an all-embracing doctrine upon society and institutions. Today, the majority of such regimes justify their existence with arguments based on the principle of sovereignty, national interests, matters of security and stability, people's alleged cultural incompatibility with democracy, and, increasingly, what they term the failure of liberalism in the West. All authoritarian regimes require a great degree of physical and psychological violence to secure their stability. Usually, there are some opposition circles that espouse comprehensive illiberal doctrines. They may be marginal, but the authorities use them to discourage change.

An interesting development has occurred in this context. Rather than coming in comprehensive versus political forms, liberalism has split into a version that espouses political and civil liberties and anti-despotic principles, and another solely focused on the individual, in the sense of personal freedoms and lifestyle choices (again, I disregard here the neoliberals who confine liberalism to the economy, as I do not consider them liberals to begin with). Paradoxically, this latter liberalism of personal liberties and lifestyles might find itself more comfortable with some existing authoritarian regimes since, even though those regimes suppress political activism and civil liberties, they are not greatly concerned with the individual's personal freedoms.

When doctrinal liberals in authoritarian states think politically, they may arrive at the conviction that they should postpone the struggle for personal freedoms at the political level in favor of proposing a liberal program for a system of governance that promises political plurality open to adherents of diverse comprehensive doctrines and safeguards for the protection of civil rights and the individual's

moral autonomy. But this can prove to be a form of self-deception. Overthrowing the existing regime without waging a struggle for the core values of liberalism – at least at the level of political elites – could open up a route to power for forces that are only committed to political pluralism for electoral purposes, rather than to protecting liberties or individual moral autonomy.

The presence of political elites committed to political liberal principles, regardless of their doctrinal disagreements, is essential in the aftermath of the overthrow of a despotic regime. At such a moment, the dominant popular culture, after decades of living under authoritarian rule, is unlikely to commit itself easily to something akin to a liberal constitutional or overlapping consensus. Nor will civil and political liberties have taken root in public culture.

It is often said that liberalism is a normative theory and therefore a branch of ethics. At the level of university courses and academic conferences, this may be true. But in social and political conflict, liberalism becomes an ideology. It is in this context that the quality of being comprehensive takes on meaning. Philosophical liberalism cannot be comprehensive in this sense; it is always abstract, even when it is complex enough to have developed a complete philosophical system. Conversely, ideology can be comprehensive, though not necessarily in the sense of a totalitarian or all-encompassing dogma. Rather, it is comprehensive in its embeddedness in society and in relating to various aspects of life, culture (language, religion, mores, etc.), and interests. It thus becomes able to address the people by tying liberties to their culture, interests, and sense of patriotism; and to present its liberal political program for the liberation of the individual and society. When it departs the realm of philosophy to engage in the down-to-earth realities of political and social conflict, liberalism finds that it must be comprehensive because it is political. Accordingly, liberals call, for instance, for individual and society's liberation from tyranny without alienating the people by upsetting the foundations of the dominant religious culture. They recognize that they must offer solutions to the poor, who will not understand a notion of political liberty that fails to address their economic plight. Meanwhile, a "liberal" for whom a progressive personal lifestyle is the core issue can coexist with a secular authoritarian regime. Such a liberal can agree with others whose "liberalism" is restricted to the market economy in order to turn a blind eye to daily human rights abuses or to convince the ruling authoritarian regime to accept World Bank and International Monetary Fund prescriptions in exchange for further loans. ■

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> Sociology as the Continuation of Moral Philosophy by Other Means

by **Frédéric Vandenberghe**, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and member of ISA Research Committee on Sociological Theory (RC16)

Like astronomy, biology, and Egyptology, sociology is a scientific discipline. Disciplines are the primary units of internal differentiation in the sciences. However, this organization of science into disciplines is a modern invention. Up till 1750, scientists (professional and amateurs alike) were generalists and their knowledge was encyclopedic. Through internal differentiation of the sciences, scientific disciplines emerged in the nineteenth century as new ways of ordering knowledge for the purposes of teaching and learning.

For a long time, the sciences remained within the bosom of philosophy. The scientific revolution of the sixteenth century arose out of a conjunction of mathematic formalization and experiments in physics. It was followed by a second scientific revolution in the eighteenth century when these disciplines split off from philosophy. Natural philosophy gave way to physics, chemistry and biology. Similarly, moral philosophy was replaced by a federation of disciplines (history, economics, sociology, political science, and anthropology) that make up the social sciences. The humanities, for their part, are defined negatively and encompass disciplines that are excluded from the natural and the social sciences.

It is within this context of differentiated sciences that sociology emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, in the wake of the Humboldtian university revolution in Bismarck's Germany and the establishment of the *grandes écoles* in Napoleon's France. At the intersection of the German *Geisteswissenschaften*, the British moral sciences (which included political economy), and French political thought, sociology arose as an empirical offshoot of the philosophy of history. While the new disciplines are institutionalized as research sciences based on experience and are thus *Wirklichkeitswissenschaften*, they also continue the tradition of moral philosophy (in its broad sense) by their own means.

> Sociology and moral philosophy

Moral philosophy *sensu lato* includes not only moral, practical, and political philosophy, but also the philosophy of history. Up till today, sociology remains within the matrix of "post-Hegelian neo-Kantianism," to borrow an apt but counterintuitive denomination from Paul Ricoeur. It is neo-Kantian because it formulates and formalizes its research with reference to a series of systematically integrated concepts that define what is social and how it is to be studied; and it is post-Hegelian because it removes the dialectics of the absolute and restrains itself to an analysis of the historical development of the objective spirit in social institutions.

Originally, sociology was not supposed to be a social scientific discipline among other disciplines. It was, for sure, a specialized discipline that studied social facts; however, it was a *super-discipline* that federated neighboring disciplines into a general sociology – today, we would say into a social theory. Both the French and the German traditions conceived of sociology as a super-discipline that orchestrated the production of social scientific knowledge and coordinated research among the disciplines of the social sciences into a morally righteous, politically engaged, empirical philosophy of history without teleology or metaphysical guarantees.

> Reestablishing the social sciences

If I return to the prehistory of sociology, it is because I think that today we need to recompose the social sciences as a whole. The discipline is increasingly turning inwards, away from philosophy and the humanities, defining itself by its methods and its data, with the result that it is becoming inapt for understanding the transformation of societies worldwide and as a whole. Overwhelmed by the speed of societal change that the digitalization of the

“A sociology of sociology that investigates the moral and political presuppositions of sociology will reveal that its critiques of social injustices and social pathologies adhere to the repertoire of ‘liberal communitarianism’”

world has brought about, shaken by the accumulation of multifarious crises it had not seen coming, stirred by the newest social movements to which it pays lip service but whose demands it cannot theoretically accommodate, sociology is retracting its theoretical ambitions and cutting the lifeline to philosophy.

The celebration of sociological theories of the middle range to the detriment of social theory, particularly pronounced in the United States and France, is not helpful in that regard. Social theory has moved out of sociology; it is now practiced in Critical Theory (in the ecumenical sense, not the municipal sense of the Frankfurt School) and in the Studies (by which I refer to a conglomerate of *inter-disciplines* that operationalize post-structuralism). In *For a New Classical Sociology*, a book I have written together with Alain Caillé, we propose a new alliance between social theory, moral and political philosophy, and the Studies. In this vision, social theory becomes the space where philosophy, the social sciences, and the new humanities can be redefined and the social sciences can continue the project of moral philosophy by its own means.

Even if one no longer subscribes to the Eurocentrism that usually comes as a package with evolutionist accounts of societal development, it is difficult to completely avoid the philosophy of history and its presupposition that there is something like a history connecting society and people across time and space. The shift from a post-Hegelian philosophy of history to a neo-Kantian philosophy of the

historical sciences points in the right direction. For a science like sociology that is so intimately tied to the advent of modernity and for which modernity is both a presupposition and an object, the imprint of the philosophy of history remains implicit: it never completely disappears.

If it is difficult to escape completely from the philosophy of history when one studies modern societies, it is even more difficult to reject the normative principles of modernity altogether. Being itself a product of modernity, sociology endorses the normative principles of subjectivity and liberty on which modern societies are based. And these principles continue to structure the system of sciences. If sociology studies the social preconditions of moral individualism, it is not to negate the validity of normative principles, but to understand their institutionalization. When these principles are negated in practice, their validity is upheld in critiques of alienation and discrimination.

A sociology of sociology that investigates the moral and political presuppositions of sociology will reveal that its critiques of social injustices (discrimination) and social pathologies (alienation) basically adhere to the repertoire of “liberal communitarianism.” Sometimes it veers more towards the communitarian pole of identity and authenticity; at other times towards the liberal pole of autonomy and justice. When the discipline is attacked by authoritarian or “austeritarian” regimes, it is important to reconfirm its first principles – lest the discipline itself disappear with the world it was supposed to analyze and defend. ■

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> Religious Nationalism and Anti-Cosmopolitan Terror

by **Anna Halafoff**, Deakin University, Australia



| Illustration by Arbu, 2023.

Religious nationalism is on the rise globally, as is its capacity to inflict violence – both direct and structural – on “others”. These others are commonly understood to be human cultural, religious, gender, and sexuality minorities, and also non-human lifeforms. While it is often argued that religion is misused by perpetrators of harms, scholarship on the “ambivalence of the sacred” argues that most religions have certain qualities that pre-dispose them to both violence and peacebuilding.

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> Devastating results of man's dominion and increased conservative trends

Religious exceptionalism and exclusivism, the sense of having the one and only right way, access to the truth, and superiority over others, lead to inevitable conflicts between religious and non-religious groups, as well as with state and other actors. Doctrines of “holy war”, common to many religious traditions, justify violence when one’s religion is perceived as being threatened. Numerous religious texts allocate a lower status to women, and LGBTI+ people. The belief that religion is over and above the law has also resulted in devastating harms to children, women, and gender and sexuality diverse minorities. Most prominent religious figures are men, and religious ideologies frequently assert man’s dominion over all other forms of life.

Despite predictions of secularization in modernity – the decline of the power and influence of religion over states and societies – there has instead been a disturbing trend towards a strengthening of conservative religious, political, and media alliances in many parts of the world in recent decades, with devastating results.

> Cosmopolitanism and the backlash of anti-cosmopolitan terror

A useful framework to understand this phenomenon is the clash, not of civilizations, but between cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan actors, building on the work of sociologist Ulrich Beck. The mid-late twentieth-century was a cosmopolitan moment, where there was a growing global appreciation for the need to respect both human and environmental rights and diversity. This was acknowledged in global Declarations and Covenants, and local laws and policies, that protected minorities and multiple species from harms. However, these developments were not universally accepted, given they undermined the power and privileges of conservative, including religious, groups and institutions. This resulted in an anti-cosmopolitan backlash, and the rise of extremist religious movements and nationalisms, denouncing minority rights, liberalism, and democracy, and calling for a return to heteronormative “family values”.

For example, I first used the phrase ‘anti-cosmopolitan terror’ in 2014, to describe Anders Breivik’s horrendous 2011 attack in Norway. His anti-migration and anti-feminist Manifesto cited anti-Muslim statements made by Australian conservative political and religious leaders, at the height of the

Australian values debate. Brenton Tarrant’s horrific 2019 Mosque shooting in Christchurch, and his Manifesto, were also inspired by Breivik and fueled by anti-migration views and White supremacism, formed in Australia and Europe.

In India, Narendra Modi’s, authoritarian, Hindu nationalism has also resulted in rising anti-Muslim prejudices and violent clashes between those supporting Hindutva and those opposing it. Vladimir Putin has, most ominously, long positioned himself as the leader of the conservative world, through unparalleled online propaganda. Putin’s regime is founded on Russian and Russian Orthodox exceptionalism, and a dangerous vision to restore Russia to its former glory. Putin and Patriarch Kirill are engaged in a brutal holy war in Ukraine and against the West, spreading hate and disinformation to destabilize democracies, while at the same time lending support to other anti-cosmopolitan leaders and far-right movements globally. Putin’s terror is being strongly resisted by Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Ukrainian people, and their allies, and by anti-Putin and anti-war activists in Russia, such as Alexei Navalny and his supporters.

> Our current duty as sociologists (of religion)

It is crucial to better understand the role of conservative religious, political and media actors in propagating this anti-cosmopolitan terror and violence globally, and critical that we, as sociologists alongside more progressive religious and non-religious peacebuilders, play a role in strongly condemning and countering it. Sociologists conduct research on social relationships and institutions, including issues pertaining to social equality and inequality. A plethora of sociological research internationally over many decades has documented the harms caused by racism and discrimination against minorities, and the importance of inclusion and belonging to individual and societal peace and wellbeing.

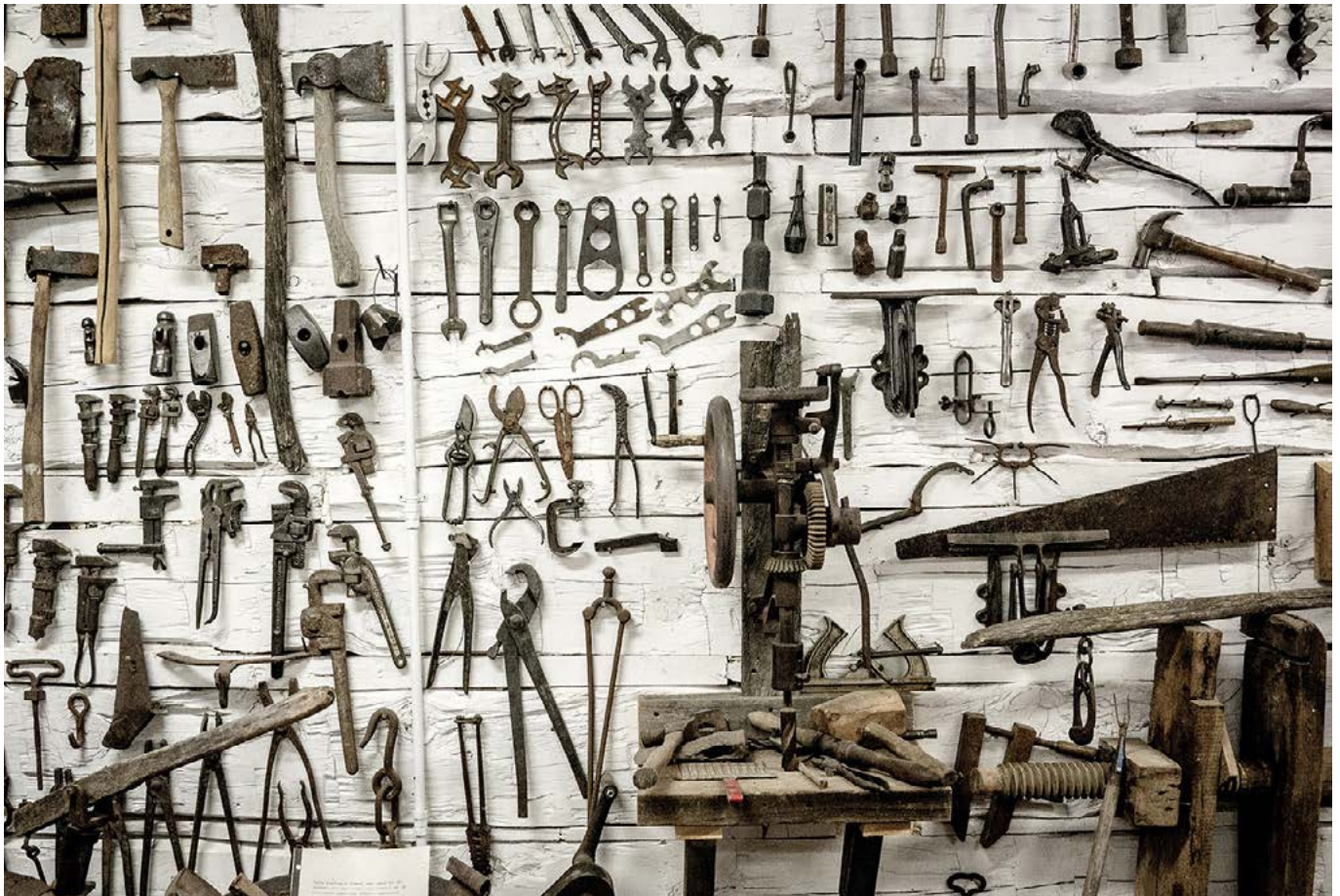
Sociologists of religion have focused significant attention on documenting the negative effects of discrimination against religious minorities, yet have been comparably less engaged in exposing and preventing religious and spiritual harms.

Given a broad acknowledgement that calls for religious freedom have shifted in recent years from a shield against hate, to a sword – namely, a justification for holding and expressing discriminatory views – it is vital that sociologists also be prepared to move to interrogating all forms of hate and harms related to religion. ■

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> The Current State of Social Theory

by **Mikael Carleheden**, University of Copenhagen, Denmark and **Arthur Bueno**, University of Passau and Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany



Credit: Lachlan Donald, Unsplash.

“**B**efore theory comes theorizing”. It may seem self-evident to distinguish between theory and theorizing, that is, between a theoretical product and the process that has led up to it. In fact, however, this distinction opens up a whole new field of inquiry. What are we doing when we theorize, and how should we do it? Are special skills involved? Is there an art, a craft, or a method of theorizing? And if so, how could it be conceptualized, developed, and taught? When we start asking such questions, it may strike us how little attention has been given to them in the history of sociology.

The explicit motivation for raising such questions was initially the need to shift our concern from theory to theorizing in order to produce [“better and bolder theory”](#). However,

there is also a somewhat different reason, namely the declining status of social theory in contemporary sociology. Is [“social theory as a vocation”](#) still possible? As it seems, not only is the [“long summer of theory”](#) over, but there is an ongoing [“erosion in the willingness”](#) to develop social theories in international sociology.

Rather than simply bemoaning this state of affairs, it is worth reflecting on how it came about. The current situation is all the more remarkable when one considers the central role that major social theorists played in the discipline throughout the twentieth century. However, already in the last quarter of that century tendencies emerged which have only intensified since then, such as the fragmentation of sociology into subdisciplines and the growing focus on

empirical research, with a prominent role played by quantitative studies. To be sure, this period was also marked by the emergence of a new generation of social theorists. Yet many members of that generation have expressed considerable reservations about the relevance of grand theorizing – the exemplary case in this regard being Bruno Latour, a theorist against theory.

There were certainly good reasons for such a shift. The end of the long summer of theory was accompanied by a pluralization of debates within the discipline, including greater attention being paid to the particularities of each field and to the contribution of lay actors in the construction of sociological knowledge. Moreover, the consideration of the different contexts of knowledge production resulted in salutary questioning of disciplinary canons and the valorization of peripheral perspectives (Bueno et al. 2022).

And yet, these tendencies did not only take the form of intellectual debates, they also brought about changes in the institutional structure of the discipline itself. With the decline of grand theory, the positions available for specialized research on theoretical questions have steadily diminished. The conditions for the practice of social theory as a profession – that is to say, as part of ‘normal science’ – have been gradually eroded. Paradoxically, the critique of grand theory might reinforce the very tendencies that were

deemed problematic. Theory may become the exclusive activity of great authors, endowed with exceptional institutional conditions. The risk, moreover, is of creating an ever-widening gap between empirical research and social theory. In such circumstances, opening up a debate on ways of theorizing can be understood as the beginning of a *Positivismusstreit 2.0* (positivist dispute 2.0).

For these and other reasons, we think it is crucial to discuss the current state of social theory. The aim is definitely not to return to some glorious past (which wasn't actually glorious in many respects), but to gain more clarity about the different ways and methods of theorizing and their social and political implications. What role should social theory play in sociology? Are ways of theorizing linked to different traditions within sociology and different knowledge interests? Are certain – more or less tacit – conceptions of theorizing dying and are others rising from the ashes of previous dominating notions?

As the reader will see, the contributions to this special section do not offer unified answers to such questions. Endowed with a pluralistic spirit, they explore the current possibilities of revitalizing social theory without proposing a mere return to previous modes of theorizing, but also without neglecting the challenges of the present. ■

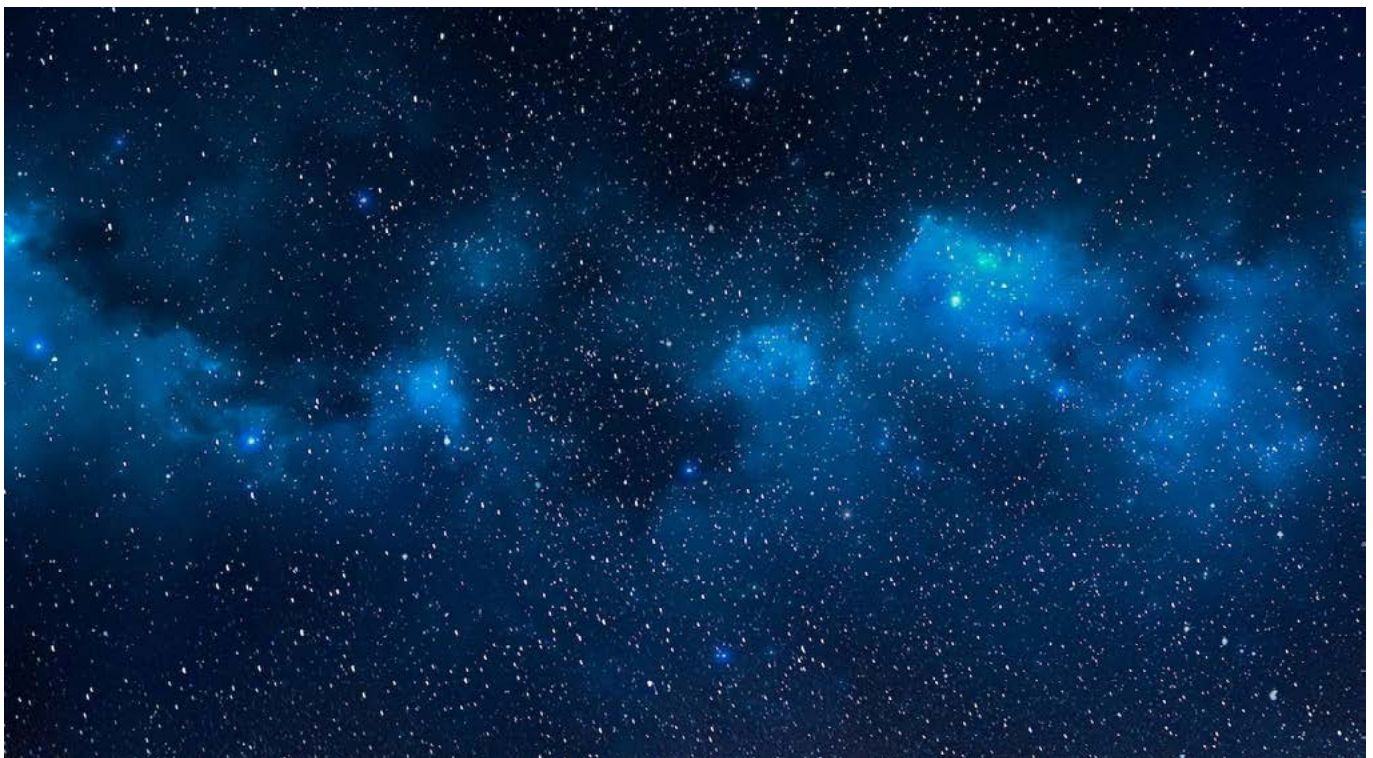
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> Inviting Creativity When You Theorize

by **Richard Swedberg**, Cornell University, USA



| Credit: Alex Lanting, Unsplash.

It is natural to want your theorizing to be more creative, but is it possible to affect it in this direction? And if so, how do you go about it? Most would agree that it is actually impossible to give a prescription for how to be creative. What you can do, however, it will be argued in this note, is to *invite creativity*. That is, you can put yourself in a position where you may succeed in creating something new and valuable.

A natural way for a sociologist to find out how to invite creativity would be to go to sociological studies of creativity and see which factors they have concluded are important when it comes to intellectual discovery and creativity.

This, however, is not as easy as it sounds, because the factors that are singled out as important in a sociological analysis are often not the ones that the individual can use for his or her own benefit. *Knowing-how*, as Gilbert Ryle has made clear, differs from *knowing-that*.

There may, however, exist a way of looking at studies of creativity and transform some of their knowing-that into knowing-how. I will call this process *translation*; and the way I will proceed in what follows is to first present the results of a few well-known sociological studies of creativity and then try to translate their knowing-that into knowing-how.

• **Study # 1:** Robert Merton is known for arguing that creativity can sometimes come about by accident or thanks to serendipity, to use a term he has popularized. Alexander Fleming, for example, famously discovered penicillin in an accidental manner. Something had fallen into a petri dish and he noticed that it had killed off the bacteria. In *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity*, Merton and Elinor Barber also argue that there exist certain environments where serendipity is more likely to occur than others, so-called serendipitous microenvironments. The Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto (which Merton helped to create) is one of these; Harvard's Society of Fellows is another.

• **Study # 2:** Networks are a popular object of study in modern sociology; and as an example of a technical network analysis of creativity, one can mention Ronald Burt's "Structural Holes and Good Ideas." The basic argument here is that a person who can draw on two networks, a so-called broker, is in a good position for creativity to occur. You may, for example, be a sociologist, but also be in contact with people in another science, say, cognitive science or biology.

• **Study # 3:** A more historical attempt at unlocking the secrets of creativity with the help of network analysis can be found in Randall Collins' giant history of philosophy, *The Sociology of Philosophies*. Its argument is that creativity is caused by an interaction of forces on three levels: that of society; that of an organization; and that of a network. In the case of the German Enlightenment, for example, the societal force was the French Revolution; the key organization was the University of Berlin; and the network of Immanuel Kant and others had a special structure, consisting of colleagues, students and more. A creative network typically has several openings at first, while later it is hard to find an unoccupied place.

• **Study # 4:** While a network has diffuse boundaries, a team does not; its role in modern science is also different. One important study of the relationship between the number of scientists in a team and their creativity was published in *Nature* in 2019 by computational social scientist James A. Evans and his colleagues. What they found was that very small teams, as well as single individu-

als, are better at disruptive discoveries than large teams. By disruptive discoveries they mean "powerful and highly improbable theories" (Chomsky). Large teams, however, excel at normal science and the kind of minor discoveries that come with pursuing an existing research program.

> How to invite creativity

At the beginning of this note I pointed out that while one cannot give a prescription for creativity, it is possible to *invite* creativity. I also claimed that most studies of creativity focus on knowing-that, while what is needed is knowing-how. One way to solve this problem, I suggested, is through a process I called translation; and the time has now come to show how this works.

What you first need to do is to locate whatever it is that seems to invite creativity. In the studies just mentioned, these are: for Merton, the serendipitous microenvironment; for Burt and Collins, a certain type of network; and for Evans et al., the size of the scientific team.

The second step is to figure out if and how you can make use of these factors for your own purposes. When you do this for the studies above, the result is as follows. You can, for example, try to become part of some serendipitous microenvironment, join a creative network, or engage with some team that looks promising. The hope is that by doing this, your conscious and unconscious mind will start working in some creative fashion.

But it is also possible to invite creativity by going at it alone, say by straddling two networks along the lines of Burt's broker. There are many ways to do this, such as exploring what people think in some group or discipline other than your own and hope that some sparks will be generated when these ideas are brought into contact with your own ideas.

It is true that you can never be sure that if you invite creativity the result will be successful. Still, when it comes to theorizing, you have to aim for what is new and creative. The motto for this could be: *if you don't try, you will never fly.* ■

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> Methods of Theorizing: A Call for Pluralism

by **Mikael Carleheden**, University of Copenhagen, Denmark



A sociologist is a scientist sitting on a stool with three legs: qualitative research, quantitative research, and social theory. If one of these legs is in bad shape, the stool might break, and the sociologist will fall down. Credit: Charles Deluvio, Unsplash.

How should we understand the relation between theoretical and empirical work? Sociologists have most often talked about it as highly problematic. Claims like “a very deep hiatus” (Parsons), “divorcement” (Blumer), and “an extremely damaging division” (Joas and Knöbl) are common. Attempts to understand the relation have a history as old as the discipline of sociology itself. The proposals have shifted with the dominant methodological convictions. In view of this history, a pluralistic approach seems reasonable. So, one possible point of departure is the following: A sociologist is a scientist who sits on a stool with three legs: qualitative research, quantitative research, and social theory. If one of these legs is in bad shape, the stool might break, and the sociologist would fall over.

These “legs” signify the internal differentiation of sociology into three main subfields, while the stool as a whole signifies their interdependency. Different skills and knowledge are developed in the three subfields, which are of mutual benefit. The need to integrate these skills and knowledge, without losing the gains from differentiation and specialization, is currently discussed under the heading “mixed method.” However, the focus of such work is primarily the relation between quantitative and qualitative research. So what about the third leg? Should we simply add it to the mixed methods approach in order to analyze a tripartite relation instead of a twofold one? In this article, I will suggest another way forward.

> We are all theorizing

My suggestion is based on the observation that today most sociologists claim to be theorizing, in one sense or the other. Theorizing seems to be directly included in the first two subfields, while social theory is only indirectly related to empirical research. Furthermore, theorizing in the first two subfields seems not – at least not primarily – to be about applying and testing social theories in the sense

of the third subfield. Rather, the three subfields seem typically to contain *different* theorizing practices. If this is true, any attempt to answer the question I opened this article with, must take multiple relations between theoretical and empirical work into account. Also, theorizing should be understood as differentiated and in need of integration, without which the gains of differentiation are lost.

> **The missing methods of theorizing**

This suggestion implies that we should not talk only about empirical methods, but also about theoretical methods. In an initial step, we might then make a distinction between variable analysis, interpretative analysis, and social theory. However, it is often unclear what sociologists mean when they claim that they theorize and how that theorizing is conducted. Compared to empirical methods, sociologists surprisingly seldom seem to reflect on the craft or art of theorizing – not even in the subfield of social theory. We seldom or never see textbooks, courses, journals, methods sections, or research networks about theoretical methods. Thus, theoretical practices are characterized by “knowing how” rather than “knowing that” (Ryle). So, in order to prevent both methodological and theoretical imperialism and to develop the multiple practices of theorizing, we need to clarify these practices, i.e., to formulate methods of theorizing.

Based on a reconstruction and development of Gabriel Abend’s distinction between seven meanings of theory, in a forthcoming article¹ I suggested seven methods of theorizing in relation to the three subfields of sociology, as laid out in what follows.

- *Quantitative research (Variable analysis):*
 T¹ Empirical generalization of facts and of correlations between variables
 T² Construction of hypotheses about causal relations between variables at a middle-range level
- *Qualitative research (Interpretative analysis):*
 T³ Interpretation: Context-dependent (close and thick) conceptualization of meaning constructions
- *Social theory:*
 T⁴ Social theoretical exegetics
 T⁵ Social ontology: Conceptualization of the fundamental features of social relations
 T⁶ Social criticism: Construction, reconstruction or deconstruction of social norms and practices
 T⁷ Theory of society: Conceptualization of the constituting structural principles of a society and their transformation over time (macro level)

> **Observation versus the armchair approach**

This differentiation of ways of theorizing is based on two parameters: the kind of relation between theorizing and ob-

servation (e.g., surveys, interviews, field studies, and experiments), on the one hand, and the subject matter of theorizing, on the other. The fact that theorizing in the first three cases is directly involved in empirical research does not in any immediate way release them from the problem of linking empirical and theoretical work. All methods of theorizing must take into account that theory is “underdetermined by evidence.” What divides the first three methods from the latter four is rather that the problems under investigation in social theorizing cannot be resolved by empirical research. These problems primarily demand “armchair sociology.”

However, it should be emphasized that the methods in the list above are to be understood as pure types. Theoretical work most often consists of some combination of the types. The hypothetico-deductive method can, for instance, be understood as a combination of T¹ and T². Social theorizing in the sense of T⁵, T⁶ or T⁷ most often takes its point of departure from T⁴. Variable analysis needs interpretative analysis when operationalizing, and interpretative analysis needs variable analysis to assess the general relevance of its results. Furthermore, both kinds of analysis need T⁷ to identify the influence of structural principles on their objects of study, T⁵ to reflect on their ontological points of departure, and T⁶ to consider the value-ladenness of facts. Conversely, social theorizing needs the results of empirical research to avoid the emptiness of pure social theory. However, the differentiation of sociology into subfields means that only some methods of theorizing are in play in any particular research project. Most often, only one or two of them are pursued in a systematic way, while the others are subordinated, have ad hoc status, and are tacitly replaced by common sense theorizing. Specialization is important for skillful theorizing, but at the same time it underlines the significance of cooperation between the subfields.

> **Calling for theoretical pluralism**

To conclude, my suggestion is that we should take a conception of multiple methods of theorizing as a point of departure when linking theoretical and empirical work. That would imply that theorizing in sociology is neither just about applying and testing social theory in empirical research, nor about replacing social theory with variable analysis or interpretative analysis. In the history of sociology both these misconceptions have been common. Currently, there are many indications that point in the direction of a rehabilitation of a sociology dominated by variable analysis. We might be facing a “scientization” of sociology in a manner that we have not seen since the 1940s and 1950s. Such indications are the background of this call for theoretical pluralism. If we fail to take care of all three legs of the stool that we sociologists are sitting on, we will all fall over. ■

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1. Carleheden, M. (forthcoming) “Unchain the beast! Pluralizing the method of theorizing” in Fabian Anicker and André Ambruster (eds.) *Die Praxis soziologischer Theoriebildung*. Springer.

> Let's Do Free-Spirited Sociology!

by **Anna Engstam**, Lund University, Sweden



"The Centipede's Dilemma" by Katherine Craster (1841–1874):
The Centipede was happy quite, / Until a Toad in fun / Said, "Pray,
which leg goes after which?" / And worked her mind to such a pitch,
/ She lay distracted in a ditch / Considering how to run. Credit: Zach
Lezniewicz, Unplash.

If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?" This famous quote is attributed to Albert Einstein, who without doubt epitomizes the very idea of genius. Whoever said it pinpointed the indispensability of intuition: to keep going without continuous questioning of what you are doing; to open up for undisciplined, informal thinking; to trust your capacity to attain something of interest without evident rational thought and decision-making. When you think about it, you cannot come up with something novel through critical thinking only, can you? Creative thinking is needed to generate original puzzles and ideas, and more than that: *You have to rise above normal creativity! You have to think like a genius!*

Would Robert K. Merton be the first to object? [Richard Swedberg](#) has pointed out that Merton was probably "the first sociologist to single out the topic of theorizing as [a] distinct area of knowledge, study and teaching." "It's a good

thing that you know what you are doing," he used to tell his students. In this way Merton stressed the importance of making conscious decisions about how to proceed when theorizing. Swedberg finds this helpful: "it draws attention to the fact that when you theorize you need to pay careful attention to a number of issues that are often taken for granted." On the other hand, "the insight that [theorizing] does not happen in a linear and logical fashion" hardly fits in with [Merton's](#) idea of *disciplined research*.

To come up with a "puzzle, something about the social world that is odd, unusual, unexpected, or novel," and "a clever idea that responds to or interprets or solves that puzzle" certainly is the heart of good sociological theorizing ([Andrew Abbott](#)). *But to what extent is it a good thing to intellectualize the process of invention? Can our knowledge-how be improved through increased knowledge-that?* Arguably, this question of intellectualism/anti-intellectualism is at the core of the theorization of theorizing. As for Einstein, he warned against analyzing too much (see the 1929 [interview](#) by George Sylvester Viereck): "Perhaps you remember the story of the toad and the centipede?" (If you don't, read the lovely [poem](#) from 1871 by Katherine Craster!) "It is possible that analysis may paralyze our mental and emotional processes in a similar manner." The lesson to be learned is that thinking carefully about what you are doing may be disruptive, and thereby result in impaired performance. [Charles Sanders Peirce's 1907 captivating story](#) about how he recovered stolen goods through straightforward guessing can be understood in much the same way. The message is clear: *Put some trust in your capacity to guess right!* And that is exactly what Einstein did.

When asked to "account for sudden leaps forward in the sphere of science," Einstein ascribes his own discoveries to intuition and inspiration: "I sometimes feel that I am right. I do not know that I am." Interestingly enough, he bridges the gap between art and science: "I am enough of the artist to draw freely upon my imagination." So does Peirce: scientists need to acknowledge "the art of inquiry," the creative aspect of hypotheses formulation that mirrors the hypological (non-necessary) aspect of so-called abductive reasoning. *You mustn't jump to conclusions, but you'd better jump to "What if ... ?"!* *Make use of your intuition! Draw upon your imagination!* Now we have a clue what genius has to do with research. I will try to give you a Kuhnian answer as well.

Late in life, [Thomas Kuhn](#) reflected on his way of theorizing ruptures in physics: “I am a Kantian with movable categories,” he said. Let me continue: *Kuhn is a Kantian with blurred distinctions, a Kantian who recognizes the significance of genius outside the realm of fine art – a Kantian touched by Nietzsche?* Whether I am right or wrong, I read [The Structure of Scientific Revolutions](#) (1962) as pioneering bricolage: to make sense out of extraordinary shifts of commitment in the history of science, as displayed through historical records of research activity, Kuhn draws on Kant’s writings on genius and art in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). In paragraphs 46 to 50, Kant tells us what makes a genius; furthermore, he highlights *ingenuity as a style of thought and creation*. This is how I understand it: through *undisciplined* creativity, a genius produces a disciplinary piece of art – an *exemplar* ([Kuhn](#)); more specifically, a genius transcends established concepts through *forming* a manifold of intuitions into a composition that excites a heretofore non-communicable idea, in others as well as in “the composer.” In short, a genius *turns informal thinking into forms*, and as a *child of the future*, influences others through *resonance*.

From this perspective, the genius is summoned as a *Vordenker* who breaks the ice when serious anomalies make you feel really awkward; whose *formulations* vitalize art, science, and everything in between. *Gai saber!* Kuhn does not downplay the scientific community, however (1962: 122): “the flashes of intuition” through which a new exemplar/paradigm is born “depend upon the experience, both anomalous and congruent, gained with the old paradigm” (my italics); that is, by engaging in *normal science*. But “the ‘lightning flash’ that ‘inundates’ a previously obscure puzzle, enabling its components to be seen in a new way that for the first time permits its solution,” might be blocked or neglected, if you are too disciplined to postpone interpretation or explanation. This is the main reason why we, researchers, must not make tradition a *disciplinary matrix* ([Kuhn](#)). *How not to? Acknowledge “the art of social theory”* ([Swedberg](#))! *And be enough of an artist yourself!* The thing is, *you can think like a genius, even if you aren’t one*. Genius is a matter of what you think, not a matter of how you think. And unless you make something out of your intuitions – turn informal thinking into forms – it is hard to tell whether you are on to something or not. Doing a sloppy pre-study ([Swedberg](#)) may be a good start. *Postpone the puzzle efforts!*

Kuhn himself exemplifies *gai saber*. Not just for fun, we can picture the story of *The Structure* as a classical Greek

drama: *hubris* (questioning the philosophy of science), *peripety* (criticisms that prompted him to clarify), and *catharsis* (“Reflections on My Critics” and other postscripts). *What did he do to begin with? He preflexed.*

Sometimes it is a good thing to flex your way of thinking. And that takes preflexivity!

| ART | SCIENCE |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Playful attitude | Methodical attitude |
| Ingenuity | Discipline |
| Intuition | Rationality |
| Informal thinking | Formal thinking |
| Hypological | Logical |
| Hypocritical | Critical |
| Careless | Careful |
| Gay | Rigorous |
| Free-floating | Goal-directed |
| Divergent | Convergent |
| Preflexivity | Reflexivity |

In this article, I have tried to give you an idea of preflexivity: a concept that I am forming. *What do I mean by preflexivity, and what could this clumsy novelty possibly be good for?* A hyphen can make all the difference, with a rather clumsy word suddenly turning into an illegible concept: *pre-flexivity*. If you know what a prefix is, you are certainly familiar with the meaning of *pre-*. Flex, for its part, is an English morpheme identical with the Latin morpheme *flex-* ‘bent,’ made from the verb *flectere* ‘to bend.’ Accordingly, preflexive means *before flexion*, in other words, *before the act of bending* and *before the state of being bent*. I would like to propose preflexive as the opposite of reflexive, which I consequently conceive of as describing *acts of bending anew*. Hence, [p]reflexivity (reflexivity as well as preflexivity) can be understood as the opposite of just going along, more specifically, the normality of moving on by following an indicated path. From a Kuhnian perspective, this is equivalent to trying to solve an already suggested problem in the same manner as a forerunner (*Vordenker*) has solved a comparable problem, that is, without coming up with “a clever idea that responds to or interprets or solves [a true] puzzle” in a creative way. In my view, Kuhn writes about preflexivity without naming the phenomenon. The difference between preflexivity and reflexivity can therefore be clarified in the light of his distinction between *intuitions* and *interpretations*: as compared to reflective thinking, preflexive thinking draws upon intuition to the degree that something like a sudden, unstructured *gestalt switch* (a re-abduction) may happen. Accordingly, preflexivity is at the center of Kuhnian theory of science and scientific breakthroughs. ■

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> After Grand Theory: Fieldwork in Philosophy?

by **Nora Hämäläinen**, University of Helsinki, and **Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen**, Tampere University, Finland



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It is a commonplace that something noteworthy has happened to “social theory” in recent decades. Views differ, however, concerning what exactly has happened and how the situation should be assessed.

> From mid-century “grand theory” to end-of-century “studies”

Defenders of “theory” have been heard to lament that the social sciences have been taken over by myriad empirical studies, with little ambition to say something more general about society and no capacity to provide research with new substantive tools or perspectives. This situation is contrasted to the creative surge in social theory in the decades after World War II, especially from the 1960s through the 1980s, the heyday of “Grand Theory”. In European sociology, this period was marked by lively debates in which different schools of thought were forged and often positioned against each other. Various forms of Marxism prominently challenged the “liberal” tradition of (American) sociology. Influential yet differing arguments about communication or systems theory were exchanged

by Niklas Luhmann and Jürgen Habermas. Thinkers such as Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu launched new research programs that aimed to find a middle ground between “actors” and “structures,” seeking to emphasize the role of “practice.” Even more philosophical debates had a following within European sociology, such as the writings on “postmodernism” by Jean-Francois Lyotard or Jean Baudrillard and, more lastingly, Michel Foucault’s studies of power and knowledge in the historical shaping of Western forms of subjectivity.

An important shift took place in the late 1980s and the 1990s that saw the consolidation of interdisciplinary fields of various “studies”: cultural studies, urban studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies, science and technology studies, and, more recently, queer studies and discard studies. While research in these fields often made substantial use of prominent theorizing from earlier decades, the manner of employing conceptual apparatuses was new. Sociological work was mixed with anthropology, philosophy, history, and literature scholarship, and instead of aiming to produce broad generalizations, research was oriented towards empirical topics and characterized by methodological pluralism and theoretical diversity. This pluralism has been hospitable to conceptual innovations in relation to empirical work, including growing attention to questions of spatiality and temporality, embodiment, materiality, practices of care, epistemic forms of injustice, and so on.

However, few of these moves fit the idea of grand social theory. At present, ambitious conceptual efforts and theoretical novelty have failed to capture the imagination of our contemporaries. In sociology departments, most research is Kuhnian “normal science”: the methods and topics are relatively well established; as for conceptualizations, there is a wide variety of possible paths to follow that are all regarded as legitimate. The discipline of sociology does not appear to expect itself to be revitalized by high-profile theorizing that, as an end in itself, has turned into a marginal pastime.

> The theoretical efficacy of lived practice

Is this, then, the end of social theory? In our view this would be a mistaken conclusion. Instead of bemoaning the situation simply because theorizing today does not look or feel the way it did at a previous point, we want to draw

attention to the ways in which theoretical thinking is alive and well in the areas where sociological work encounters different kinds of “studies.” Moreover, we propose a name or label for this manner of moving between various intellectual heritages: *fieldwork in philosophy*.

The phrase “fieldwork in philosophy” was coined by philosopher J. L. Austin to emphasize the need for familiarizing oneself with ordinary language use to overcome misguided generalizing questions in philosophy. It was later picked up by Pierre Bourdieu, for whom it was helpful when thinking about how to turn the philosopher’s activity into an object of social study. For his part, Paul Rabinow used the label in a sense that comes closer to ours: he found the philosophico-theoretical ways of posing questions useful for addressing complex contemporary realities at concrete sites.

The common denominator for thinkers whose work fits the “fieldwork in philosophy” label is the way attention to lived practice (linguistic, institutional, etc.) is considered theoretically efficacious in its own right. Rather than applying a “grand” (explanatory) theory to the world they study, they are inclined to let social reality teach them how to consider it, in what could be described as a ground-up manner that is nonetheless geared towards generating theoretically significant results.

> Distinctive characteristics of a broad field

The phrase “fieldwork in philosophy” suggests an especially close affinity between philosophy and anthropological practice. However, in our view, it also nicely captures the tone in which much sociological research is conducted nowadays. Thus, instead of finding authors of “grand” theories in the list of references of many present-day publications, one finds particular kinds of scholars – those who philosophize based on empirical materials and historically situated data. This characterization applies not only to the work of a range of philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, Ian Hacking, Donna Haraway, and Anne-Marie Mol, but also to anthropologists like Anna Tsing, Marilyn Strathern, Eduardo Kohn, and Tim Ingold, whose writings especially influence those sociologists who work at the intersections of different “studies” and more classical forms of qualitative research. We suggest that there are four distinctive characteristics of the broad category of fieldwork in philosophy.

1. This work focuses on a particular *site* of human life and activity with distinctive spatiotemporal constraints instead of proceeding with presumably universal categories. For

example, such sites can include the institutional settings where a modern understanding of probability is consolidated, as in Hacking’s *The Taming of Chance*.

2. The theoretical sensibility of fieldwork in philosophy implies an engagement with a *description* of what happens at a given site, with the conviction that this description has theoretical and philosophical implications; an example is Mol’s 2003 ethnographic study at a university hospital in the Netherlands that purports to be about “empirical philosophy.”

3. Fieldwork in philosophy involves *conceptual work* on both the concepts used by the people at the sites studied and those developed for the purpose of describing what is going on at the sites. Hence, Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* does not content himself with articulating the “member categories” of the discourse at play in the emergence of new forms of subjectivity in prisons, hospitals, schools, and the army in nineteenth-century France, but also develops new conceptual tools with which to organize his findings. This is the role of his famous concepts, such as “microphysics of power” which, because of their rootedness in the particular described site, are never meant to be about “grand theory,” even if they can in effect travel to other sites and have subsequently been found useful for very different research by other scholars.

4. Lastly, many though not all studies sharing the sensibility that we call fieldwork in philosophy address *ontological issues*; that is, the make-up of reality. Latour’s *Aramis* is a good example. While studying in minute detail the rise and fall of a technological project, the empirical description helps him address what human togetherness – the collective – is in ontological terms.

Rather than leaving an impression on subsequent research in the form of a theory that can be “applied” from the top down, research that shares the sensibility of fieldwork in philosophy leaves a trail of ways of looking and conceptual tools that can, insofar as they are found useful, be put to work at new sites and modified to new needs. In other words, the theoretical sensibility that authors such as Foucault, Latour, and Mol represent also invites conceptual and methodological improvisation on the part of emerging researchers to fit both new objects of inquiry and whatever new questions researchers bring to the field of study. Thus, the development of theory happens not primarily in the register of “social theory” but in the course of ongoing work *in situ*. ■

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> Theory and (the End of) Practice

by **Arthur Bueno**, University of Passau and Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany



| Credit: Boys in Bristol Photography, Pexels.

Some of the most influential trends in contemporary sociology have converged around the concept of practice (Schatzki et al. 2000). To be sure, their novelty does not lie in the focus on this theme itself. In the long-standing debates on agency and structure that marked mid-twentieth-century sociology, this concept played a central role and already involved a shift from the meaning that “praxis” had in Marxism. Rather than pointing towards forms of revolutionary action to be carried out by the proletariat, theorists like Bourdieu or Giddens regarded practice in more politically modest but also more far-reaching terms. While still located at the crossroads of social reproduction and social transformation, practice did not entail the radical overthrowing of the capitalist system but an ongoing, everyday process of internalization and externalization of social structures.

However, the next generation of sociologists deemed that such approaches conceive of practice in much too narrow terms. As they saw it, the analysis of actions as mostly unreflected actualizations of social structures tended to marginalize agency, purveying an “over-integrated” view of individuals (Archer 1982) and ultimately depicting them as “cultural dopes” (Boltanski 2011). It also involved a fundamental epistemological asymmetry, as the sociologist was given the task of uncovering structural truths that the natives would not be able to recognize. Against such a view, authors like Latour and Boltanski highlighted the agency of non-humans and the reflexive capacities of hu-

mans. They stressed how one should learn from and enter into discussion with them, rather than bring enlightenment from outside and above. The very notion of structure was thereby called into question. Categories like “society” or “capitalism,” once supposed to unveil the hidden logics of practices, in fact explained very little: they simply saved one the trouble of following the ways in which the actors, from situation to situation, actively connect to each other.

> The paradox of practice

This step was largely understood as a thrust for democratization. By rejecting previous conceptions of practice, the new sociologies also advanced a new politics radically supposed to proceed from the bottom up. In fact, how could one deny that these approaches took actors more seriously than the preceding ones? Who could object to recognizing the active and reflective capacities of agents, or to balancing the power relations between the analyst and the analyzed?

Following actors, however, can be an unsettling experience. Since the 1980s and especially in the last two decades, we have seen complaints about the quality of our democracies multiply. The concentration of power and wealth has reached such levels that, in a recent article, Chancel and Piketty claim that “early 21st century neocolonial capitalism involves levels of inequality similar to those of early 20th century colonial capitalism.” Not to mention the issue of climate change, whose solution is delayed with each new

international summit despite the broad consensus about its causes. If there is a problem here – and there is – it cannot be said to amount to a lack of reflexivity!

The category of practice thus seems to be caught in a paradox. The more one underscores the multiplication of agencies and the actors' reflexive capacities, the more one appears to confront a world that turns deaf ears to our demands, blocks our efforts to transform it, and places us in precarious conditions (as each new generation of sociologists has become increasingly aware in their own lives). While this is certainly not the product of social theorists working within the confines of the discipline, it does make one think about the political implications of our concepts of practice. How are we not to consider that, after all, we are dealing with powerful systems or structures? How can we deny that such realities, built by ourselves, are endowed with logics that escape us? Who could, reflexively, ask for more of the same?

> The logic of things

We seem to be led, inadvertently, back to social structures – and their apparent autonomy, their veiled mechanisms, their unconscious motives. Yet to merely restate the theoretical alternative between agency and structure, advocating for one against the other, would be a misstep. For their opposition does not pertain to the “things of logic” but to the “logic of things.” The ever-recurring hiatus between agency and structure is not a mere epistemological error but a product of the workings of social reality itself. This is precisely what allows us to agree with both sides. More than simply having the *capacity* to be active, reflexive, dynamic, and multiple, this is how we are *urged* to be. But the mysterious thing is that, at the same time, we are confronted with a world that is largely alien and even hostile to such capacities. Paradoxically, it is by being continuously asked to make our own history that we become unable to do so. We become passive through our own activity. We are reflexive and dopes.

To this strange logic, Marx gave the name of “fetishism,” and Lukács, that of “reification.” Should we, then, go back even further in history, returning to their concepts of praxis? Yes, but perhaps not in the same way. It is, in any case, crucial to retain one aspect: in this tradition, practice is fundamentally something to be *realized*. It does not consist simply in the continuous internalization and externalization of social structures, regardless of the outcome; nor does it point to the affirmation of agential capacities given in advance. Rather, such capacities are understood primarily as potentials whose actualization is hindered or blocked under present conditions. This is why the dichotomy between agency and structure cannot be resolved theoretically, by abandoning either one notion or the other. It must be overcome in reality itself, in the very “logic of things.” Here, practice is synonymous with struggle, with collective transformation, with emancipation. The mediation between agency and structure is not something to be merely described, but to be politically accomplished.

> Passivity and power

To adopt this conception does not mean abandoning altogether the features highlighted by recent sociologies of practice. Rather, it leads one to conceive of them differently. It is true that failing to recognize the active capacities of actors can lead to a self-imposed powerlessness before a “System” that invariably prevails. [As Latour once said](#) about the idea of capitalism: “If you keep failing and don't change, it does not mean you are facing an invincible monster, it means you like, you enjoy, you love, to be *defeated* by a monster.” And yet, to deny that there are systemic processes which turn us (partially) into dopes leads one to the same condition, only by a different path. If each time we are confronted with systemic blockages we tell ourselves that there is *still* activity, *still* resistance, *still* practice, then we end up cheapening these very notions. They become ever thinner and ever politically weaker: the less we ask for, the less we get, and the less we are able to ask for next time.

Whether by assuming an all-powerful system or by denying its existence, one thus ends up in a position of powerlessness and with a sense of defeat. The problem does not lie in the notions of structure or agency themselves, but in the fact that they are treated as static entities: one of them is presented as always already given, the other as something negligible. In contrast, what praxis does is precisely to acknowledge, to articulate, and to transform this opposition.

As [I have argued elsewhere](#), an important moment for emancipatory movements occurs with the recognition that, despite every appearance of individual activity, one is subjected to structural logics beyond one's control. Against the idea of pre-given agency, we accept being passive “cogs in a machine.” But the process must not stop there. Instead of leading to a sense of defeat, the acknowledgment of our bodies' vulnerability to structural logics can bring to the fore precisely the material power of these bodies – without which, after all, those logics cannot exist. To paraphrase Marx: at the basis of (capital's) systemic domination lies the living (labor) power of human and non-human beings. Once acknowledged and self-organized, this power can be set against existing structures, empowering new ones. Agency comes back. However, it no longer appears as the act of an isolated actor, but as the expression of a collective living force grounded in a shared condition of vulnerability. We can only be active if we recognize our passivity. Practice becomes an end precisely because one acknowledges that it can end. ■

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> Doing Anti-Colonial Social Theory

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Anti-colonial social theory draws its approach from a critical understanding of anti-colonial thought which grew and spread across the world through anti-colonial social movements. Anti-colonial thought assesses, in various ways, the constitution of hierarchies and domination/hegemony in colonial territories and thus is a proto-sociological analysis of the roles and interventions of “native” groups against colonialism. In order to do this, anti-colonial thought defines a method to debunk received ideas, principles, and assumptions that naturalize colonial domination within the colony and historizes the way such dominant/hegemonic knowledge grew in the colonizing countries. Additionally, it assumes that colonialism is a historical watershed and a marker of capitalist exploitation of peoples, regions, and territories and so it embarks on its search for a new episteme to comprehend the contemporary modernity defined by colonialism/imperialism.

The growth of a social theory based on anti-colonial thought is a recent phenomenon as, for a long time, social sciences had pushed the discussion on colonialism/imperialism and its relationship with modernity to the margins. However, since the late 70s and early 80s, as the label “sociological theory/ies” began to be increasingly replaced by another tag – “social theory” – perspectives related to anti-colonial social theory have emerged. This change occurred after the breakdown of sociology’s late-nineteenth-century positivist perspective, which assessed regularities, made law-like analyses, and used regression-based variable models to comprehend the “social.” While some scholars applied hermeneutics or interpretative and constructivist analysis, others suggested a need to historicize the discipline to comprehend whether the sociological classics and their canons are relevant in comprehending new modernities constituted within or outside Europe.

> Original ontologies and methodologies to replace hegemonic logic and reasoning

Consequently, social theory can be perceived as a sociologically grounded philosophical reflection on and about meta-theories that explores their ontological–epistemological moorings. This formulation of social theory has led to the acceptance of the “normative” within sociology (Chernilo and Raza). Anti-colonial social theory, I would

contend, is one of these normative trends that interrogates the relationship between knowledge, its fields, and its capitalist and colonial/imperialist moorings. It is a methodological intervention that debunks the use of dominant/hegemonic forms of logic and reasoning while searching for an original ontology that comprehends innovative ways of knowing and thinking. Because it identifies dominant/hegemonic thought as associated with capitalist colonialism’s exploitative and exclusionary processes of inequalities within the world, it presents us with a novel way of doing social sciences; it is the methodology of theorizing how to comprehend the politics of knowledge construction rather than elaborating what it is. Consequently, it interrogates sociologically the empirical, the theoretical and the “scientific unconscious” that organizes fields/disciplines to present a new alternative (Rutzou).

Given that colonialism made its marks in various regions from the sixteenth century on, leading to the growth of anti-colonial political struggles in distinct spaces and places, there have been many versions of proto-sociological anti-colonial thought and thus of anti-colonial social theory. These different methodological positions are: indigenous sociology, indigeneity, and indigenous methodology (Atal; Akiwowo; Smith); endogeneity and endogenous thought; extraversion (Hountondji); autonomous and independent sociologies (Alatas); subaltern theory, derivative nationalism, and colonial difference (Guha; Chatterjee); colonial modernity (Barlow; Patel); internal colonialism (Martin); coloniality of power (Quijano); border thinking and de-linking (Mignolo); southern theory (Connell; De Souza Santos); connected sociologies (Bhambra); and post-colonial sociology (Go). Undoubtedly, these different positions have unique attributes, but they also flag an imperative for a common denominator they share. I suggest that this common denominator is the affiliation of these approaches to an anti-colonial social theory as an ontological–epistemological perspective.

> Where to start

Not only does anti-colonial social theory postulate methodologies for deconstructing dominant/hegemonic positions across various geographies, it also lays out steps to reconstruct them in new and novel ways in the context of global divisions of knowledge. It is a strategy for presenting ways to deconstruct institutionalized flows of knowl-

“Anti-colonial social theory also lays out steps to reconstruct dominant/hegemonic positions in novel ways in the context of global divisions of knowledge”

edge circulation and reproduction. Its discussions help to reframe the fragmented field of global social theory by asserting that the differences do not indicate closure of the field. Instead, the perspectives mentioned above and their various avatars affirm a methodological assumption that the knowledge of the “social” is ideologically associated with the processes of colonial capitalism and represent contexts within colonizing time-spaces as these emerged as global dominant/hegemonic perspectives. They contend that contemporary social science theories need to be mediated and filtered through a theory of politics of knowledge production and that comprehending colonial/imperial geopolitics is a prerequisite to assess the theory of politics of knowledge production and modernity.

A contemporary critique of Eurocentrism is a starting point for building an ontology from an anti-colonial perspective. This implies, first, recognition of the power equation within the Eurocentric binary of the “I” and the “other.” Anti-colonial scholarship outlines ways to subvert this and find a new epistemic voice to define the “I.” This has led scholars to devise new methods to examine power/knowledge politics: endogeneity in the case of Paulin Hountondji, structuralist deconstruction of the archive in the case of Ranajit Guha, and Marxist historiography in the case of Aníbal Quijano. This search has also led to analysis of the impact of colonized power on the constitution of hierarchies within colonized territories. This can be seen in Guha’s distinction between the nationalist elite and the subalterns, and Quijano’s understanding of exploitation being organized in terms of class and race. Second, these perspectives defend a shift away from the linear theory of time/history and its theories of evolutionism. With colonialism, it is argued that an epistemic break occurs, and history needs to start from there. Consequently, most anti-colonial theories of modernity enunciated within colonized regions

assess the colonial/imperial spatial connections that organize the flows of commodities, ideas, ideologies, and fields of knowledge between metropole(s), semi-peripheries, and peripheries of the world.

> Examining the attributes of Eurocentrism

More particularly, contemporary anti-colonial social theory uses a combination of methodological strategies ranging from structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction with dependency theory, world-system analysis, and critical Marxist historical sociology to interrogate Eurocentrism’s attributes. Consequently, it has argued variously that dominant/hegemonic social sciences (a) are ethnocentric insofar as they project a superiority of the European experience of modernity, (b) universalize European historical and cultural patterns of modernity and thus promote path dependency, (c) sometimes partially reconstruct and sometimes efface non-European history to reproduce it through binaries that include racist, caste-ist, gendered, and other categories of hierarchies, (d) divide and create boundaries and borders between social sciences, and (e) promote an Orientalist way of looking at the non-European world.

Anti-colonial social theory affirms the need to map context, time, and space to organize research queries and methods, and to comprehend the processes, mechanisms, and events that impact action and actors in colonized and colonizing worlds. This social theory helps examine how to build substantive theories on modernity, confirm their relevance, investigate empirical data, and apply them to conduct an empirical study. As an investigation into philosophical assumptions of sociology, anti-colonial social theory can become the foundation of contemporary global sociology. ■

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> Women in the Making of Social Theory Beyond the Canon

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Credit: Photo montage by Vítória Gonzalez, 2023.

In 1838, Harriet Martineau defended the creation of rules for producing “safe generalizations” about societies. Almost six decades before the release of Émile Durkheim’s *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Martineau published *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, an exquisite work on the epistemological challenges involved in the production of knowledge about human beings and their interrelationships.

Martineau imagined the social as a domain in which institutions, material life, symbols, feelings, bodies, and demographic factors intertwined. Like her predecessor Mary Wollstonecraft, she believed that domestic morals and politics were “inseparable in practice” and that the scientist could only divide the public and the private spheres for analytical purposes. Martineau was, in sum, a theorist who recognized the gendered basis of social life.

In the years following her death, Martineau and other pioneers such as Flora Tristan, Anna Julia Cooper, Marianne Weber, Beatrice Potter Webb, Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Alexandra Kollontai fell into obscurity. The participation of women from outside the Anglo-European context in the public debate and publishing market of the nineteenth century was also forgotten, as in the cases of the Indian writer Pandita Ramabai and the South African writer Olive Schreiner.

The trajectories of such women were highly diverse: some were deeply engaged with the construction of so-

ciology, while others were not necessarily concerned with founding a scientific discipline but they produced insights that we now understand as sociological. With all their differences, these women show that the history of sociology is not linear but has multiple origins and greater thematic and geographical variety than we usually recognize.

The institutionalization and masculinization of sociology went hand in hand. The academic and political disputes that gave Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber the status of classics erased the female presence in the construction of the social sciences and silenced non-European sources. As a result, many gendered domains of inquiry have been marginalized, limiting our sociological imagination. As Dorothy Smith pointed out, the everyday world is a problematic open to sociological inquiry. Therefore, neglected topics such as family, marriage, sexuality, and reproduction are not just private issues, but matters of sociological relevance.

> Key topics of sociology made by women

Since the presence of women in classical sociology has never been systematically recognized, mapping their contributions is always a challenge. The ignorance of their works, the scarcity of new editions and translations, and the lack of research with critical perspectives on the subject feed the narrative that there were no women thinking about society in the nineteenth century. This disregard for the contributions of women in the history and teaching of sociology impacts the definition of key concepts, theories, and methods for the discipline.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, for instance, Flora Tristan, a French thinker of Peruvian descent, analyzed the particularities of the condition of working-class women within the family and work environments. One could say that she used the methodology of participant observation in her study of the English working class, published a few years before Friedrich Engels’ book. Furthermore, she realized how relations of oppression were not only grounded in legal apparatuses, but embodied in everyday structures and institutions, such as the church and the family.

Pandita Ramabai, in turn, wrote numerous works in which she chronicled the complexities of women’s situation in India at the intersection of religion, caste, inequality, and colonialism. Ramabai theorized about the intimate relationship between castes, their forms of endogamy, the

ritualization of everyday life, and the control over women. She pointed out mechanisms by which castes were related to practices such as dowry, or the treatment of widows, or even female infanticide. Her work reveals the gendered features of social groups and boundary making.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's work was widely read. Gilman was a member of the American Sociological Association and criticized the Victorian cult of motherhood and female domesticity. In her work, she strove to historicize the family and the home, identifying the social as a dense web of relationships between the family, the state and the market, forming a highly interdependent structure.

As for the German Marianne Weber, she wrote nine books and dozens of articles in which she discussed topics such as law, marriage, motherhood, female autonomy, and patriarchal domination. Marianne compared the legal arrangements of marriage in different societies in a way that resembles the methodological approach of historical sociology. Against submissiveness in marriage, she defended the construction of partnership relations and law reform as a way of guaranteeing female individuality.

In the same period, the South African thinker Olive Schreiner was an active voice in the debates about the possibility of creating a South African nation. She had a critical view on British colonialist actions in South African territory and denounced imperialist initiatives exploiting mineral wealth and native people. Schreiner showed a keen eye for the contradictions related to the formation of the state and its relationship with nation, territory, race, and gender.

Finally, in the beginning of the twentieth century, Ercília Nogueira Cobra criticized the sexual morality in Brazil by looking at sexuality and the ways in which women's bodies were controlled. Cobra showed how honor codes, such as the requirement that women remained virgins before marriage, were linked to the denial of civil rights to women. Thus, she demonstrated how the legal regime affected social relations, pointing out that the control of sexuality could be a basis for exercising power relations.

By taking these women's texts seriously, we seek to make analytical use of the gender category, understood as a fundamental factor of social life. The idea is to ask whether the theories produced by these women help us to rethink concepts such as order, action, and social change, as well as work, power, solidarity, and inequalities.

> Contemporary challenges when thinking about the canon

In contemporary sociology there is controversy over the status of the sociological canon. Authors like Raewyn Connell and Patricia Hill Collins argue that the very idea of a canon is unsustainable in the face of an increasingly complex and global sociology. However, the international community of sociologists continues to rely on classic authors for purposes of professionalization.

Social processes of the formation of new and old canons remain active regardless of our will. What qualifies as "great theory" is usually presented as a synthesis or overcoming of the antinomies of classical sociology. Therefore, classical and contemporary theory maintain a fundamental relationship that seems far from being over.

For gender to stop being a sub-area or even a self-sufficient field and enter the core of sociology, it is necessary to include women authors in the circuit of classical sociology, making them references in textbooks. In recent years, excellent initiatives have been taken, such as the work of Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Jill Niebrugge-Brantley, Kate Reed, Mary Jo Deegan, and Lynn McDonald. It is pointless, however, to keep reproducing Eurocentric points of view with a female bias. A sociological theory beyond the canon requires a glance beyond Europe, as Alatas and Sinha propose.

From Brazil, we registered our contribution to the debate with the publication of the collection *Pioneiras da Sociologia: Mulheres intelectuais nos séculos XVIII e XIX* [Pioneers of Sociology: Intellectual Women in the 18th and 19th Centuries]. The e-book is available, for now, only in Portuguese. The initiative, unprecedented in the country, brings together sixteen women authors from different backgrounds and proposes presenting them in a didactic way.

Thinking together about female authors, canonical or not, from such different regions, presents historical and sociological challenges. The comparison allows for both the relativizing and criticizing of androcentric universalist theories from the Global North, bringing to light unique sociohistorical configurations, as well as providing clues for the analysis of global macro-sociological processes that have marked the modern world. Rethinking the sociological canon and making it more inclusive is the task that awaits the new generations. ■

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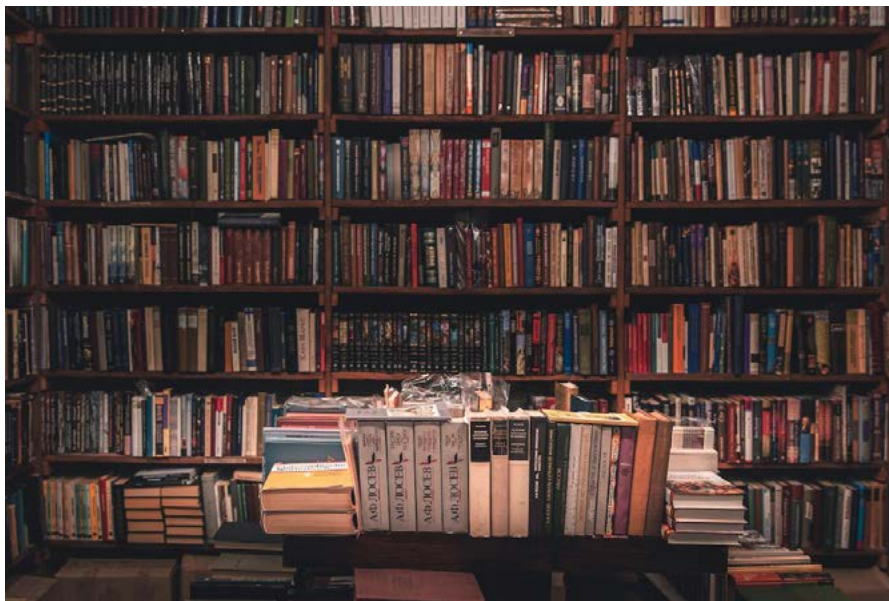
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> Open Access, Predatory Journals or Subscription-Based Journals

by **Sujata Patel**, Retired Professor, University of Hyderabad, India, and 2021 Kersten Hesselgren Visiting Professor, Umea University, Sweden



| Credit: Stanislau Kondratiev, Pexels.

Recently, a colleague from a European university asked me to contribute an article for a special issue on sociological theory in an English-language open-access journal that she edits. I had not heard of the journal but agreed immediately given that it would mean that if published (after reviews), the paper could potentially be read around the world. This would overcome the circulation bottleneck that exists today in flows of professional knowledge which are dominated by journal subscriptions and article payments. As we all know, subscriptions and article processing payments are not subsidized by most governments, universities, research institutes, or research grants. Consequently, outreach is restricted and divisions are created in flows of information and knowledge across national and global scholarly communities. But a query about the journal led me to discover how the academic community views open access; most of my colleagues argued that open-access journals are largely predatory while subscription-based journals are professional. I was puzzled: why do my colleagues think this, when open access allows for free circulation of scholarship and encourages dialogue and conversation across academic communities?

> An optimistic beginning

The open access (OA) movement emerged in the 1990s when the Internet became available as a means of communication and consequently redefined publishing, which till then had been based on printed material. The movement soon gained significance and in 2001 the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) defined OA as free availability of peer-reviewed research “*on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself.*” BOAI also states that all intellectual rights of the article rest with the author. This definition resonates with Creative Commons licenses.

With bandwidth increasing steadily, it was expected that the publishing costs per research paper would decrease as printing and distribution were removed from all budgets. This would lead, it was presumed, to most journals becoming OA.

> Claims of predation

However, no such sea change has occurred. A recent assessment suggested that in 2013, only 25% of published papers were part of OA journals. Why has the movement not captured the imagination of all scholars? Part of the reason is an assumption that most OA journals charge article processing fees and thus are predatory journals: “anything can get published if you pay.” There is a widespread perception that OA journals are not professionally competent, have fake editorial boards, and often do not carry out rigorous reviews of papers.

The term *predatory* for such journals was first used by the librarian Jeffrey Beall who, since early 2010, has been campaigning against OA. He has put up a [list of predatory journals on the Internet](#). For Beall: “Predatory publishers use the gold (author pays) open access model and aim to generate as much revenue as possible, often foregoing a proper peer review.”

New literature suggests Beall may not be the only one campaigning against OA. In addition, big publisher trade associations and their lobbyists have promoted the idea that OA is a danger to the peer-review system. Their main argument has been that subscription-based journals are key to good practices, especially of the peer-review system, and that these are institutionalized through their alliances with learned societies, professional associations, and research institutes. Despite recognizing that their business models are aimed at profit, they also contend that they share their revenues with such organizations (e.g., the International Sociological Association’s budget is hugely dependent on publication royalties) and thus promote knowledge production that is both professional and global. Additionally, they suggest that they protect the intellectual property rights of authors and research institutes.

Therefore, most learned societies and professional associations lend their support to the big publishers. In turn, those publishers have aggressively intervened in the public domain to ensure that their journal rights are protected against any form of open access. For instance, in 2012, some publishers (Oxford, Cambridge, and Taylor and Francis) took a case to the Indian courts against a Xerox shop at Delhi University for the sale of photocopied books and pages. Both the University and the High Court came out in support of the shop and the case was dismissed.

> The need to do away with institutionalized binary divisions

That predatory journals exist is not in doubt. Together with India and Iran, the USA and Japan have the highest numbers of such journals and regulatory bodies including universities do not recognize papers published in them for performance evaluation. However, are all OA journals really

predatory in nature? [Recent research](#) into Beall’s list suggests that the major flaws he listed as applying to OA journals are also present in subscription-based journals. Additionally, not all OA journals charge article processing fees. The Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) states that of 18,000+ OA journals available on the Internet today, some 13,000 do not charge a processing fee. In the same research just mentioned, the authors argue that instead of presenting a dichotomy between OA and subscription-based journals, it is important to ask more reflexive questions concerning how to initiate and institutionalize good reviewing practices and how to make these transparent for both OA and subscription-based journals. In addition, it is also important to ask whether these practices include those perfected in different parts and regions of the world.

While there is need for further research on this theme, it is my contention that the publishing industry is part of the knowledge ecosystem that thrives on generating divisions between regions and language communities with regard to the production and circulation of knowledge. The publishing industry feeds into this system and institutionalizes it. This ecosystem came to be organized in the aftermath of the Second World War when universities and research institutes increased exponentially in the Global North and across the world. With this spread, a perspective that knowledge fields within the sciences, social sciences and humanities produced in the Global North are universal and can be emulated by academic communities across the world was institutionalized.

That ecosystem then designated the responsibilities for the production of knowledge to universities, institutes and laboratories in Europe and North America, and the knowledge was then circulated via journals and books published and printed by the private sector. Soon, those universities and research institutes became the main consumers of learned journals and books, thus creating a symbiotic relationship between them and private publishing houses. No wonder publishers in the USA and UK classify their products as being part of the international markets while knowledge-products of other countries are classified in terms of the region. In recent times, this ecosystem has got a boost as universities have demanded stringent audits to examine teacher performance, giving subscription-based journals further legitimacy. The OA movement subverts this ecosystem and is thus a threat to all who have a stake in it.

Where does this leave scholars from various parts of the world who wish to publish or read new research? Where also does it leave publications from across the world which wish to encourage distinct content(s), new styles of writing, and different review practices? As scholars who seek global conversations, I hope we can start a discussion on this theme. ■

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> For a Better Health Seeking Behavior in Bihar, India

by **Aditya Raj** and **Papia Raj**, Indian Institute of Technology Patna, India

Credit: Anna Shvets, Pexels.



The conditions posed by Covid-19 meant that behavioral changes became the norm to control the spread of the virus in any community. Governments decreed lockdowns several times and kept advising people to physically distance, self-isolate, home quarantine, use a mask and gloves in public places, wash their hands frequently, etc. Despite such efforts, the Indian government was unable to control the situation as the majority of the population in India, as constantly reported in popular media, was not adhering to the guidelines and more importantly was not willing to be tested for the virus. Also, if people tested positive they were reluctant to say so until their situation became very severe. Due to a lack of public health infrastructure, conditions were especially critical in Bihar, an underdeveloped province of India. This suggests the importance

of individuals in any community engaging in health seeking behavior (HSB).

HSB is conceptualized as a sequence of preventive and remedial actions taken by members of a community either to correct perceived ill health or to maintain a good health status. Thus, HSB constitutes people making “healthy choices.” Such behavior varies across geographical spaces and among communities. To improve conditions, it is most important to comprehend the factors that prevent people from adopting progressive HSB. It is also crucial to understand how people could be motivated to develop positive HSB. Despite being a vital component of public health, there is no significant research aimed at understanding the barriers to and facilitators of HSB in India, or specifically in Bihar.



> Lessons learnt from the cross-sectional study conducted in Bihar

We conducted a cross-sectional study in Patna, the capital of Bihar. Patna recorded the highest Covid-19 morbidity and fatalities in India. We adopted a mixed-method approach and collected primary data during the pandemic, between April and July 2021. Analysis of our data revealed that 43% of all respondents reported that they themselves tested positive for Covid-19, while 34% stated that either one or more of their family members had tested positive, and 23% said they themselves as well as their family members had tested positive. There was a striking gender gap among those who had tested positive: while 69% were men, only 31% were women. Physiologically, women are stronger compared to men, and under similar circumstances women have greater chances of resistance and survival. Also, the social constructs and gender dynamics within households suggest that the health of the male members was always prioritized. Perhaps when women had symptoms they did not get tested.

Apart from gender, 40% of respondents who had tested positive were in the age group of 25-29 years, suggesting that those who were more mobile and exposed to the outside environment were also more vulnerable to a covid infection. Unfortunately, several respondents reported one or more deaths due to Covid-19 in their family. In our study, the majority of fatal cases (88%) lived in multi-story buildings, with only 12% living in individual private houses. We also observed that 67% of them worked in the service sector, 26% were self-employed, and the rest did not specify their occupation. Irrespective of socio-demographic background, there was reluctance among all respondents to get tested for Covid-19. When asked how they knew they were infected with Covid-19, most of them stated that they had developed symptoms of the virus and assumed they were infected. When asked why they didn't confirm these assumptions through testing, the replies were varied. The reasons stated included a lack of proper information about testing facilities (27%), the unavailability of advice from medical personnel (12%), and, most importantly, fear of social stigma if they tested positive (59%).

Since hospital beds and other clinical resources were scarce, people preferred to be at home rather than looking for available medical facilities, until conditions became

critical. The lack of availability of both information and resources was a major hurdle to seeking help and acted as a barrier for positive HSB in the community. Hence, many people opted for home medication (around 27%), few consulted doctor(s) over the phone (16%), a few others visited doctors' clinics (11%), while a considerable proportion (46%) just relied upon information from friends, relatives, and – of course – digital media.

Those tested positive were advised to be in isolation and quarantine, but such behavior is not conventional in an Indian social context. Indeed, infected people did not want to disclose their condition to the community in fear of being stigmatized.

Based on our analysis, we contend that though people were ready to adhere to the required HSB to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, they were at the same time affected by the lack of information, which was the greatest obstruction to HSB in this case. People were unwilling to seek medical help at an early stage of infection due to fear and ignorance. Hence, the need of the hour is to provide contextual health education to improve HSB, especially in an underdeveloped province like Bihar.

> In retrospect

Covid-19 is still an ongoing threat to public health. Population and health practices aimed at combating the situation should be sustainable and acceptable to the community. Based on the findings of our study, we suggest that social interventions through contextual health education are urgently needed to improve HSB among the community and must be implemented. The integrated approach of incorporating health education as an integral part of health policy will be instrumental to initiate behavioral changes among communities and lead to health promotion.

Our recent follow-up study has shown that after Covid-19, people have started taking extra care with sanitation, hygiene, and health-related lifestyle practices. Enhancement of health education and investment in health communication can allow people to develop a new social understanding of HSB, which will set in motion a process of health promotion. This will enable people to deal with their health issues in order to overcome existing health disparities. Health education, therefore, is the need of the hour. ■

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> The Mental Health Crisis in Spain: Why Sociology Matters

by **Sigita Doblytė**, University of Oviedo, Spain



Credit: Adrian Swancar, Unsplash.

While current mental health interventions are usually placed within the realm of healthcare and thus deemed to be within the *system*, mental health forms part of the *lifeworld* and is integrated into one's culture, social relations, and personality. Sociology has much to offer to better understand mental health and distress. Here, I advocate a greater role for sociology when addressing these issues by suggesting that we have been witnessing disturbances in cultural reproduction and social integration. These are manifested as a loss of cultural orientation, alienation, and consequently psychopathologies. While my argument is centered on the case of Spain, it should strike a chord with readers in other countries too.

Over the last year, mental health and illness have attracted unprecedented attention in the Spanish public sphere. Politicians, journalists, and activists have all been citing national and international statistics demonstrating a decline in mental health in the country. Suicide mortal-

ity has been rising. Antidepressant drug consumption has tripled over the past 20 years and is amongst the highest in Europe. Worse still, Spain reports the highest consumption of anxiolytics in the world. A survey of Spanish public employees' mental health in 2022 puts these rates into context: nearly half disclose relying on psychopharmaceuticals to alleviate the anxiety they experience derived from their work.

These figures, therefore, reflect not only individual issues but social processes too. Nevertheless, the media immediately turn their cameras towards psychiatrists and psychologists rather than sociologists. Whilst the psy-disciplines are irreplaceable when it comes to helping individual people, they tend to align with the (bio)medical model that decontextualizes and individualizes the social. Comments by practitioners frequently end with the call for more resources for mental healthcare: *more* specialists and *more* services. This is undoubtedly important. Yet, I maintain that we should consider other responses too.

> Culture and self-worth

Cultural certainties – public ones, as (re)produced through social relations and institutions, but also personal ones, as embodied through socialization – guide our expectations, decisions, and actions by securing “*coherence* of knowledge sufficient for daily practice” (Habermas 1987). In a way which has become reinforced by neoliberalism, culture increasingly supplies us with scripts of the self that emphasize competitiveness, material success, and consumption of particular lifestyles (Lamont 2019). Definitions of worthy lives become more homogeneous and predominantly based on productive performance and consumption over and above other criteria of social worth.

The stated goals are deemed attainable for everyone through hard work and effort, which results in the classification of ‘winners,’ who are believed to work hard and push themselves, and ‘losers,’ who are presumed to lack such aptitudes. But these measures of self-worth simply are not accessible to everyone, despite their efforts. Being born into a wealthy family gives one an extraordinary advantage in Spain. However hard you study and work, your

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chances of success are much lower if you were born poor than they are for your more affluent fellow citizens.

Most people do construct their future projections on the basis of incorporated cultural scripts rooted in the ideals of material success. Many of them, however, encounter objective chances that clash with such imaginaries, yet see that the luckier ones have it easier in life. This mismatch between embodied expectations and objective chances may lead to a crisis in cultural orientation and feelings of sadness, anger, or shame. Loss of (belief in the) future is, I suppose, one of the most direct paths to misery.

> Work and social relations

Besides material deprivation, sociology might also point to positional suffering. For instance, despite a relatively advantageous position, a young academic who cannot secure decent employment but who was ‘promised’ job security and recognition as a reward for years of study and effort may equally experience existential angst. Including and going beyond the topic of fair pay, surveys in Spain indeed demonstrate an association between mental distress and such workplace characteristics, that is, the meaningfulness of work, or lack thereof.

Institutional relations that foster autonomy, dignity, and recognition in the workplace would result in an improvement of employee well-being by increasing solidarity amongst and beyond the organization’s members, by rewarding effort, and thus, by helping to bring objective chances into line with subjective expectations. Meaningful work promotes the social integration of the lifeworld. Yet, there has been a noticeable deterioration in such work characteristics in Spain: less autonomy, dignity, and recognition; and more mental distress.

Disturbances in work relations could, nevertheless, be mitigated by solidarity within informal social networks, particularly in Southern European societies that are considered strong family cultures with weaker non-family ties. However, all social relations – family and non-family – have been experiencing a decline in their strength and function in Spain (Ayala Cañón et al. 2022). This process initiated before the COVID-19 pandemic but has accelerated with

it: people meet their friends and relatives less frequently, count on less social and emotional support in their networks, and essentially, feel lonelier.

Thus, while disturbances in the cultural domain result in the loss of cultural orientation, disruptions in social relations – be those work relations or informal social ties – lead to increasing alienation between individuals. This, in turn, generates the mismatch between what people expect on the basis of their socialization and how their lives are going, with some lives being more (un)livable than others, which may consequently manifest as psychopathologies.

> The system

Finally, although here I focus on the lifeworld, sociology should aim to connect the two layers of society, where the system with its economic and political–bureaucratic spheres “has to fulfil conditions for the maintenance of sociocultural lifeworlds” (Habermas 1987). This goes beyond mental health services, which can indeed alleviate an individual’s suffering. Yet, in the current state of things, individuals return to the lifeworld, which is alienated and lacks meaning.

Without broadening the systems of worth so that more people can feel valuable, without improving labor relations and opportunities so that work rewards effort, or without investing in social policies such as housing and family which promote and transmit orders of worth but which have been traditionally weak in Spain, the pattern endures. In other words, the vicious cycle of the alienated and meaningless lifeworld, on the one hand, and mental healthcare tackling symptoms rather than causes, on the other, continues.

As sociologists, we are in a position to bring these processes and explanations to the fore. However, even when engaging with mental health and illness, sociological research tends to remain within the limits of medical sociology. Crossing boundaries towards, for example, cultural or economic sociology could, nevertheless, greatly benefit knowledge and practice. Thus, I argue that it is time to intensify this dialogue between different sociological sub-disciplines. ■

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> Expanding Human Rights Discourse

by Recognizing Subliminal Violence

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Credit: Illustration "we want each other alive" made by the Brazilian artist and political scientist Ribs (twitter.com/o_ribs and [instagram.com/o.ribs](https://www.instagram.com/o.ribs)) for the Social Movements Observatory of the Centre for Social Theory and Latin American Studies (NETSAL-IESP/UERJ). Credit: Ribs, 2021.

The human rights paradigm is a deeply empathetic manner of looking at the world. It is predicated on the fundamental assumption that human life is worthy and invested with dignity and meaning. The paradigm has evolved structurally, drawing on the learnings of atrocities that women and men have suffered across history. However, like every paradigm, it arose within a historical context; in this case, one dominated by the intellectual currents of legal positivism and individualism that privileged objective empiricism and the disembodied individual as the subject matter. The time has come to enrich and further expand the contours of the human rights paradigm, by recogniz-

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ing the value of intersectionality and situated knowledge in grasping the palimpsestic nature of gender-based violence (GBV). Any indication of possible ossification must provoke us to develop a more nuanced and context-specific customary international law of human rights that attends to the hidden cultural violence and entrenched biases that silence and restrict subjective renditions of survivors of such violence.

> **The failure of human rights discourse to address the complexities of gender-based violence**

This article spells out the inadequacy of the existing discourse on human rights and its concomitant socio-legal instruments to address GBV, especially when it is subliminal in nature and thereby occurs during “times of peace.” Moreover, it recognizes the need to expand human rights discourse to recognize forms of violence that often lie beyond the quantifiable realm of the empirical, but nonetheless remain insidious and embedded, requiring different tools for its measurement. Thirdly, an appeal to defenders of human rights and agents of law is made to shift their attention to everyday subliminal forms of GBV, while developing the requisite competence and accountability to offer relief.

If viewed as a spectrum or a continuum, GBV spans from the spectacular to the most mundane, from the exotic to the banal. Brutal acts of GBV that have gained mention in the human rights framework, given their occurrence within conflict zones, include arbitrary killings, sexual violence used as a tactic of war, human trafficking and other such brutalities, and rightly draw international and public outrage. However, the concept of symbolic (Bourdieu, 1970) and subliminal violence serves as an instructive tool to shift our gaze from the more severe and manifest forms of violence, to the “workings” of low-intensity and insidious forms of violence that often operate during “peacetime” but reach a tipping point during conflict or crisis events. In their work, [Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois](#) use the term “everyday violence” to highlight the social indifference towards the most disturbing forms of suffering caused to survivors of GBV by institutional processes and discourses.

Our contemporary condition has exposed us to the complexities of violence, particularly the palimpsestic layers of GBV given the porous demarcations between the private and the political. Latent GBV that operates in “times of peace” is often not given due policy-level and legal attention, unlike manifest violence, given the problems of measurement. What is not measured is often silenced and forgotten, removed from discussion and debate. As [Gayatri Spivak](#) notes, measuring restricts what is viewed and erases that which is “not identified.”

> **Feminist epistemologies and contextualization to visibilize hidden everyday violence**

Positivism, in its quest for scientificity, has sought to develop quantifiable indicators. Human rights discourse usually shines the spotlight on corporeal injuries and forms of violence that are manifest and found in conflict zones, revealing destructive, deviant, and aberrant behaviors, as these may be measured discreetly, by prevalence or incidence. In its historical alliance with the tradition of positivist methodology and neoliberal quantification, the human rights paradigm may inevitably have tended to disregard richly detailed narratives. The resultant “[thick descriptions](#)” or “counter accounts” are embodied in everyday lived experience, requiring an ontological break from narrow empiricism and a shift to an interpretivist feminist standpoint that recognizes the subjective experience of the violated as valid and allows them to verbalize, categorize and thereby measure the violence experienced by them. [Cecilia Menjivar](#), in her acutely perceptive ethnography of violence in Eastern Guatemala, documents the embodied experience of veiled violence endured by the Ladina women, subjected to everyday micro-contexts of devaluation, humiliation, and contempt, leading to gruesome manifestations of femicide. Menjivar retrieves from the recesses of normality, violence culturally regarded as “commonplace,” by recording women’s own observations of “*aguantar*” – to endure – indicating the routinization of pain.

By acknowledging the social and historical context of the particular knowers, feminist standpoint epistemologies create space for those who were, all the while, “absent subjects,” and retrieve their “[absent experiences](#).” This methodology promotes greater visibility of the stakeholders, who are no longer excluded from the systems of accounting, and grants them epistemic authority. Take, for instance, the formalism of court proceedings or a trial where the survivor of abuse is asked by agents of the law in their composed comportment to describe in categorical terms whether there is any “proof” of the violence that was committed, given the apparent “consent” that is evinced from her behavior and the status quo maintained by her actions. A human rights stance must enquire further and be grounded contextually in the specific realm of the woman’s experience of “hidden persuasion,” with the most implacable example being that exerted simply by “[the order of things](#).”

When agents of justice and upholders of the law and “[symbolic power](#)” carry such entrenched biases and base their “verdicts” on unreflexive presuppositions, injustice becomes unidentified, unexpressed and institutionalized. Justice is buried under the form and weight of the state and the larger social system.

> New tools for a shifting social reality

The required conceptual embracing – of the imperceptible – is not devoid of practical and legal complexities, not to mention ethical dilemmas. This is even more so given how feminist studies have often accorded a blind spot to symbolic violence regarded as too nebulous a category to ascertain. The codification of human rights, however, can never be an exhaustive and definitive process, but one that must be continuously informed by shifting social forces and empirical discoveries that necessitate different tools for measurement.

A foundational step in the direction towards codifying and penalizing everyday symbolic violence is the [Belém do Pará Convention](#) and the MESECVI model law that endeavor to achieve this end. Article 6 of the Convention recognizes women’s “right to be free from discrimination and to be free from cultural stereotypes and practices that deem them inferior or subordinate, or assign them fixed patterns of behavior.”

A powerful example in the case of South Asia are the “crimes of honor” related to patriarchal frameworks of “honor” and its corollary “shame” that control, direct and regulate women’s sexuality. However, muted forms of low-intensity violence which entail social ostracization of the woman and her family, leading for all practical purposes to her “social death,” rarely find any mention or categorical state condemnation. In fact, such acts of violence are legitimized, with their visibility subdued by agents of the law.

> A deeper commitment to human rights

Hidden forms of violence are efficiently internalized and supported by existing ideological narratives, custom, and institutional discourses. The human rights discourse must be attentive to the possibility of violence that does not manifest in brazen acts but through everyday compliance, as a result of deep-seated cultural ideologies and “[schemes](#)” that are supported historically.

These subliminal forms of violence lying underneath the veneer of “normal” social practices need to be extracted from normative social spaces, practices, institutional processes, and interactions that may cause damage of a less obvious kind. A deeper commitment to human rights would therefore need to manifest in a language that attends to this embeddedness of subordination and domination that women experience in asymmetric gender relations occurring within a specific cultural context. These cultural locations often legitimize perpetuation and reproduction, thereby normalizing quotidian reenactment. Acts of “mild” injustice that remain unpronounced therefore require different tools of measurement.

The lens of reflexivity and critical cultural analysis must refine the human rights discourse, to recognize that the mundanity of the everyday breeds potent forms of gendered violence. Arendt’s “[banality of evil](#)” only reminds us that “[history’s profoundest moments of iniquity](#) are not performed by extremists or psychopaths, but by ordinary people – potentially you and me – as we come to accept the premises of the existing order.” Silence and acceptance are indeed effectual mechanisms by which unequal power relations are reproduced.

An underdeveloped human rights discourse may reflect not just quiescence on the part of the state, but [quiescence of the collective conscience](#). Feminist epistemology and tools for examining “everyday violence” may offer the human rights paradigm another lens, more accommodative to the “thicker” silences and muffled yet retrievable voices of our “epistemic heroes,” who must rise from the epistemic oppression of a narrow empiricism. Reorienting human rights to a politics of recognition – by making visible the everyday acts of hidden injustice, through the very act of listening – would be a worthy project helping to bring collective healing to those who are storytellers of their invisible and incurable wounds. ■

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> The Russian Invasion of Ukraine from a Khaldunian Perspective

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Credit: Photo montage by Vítória Gonzalez, 2023.

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was a Muslim scholar and politician who has received much attention in the social sciences globally. His interdisciplinary work made invaluable contributions to the fields of economics, finance, urban studies, human geography, history, political theory, conflict studies, philosophy, and international relations, to name just a few. His writing, *al-Muqaddimah/Prolegomenon* and *Kitb al-'Ibar/History of Ibn Khaldun*, first appeared in the West in French in 1697, in Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*. Today, there are numerous translations of Ibn Khaldun's work in most of the languages still spoken and several scholars consider him one of the founders of sociology.

In February 2022, I was finishing my PhD dissertation on Ibn Khaldun and the study of state violence when Russia's war against Ukraine escalated into a full-scale invasion. I was crushed by this violence as a political scientist, but also as someone who has a Ukrainian partner and family in Kyiv. Like many, I struggled to make sense of this new hostile reality and felt frustrated by reductive and limited explanations of the war, often by "West-splaining" experts. It was Ibn Khaldun's writing that suddenly helped me to understand the dynamics of aggression and the overwhelming state violence practiced by the Russian regime against Ukraine. I share these reflections, highlighting the

relevance of Ibn Khaldun's ideas today in explaining urgent contemporary global sociopolitical dilemmas.

> The Khaldunian perspective

In principle, many global political conflicts result from the constitutive processes of modern nation-states and the state system since the seventeenth century and on. Problems that arose during constitutive processes have never been resolved. From a Khaldunian perspective, the constitutive sociopolitical and socioeconomic configurations reflect the nature of *'asabiyya* (i.e., ruling elites) and the way in which power structures have been formed within modern societies; particularly, how those structures were consolidated through violence and oppression in order to preserve the ruling elites' power and dominance, control over the means of production, and monopoly of violence. These Khaldunian concepts explicate motives and aims that lead states to export the surplus of violence, externally and internally, for the ruling elites either to gain or to maintain political power. Revisiting Ibn Khaldun's theses broadens our understanding of the crises of governance and legitimacy in today's global politics, from liberal democracy to military tyranny, authoritarianism, and monarchical regimes, as well as the rivalries between great powers in the twenty-first century. My engagement with

Khaldun's analysis of the formation of power structures has revealed to me the presence of the past and the hybrid nature of political and legal (modern and pre-modern) structures in today's international system.

The Khaldunian perspective highlights cycles of dominant dynastic groups, patriotism, or oligarchic rule. It also places the emphasis on internal struggles for power by cohesive social groups which aim to preserve the dominant elites' power and control of means of production, and most importantly to get rid of opponents and enemies (external and domestic). These dynamics have led to an "us versus them" attitude towards other countries in general and zero-sum thinking vis-à-vis those so-called enemies or foes. For example, in the case of Ukraine, Putin wants to create a new transregional regime, i.e., identity-based 'asabiyya in the post-Soviet space and to manage external competitors, represented by the EU and NATO enlargement schemes, as best he can against the backdrop of what he perceives as the sphere of his 'asabiyya power.

> Putin's 'asabiyya

As the head of the ruling Russian 'asabiyya, Putin defines politics in terms of the imposition of domination through violence and coercion, in the course of which the authority uses *ghalbah* and *qahr*, i.e., via brutal means such as murder and torture, to eliminate and diminish opponents and competitors who challenge the legitimacy and power of the 'asabiyya. In other words, Putin is exporting the surplus of violence (material and symbolic) which accompanied the rise of this 'asabiyya. He is doing so both internally, by repressing opposition groups and consolidating the security of his regime, and externally, via interstate expansionist offensive warfare. According to Ibn Khaldun, once an 'asabiyya establishes its (domestic) superiority, it sets itself the goal of domination over others and defeats subordinate groups to consolidate its power, thereby destroying and dissolving the group feeling that united the other competing and threatening dominant elites, lest its grip weaken.

In the face of failure to achieve decisive victory in Ukraine or to break the soul of Ukrainian resistance, the fate of the Putin regime could similarly be explained through a Khaldunian framework. Ibn Khaldun claimed that the regime's main foe is the disintegration of the 'asabiyya that constituted, preserved, and defended the regime in the first place. This disintegration comes about mainly through the diminution of the 'asabiyya's impact (i.e., the ability to enforce subjugation). The occurrence of such a transformation (with the curtailment of financial power as well) induces the destruction of the regime. Moreover, as Yassin

al-Haj Saleh argued, the defeat of Putin may well end his political life as well as being bad news for dictatorial regimes in Belarus, Central Asia, and the Middle East, whose survival and stability are dependent on the transregional support and patronage of Putin. Hence, his defeat in Ukraine would also weaken barbaric and traitorous regimes like that of Assad in Syria.

> Improving on realist and liberal interpretations

To recap, it would be wrong to reduce the reasons behind the outbreak of conflicts and crises within the international system solely to the ferocity of a few tyrants and ignore the impact of economic, political, and strategic international and regional factors. This is not what a Khaldunian perspective suggests. Instead, as the case of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (and other cases such as Syria, China, the United States, Israel, etc.) exemplifies, Ibn Khaldun points out the necessity to (re)examine the role and the function of dominant elites (i.e., historical blocs and social forces), side by side with other systematic indications, to reveal their crucial roles in both the establishment and preservation of the power structures of violent authoritarian regimes. The legitimacy of these regimes is constituted by exporting surplus violence against its citizens at home as a method of repression, and towards other countries as statecraft.

Unfortunately, while scholars are striving to imagine scenarios for exiting the vicious cycle of violence in today's international politics, such innovative insights have been largely overlooked. However, recently there has been growing recognition of the potential of building on Khaldunian frameworks to critique theories of international relations and analyze global cases. This logic is useful to overcome the shortcomings of realist and liberal interpretations of the latest episode of Russian aggression since Putin seized absolute power in 2008. Ibn Khaldun's theory surpasses the overwhelming focus of realism on prescriptions for peace and avoiding war based on the balance of power, security, and geopolitical calculations, and their possible implications for the international system dominated by nation-states. It does so through opening up the black box of the dynamics of authority-building and the influence of group-think by socially cohesive groups ('asabiyya). Likewise, Ibn Khaldun's theory challenges the neoliberal overemphasis on the role of international law, institutional arrangements, and security community thinking which help decision-making through the provision of valuable information on cooperation. The domination of 'asabiyya's relative-gains logic undermines the priorities of absolute gains which aims at reducing the insecurities of states by using institutions. ■

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