GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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International Sociological Association

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> Editorial

Climate change and ecological catastrophes, precarious work, poor working conditions and poverty, economic and social inequalities around the globe – these are some of the pressing issues of our times. In sociological debates we find far-reaching reflections on modernity and capitalism, and how ideas of progress and growth and the economic system are putting the ecological and social reproduction at risk. This issue of *Global Dialogue* focusses on the analysis of problems which are caused by dominant concepts of human-nature relationships and economic principles, in relation to work and labor as well as to the mode of living in different parts of the world. Some articles go back to the classics, others seek to analyze new aspects in their future relevance and others reflect on important diagnoses of the contemporary developments.

The issue starts with an interview, conducted by the prominent Austrian journalist Armin Thurnher, with the most renowned US-American philosopher and critical theorist Nancy Fraser. She reflects on her biographical experiences on the Left, presents her analysis of contemporary capitalism and shows that the pandemic has to be considered as an effect of an economy which erodes and destroys the social and ecological foundation of life.

In the theoretical section, Michael Fine analyzes the ongoing marketization of care and care work and the respective forms of governance and their effects in terms of insufficient care provisioning and poor working conditions. The pandemic and in particular the related deaths in care homes show the destructive tendencies of such a market society. G. Günter Voss presents a profound discussion on work and labor drawing on the classics and modern classics of philosophy, political and social science. Furthermore, his article sheds light on the complex interplay of paid and unpaid work and labor and their significance for the societal life.

The first symposium continues this reflection on work and labor by combining theoretical thoughts and empirical findings. It invites to a journey around the globe, investigates different forms of work and labor and analyzes the respective working conditions. Rafia Kazim shows how the pandemic affects migrant workers in India while Chris Tilly reflects on the global phenomenon of precarious and informal work. A comparative study from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland describes different modes of live-in care provision. Scholars from South Africa and the UK focus on digital work, discuss the function and influence of algorithms, the relevance of platform work in the Global South and future perspectives, as well as the online gig economy and the security of so-called "cloudworkers."

The second symposium engages in a critical debate around the Anthropocene concept. While some of the contributors update their perspective on this, others propose a more critical examination of the term. All contributions offer critical reflections on the hierarchical relation between humans and (non-human) nature and discuss a wide range of topics in the current sociological debate. Ariel Salleh criticizes the modern concept of nature and the capitalist and patriarchal form of dominance, confronting them with eco-socialist, eco-feminist ideas and approaches from social movements. Shoko Yoneyama and Gaia Giuliani, coming from different strands of research, focus on the contemporary diagnosis of the Anthropocene, showing its limitations and discussing the potentiality of different approaches to redefine human-nature relationships. Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen investigate how the "imperial mode of living" and the respective modes of exploitation of labor and nature could become hegemonic. Coming from a similar standpoint, Jason W. Moore's contribution debunks the Anthropocene concept as ideological and instead proposes a geohistorical analysis of the Capitalocene.

Not less important are the insights in the development of sociology. Mounir Saidani solicited articles from sociologists in the Maghreb. Bringing together perspectives from Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, they reflect on the scientific community, research and teaching, professional and (non-) public sociology in the region.

Last but not least, the 'Open Section' offers an analysis of grassroots activities in the face of the pandemic in Zambia, a discussion of Ibn Khaldun's paradigm of new science and a reflection on the concept of the imaginary in the context of the Brazilian sociology of law. ■

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

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GLOBAL DIALOGUE

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> Editorial Board

*Interviewed by Armin Thurnher, **Nancy Fraser** reflects on her experience of the Left, shares her analysis of contemporary capitalism and explains why the pandemic is an effect of an economy which erodes and destroys the social and ecological foundation of life.*
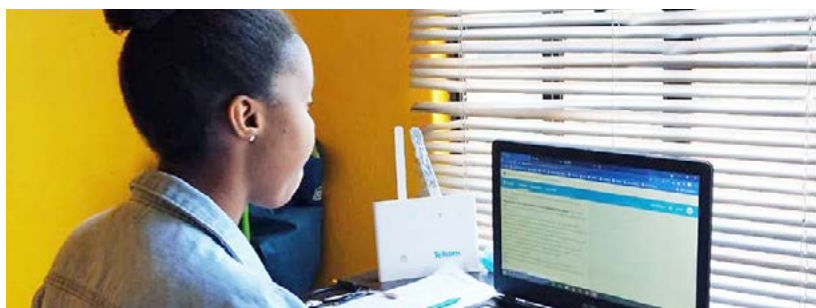
*Combining theoretical thoughts and empirical findings, this symposium provides an analysis of different forms of **work and labor** around the globe.*
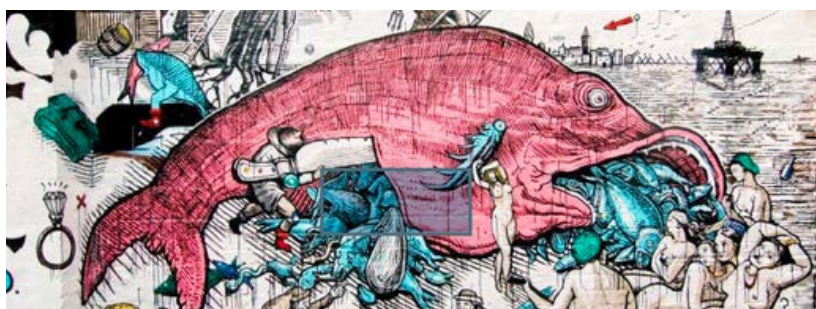
*The much discussed concept of **the Anthropocene** is here debated by engaging with theoretical precursors and giving it a critical examination from very different perspectives.*

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> In This Issue

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> "*It is only through the triad of care, self-care, and Earth care that human responsibility towards human and non-human life and nonlife becomes a political value*"
>
> Gaia Giuliani

> The Pandemic as the Perfect Storm
of Capitalist Irrationality

An Interview with Nancy Fraser
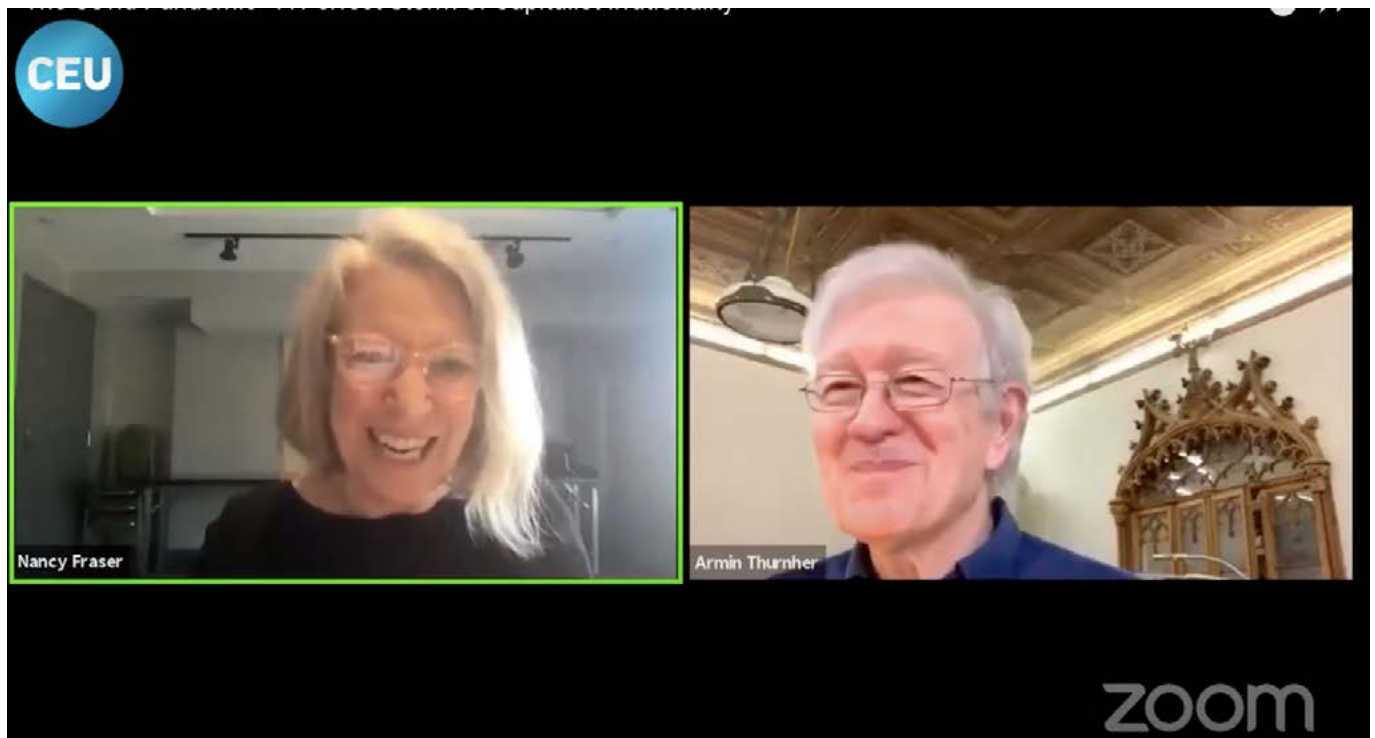
> In the context of her Karl Polanyi Visiting Professorship in 2021
> Nancy Fraser is interviewed by Armin Thurnher over Zoom.

In May 2021, **Nancy Fraser** the renowned philosopher, critical theorist, and Henry A. and Louise Loeb Professor of Political and Social Science at the New School for Social Research, met **Armin Thurnher**, the publisher of the important Austrian weekly *Falter* for a public interview. Nancy Fraser, as the first Karl Polanyi Visiting Professor hosted by the City of Vienna, the Central European University, the University of Vienna, the Vienna University of Economics and Business, the Vienna Chamber of Labor, and the International Karl Polanyi Society and Armin Thurnher, as a political journalist, talked about pressing issues of our times. This interview granted to *Global Dialogue* presents Nancy Fraser's biographical experiences on the left and her analysis of capitalism and the pandemic.

AT: Nancy Fraser, how does an American political philosopher become a socialist? Obviously, you are a member of the '68-Generation, but not many of that generation became socialists. How did it happen?

NF: I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, during a period in which it was a Jim Crow city, racially segregated by law. As a young child, that system seemed normal to me, even when things seemed off and I sensed something was wrong. But the eruption of the civil rights movement, the desegregation struggle suddenly caused me to reinterpret my childhood and family situation. My parents were Franklin Roosevelt liberals, yet I came to feel that they didn't really live what they preached. I channeled all my rebellious teenage anger into the political sphere – first into the civil rights struggle, then into anti-Vietnam War struggle, and from there, following the standard path of my generation, into SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), feminism, and so on.

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I'll tell you one little anecdote about how I became a socialist. I was very involved in the draft resistance movement to the Vietnam War. We encouraged young American men to burn their draft cards and refuse to enter the army. In this intensely radical atmosphere, I became obsessed by reports about Buddhist monks in Vietnam who were burning themselves alive to protest the war. Just to tell you how crazy this time was, I was a young college student and I was literally walking around saying to myself: If you're really against the war, how can you justify not burning yourself up? Fortunately, I happened to meet some Trotskyists, and they said, look, there's another way (*laughs*). That was how I became a socialist and joined the socialist wing of SDS.

Later, I found that my original idea that there might be a socialist revolution within a short number of years in the United States was an illusion. But the values and the spirit of the New Left have remained very vital for me ever since. My basic moral intuitions and political commitments have not really changed. I hope I've become more sophisticated, and I think I know a lot more about what it means to develop those intuitions and perspectives. But '68 remains crucial for me.

AT: What were your important teachers and academic influences?

NF: I studied first at Bryn Mawr College, which is an elite women's college, and I went there to do classics, Greek, and Latin. My teacher was Richmond Latimore, the great poet and translator of *The Iliad* – I went there specifically to study with him. Then I switched quickly to philosophy, which captivated me, while still using the linguistic knowledge I was accumulating. But as the sixties unfolded, I came to feel that the classical education I was getting was not suited to the moment. My activist self took over. I really struggled with these two passions: the political and the intellectual. An important teacher, who helped me figure out how to do justice to both, and who is now my colleague at the New School, was Richard J. Bernstein. He introduced me to the Frankfurt School. The first book that I read from this tradition was Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, which captured my sense of living in a society in which the conventional tropes for understanding the world were more of a mystification than a clarification.

AT: How did Karl Polanyi come into your biography? Did you find him interesting as a historian or as a counterpart maybe to Hayek whose ideology has become so dominant, although most people don't even know it exists?

NF: My initial encounter with Polanyi was during my student years at Bryn Mawr. I read *The Great Transformation* there for a political science course. But at that point, he

did not make a great impression on me, because by then, I was focused on Marx, and I suppose that Polanyi paled in comparison. It wasn't until many years later when I reread Polanyi that I realized what an amazing thinker he is, what a great treasure that book is. So I started teaching him. In the process of rereading and now teaching him, he made a huge impression on me. And I began to think of my worldview as revolving around "the two Karls," Marx and Polanyi, each of whom has tremendous insights but also some blind spots. And I saw my project as integrating the insights of these two Karls into a single, more comprehensive framework that would overcome the blind spots. Actually, that's not quite right. It's not just the two Karls I'm focused on, but "two Karls plus," where the "plus" means feminist theory, ecological theory, anticolonial and anti-imperial theory – none of which are adequately developed by Marx and Polanyi.

AT: Let's talk about the pandemic. When we think about the pandemic we think of it as some kind of natural catastrophe, as something unforeseen which has nothing to do with anything humans made. After I read your text about it in your upcoming book, I see things a little bit differently. Please elaborate.

NF: Most of *Cannibal Capitalism* was written before the outbreak of Covid, but the book includes an afterword called "A perfect storm of capitalist irrationality and injustice." That's how I see the pandemic, as the point where all of the irrationalities and injustices of capitalism converge. At the outset I shared your initial view of the virus as a natural disaster. But I've since learned about what the epidemiologists call zoonotic leaps to human beings from other species. The virus that causes COVID-19 comes from bats, living in remote caves far from human beings. For a very long time, it never caused anybody any trouble. But something happened that brought these bats into contact with a bridging or intermediate species and then brought that species into contact with us. That's how we got the virus. So the question is: What created these new proximities of species that had previously been distanced from one another? Well, two things: global warming and tropical deforestation, both of which have triggered massive migrations of species, which leave endangered or unsuitable species in search of new habitats where they can better survive. As a result, lots of distressed organisms that are trying to find new niches are brought into contact with other species that they've never had any previous contact with. And presto: new zoonotic virus transfer. That, by the way, is the same dynamic that precipitated previous corona virus outbreaks, such as SARS and MERS, as well as Ebola and AIDS. SARS was passed from bats to civets to humans. MERS from bats to camels to humans. It's probable, although the science isn't definitive, that COVID-19 was transmitted to us via pangolins or some other intermediary species. In every case, then, the triggering dynamic was global

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warming and tropical deforestation. So, what lies behind them? Capitalism. That's the system that has brought us global warming by bombarding the atmosphere with greenhouse gases. And it's also the system that is cutting down rain forests in order to make way for mining and cattle. COVID-19 is the child of capitalism. And it's by no means the last pandemic that we're going to face. Because these underlying causes continue. So, yes, the pandemic is natural, but it's not only natural. It's nature destabilized by capitalism.

AT: Also, capitalism, surprisingly enough, was very quick to develop a vaccine. And it becomes very creative through crisis. So isn't that a point for capitalism on the other side?

NF: Yes and no. We think too much of health care in terms of individual treatment. But it also has an infrastructural side, and the pandemic has shed a light on that side. It's shown how important it is to maintain health infrastructure – just as we have to maintain roads and bridges and physical infrastructure. Private firms now control the lion's share of the world's capacities to deal with health emergencies: the labor forces and raw materials, the machinery and production facilities, the supply chains and intellectual property. But they have no interest in the public good. What they care about is the bottom line, their profits and share price. We see this most clearly in the current struggle over intellectual property of the vaccine, which will determine whether it will be made available globally as a public good, as it should and must be if we're ever going to get this virus under control. The privatization of public healthcare capacity has been a huge handicap in that effort.

Now I come to your defense of capitalism. Well, the first point is that a great deal of the work that enabled rapid vaccine development came from the public sector, from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). I only know for sure about the United States side of this, but I suppose there have also been public contributions in other countries – certainly Cuba, China, and Russia, and perhaps also others. In any case, much of the preparatory work that made possible what we call the "Moderna" vaccine was done at the NIH. It's like the Internet. The US Defense Department pioneered the Internet. It began as a public good. Then, of course, it got taken over by Google, and Facebook, Microsoft, Apple, and so on. In both cases, this technology was originally developed in the public sector. So, it's by no means clear that capitalism deserves the credit. I would say science deserves the credit, and science can develop just as well through public support, as indeed, it often has.

AT: But the state has a problem, it is a victim of neoliberalization and nobody likes the state. Apparently authoritarian states like China (and democratic states who could isolate themselves and apply stronger measures, such as Australia and New Zealand) were successful in fighting the pandemic. In Europe, there are tendencies to overemphasize the danger for civil liberties over the measures for public health.

NF: If anything, this problem is even worse in the United States. The people who invaded the US Capitol building on January 6, hoping to prevent or delay the certification of Joe Biden's victory in the presidential election, have a theory – encouraged by Trump – about what they call "the deep state." They believe in some very bizarre and dangerous conspiracy theories, including Covid denialism, which, like climate denialism, says it's all a hoax, aimed at fostering more government control. These ideas have deep roots in our political culture, which is strongly individualist and libertarian. And this long-standing suspicion of the state has now been exacerbated to a fever pitch in the rightwing Trumpist populist ecosystem. As a leftist, I have plenty of objections to what states, above all the US state, have done, for example, invading Iraq and many other horrible things. I would much prefer to rely on international agencies, assuming they were competent and independent of the great powers. Unfortunately, that's not our situation; the WHO is weak and may not have done its job in the best possible way. In any case, when you're in a health emergency, as we are now, we have to rely on the existing public powers. And the countries that did best – and like you I would include China – are those where the population views public power in a relatively positive light. They may want a more democratic public power, but they're not lunatic libertarian individualists. The US has always struggled to validate power as opposed to the market. The country rapidly vaccinated about one hundred million people, but the effort stalled due to vaccine hesitancy and resistance. Under these circumstances I am in favor of introducing vaccine passports. You want to go to a basketball game, you want to go to a theater, you need to show proof that you've been vaccinated – or proof of a valid medical exception. Now, that's perhaps an infringement of individual liberty. But there are circumstances in which you need to create the right incentives. If it's okay to ban smoking in restaurants and to fine drivers for not wearing seatbelts, then it's okay to exclude vaccine refuseniks from indoor public gatherings.

AT: In this situation of uncontrolled, anti-state and anti-public communication, so to speak, with new social media as a worldwide force, how do you manufacture discontent or non consent, as opposed to manufacturing consent?

NF: I wouldn't say that *we* manufacture discontent. I'd say, rather, that *capitalism* manufactured discontent. We're in the midst of an acute, multi-dimensional global crisis, a general crisis of our whole social order. Covid is one aspect of this, but there are many others: economic, ecological, social, and political. In this situation, there is a widespread

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sense that our social system and our political leaders have failed us. Discontent is everywhere – and rightly so. Right-wing, authoritarian-exclusionary populism is one expression of this discontent – albeit one that badly mistakes its true causes and real solutions. Other, let's say, better, forms of discontent exist as well: left-wing populisms and Bernie Sanders-type movements, which represent more rational, promising, emancipatory forms of discontent. So the discontent is there. But you're right, it is interwoven with all sorts of processes, such as social media algorithms and influencers, which validate groupthink and consumerist lifestyles even in the midst of what looks to be wide defection from the neoliberal orthodoxy. So, it's a complicated situation.

In any case, I myself don't manufacture anything except some theory. And my hope is that the kind of theory I manufacture can help to clarify matters for people who are already in motion for their own reasons, in their own situations, facing their own impasses, which take different forms in different places for different populations. Many people really *are* in motion and *are* discontented. They want change and are experimenting with alternative understandings of the kind of change they want and alternative views about how to make it happen. I'm trying to intervene in this process by suggesting that many of the problems that are causing their discontent and their engagement can be traced back to one and the same thing: the design of capitalism as a social formation that is inherently primed to cannibalize nature, to scarf up the wealth and labor of racialized populations, to free-ride on care work and deplete our energies for sustaining our families and communities, and to hollow out the public powers we need to solve our problems. These are things that capitalism does non-accidentally, by virtue of its DNA. And so, my message is: take a look at this map of our social system and see where your discontent fits in and how it relates to the discontents of others. Understand that there's a single source, a single common enemy. Let's unite and fight. ◼

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> Care Home Deaths
amidst the Pandemic

by **Michael Fine**, Macquarie University, Australia, and ISA member and former Vice-President of ISA Research Committee on the Sociology of Aging (RC11)

Family visiting their grandmother in a nursing home separated by a glass pane due to COVID-19 restrictions, April 2021. Public Domain.

Social responses to the COVID-19 pandemic extend from the micro level of interpersonal interactions in domestic and virtual settings, to the macro level in which care practices and relations, writ large, affect entire national populations and their transnational exchanges. Actions at each of these levels need to be understood as forms of care.

Developing theoretical understandings that acknowledge the importance of care has become increasingly important for social theory and sociological research in recent years. Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 shows a distressing response by national governments and international institutions. While the public health response in a few countries demonstrated that it was possible to limit the impact of the pandemic, most countries struggled.

Under the stress of the pandemic, the state assumed caring responsibilities for the entire nation, taking on the task of supporting and protecting the population and managing their well-being with varying degrees of success. With markets unable to respond and in danger of collapsing entirely, the response by political leaders, improvised at the time and only partially successful in managing the subsequent events, was structured by the constitutional powers, institutions, and conventions which constitute state machinery.

Over the past two and a half centuries, in the era of social transformation from feudalism and tradition to global capitalism that produced the modern world, increasingly complex sets of social institutions for care provision emerged in what Polanyi termed "market societies." In the most recent phase, the restructuring of contemporary welfare capitalism has seen the state in most advanced economies using its powers to increasingly transform care through the promotion of service markets. The operation of these markets and quasi-markets in various forms, from childcare and education, through disability support and medical care across the life course, to aged care and housing, have come to increasingly underpin and shape modern life.

One of the most important challenges to social theory revealed in this process is the relatively ineffective response evident from most of the advanced capitalist economies, particularly those of Western Europe and North America. These wealthy, developed countries that normally head the global lists of affluent populations who enjoy high living standards, countries with supposedly effective regulatory systems and well-performing health and welfare systems, were found to be particularly vulnerable.

In 2020, caught out first by the spread of the virus, then later by problems with access to medical treatment, govern-

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ments of most advanced capitalist economies were unable to bring the contagion under effective control. In 2021, problems with vaccination supply and coverage, accompanied by widespread hostility towards and suspicion of vaccinations fanned by a range of ultra-conservative conspiracy movements and naïve believers in wellness and natural health, seemed to echo and then repeat the initial muddling steps of most of the wealthy capitalist welfare states.

The problems of social regulation and administration exposed by the pandemic were expressed in a myriad of forms, perhaps none more poignant and tragic than the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of thousands of the residents of aged care homes across the OECD. Care homes, in this sense, serve as a case study, a microcosm in which it is possible to identify and delineate many of the wide range of problems that the pandemic has exposed in the broader systems of care provision and regulation at the local, national, and global level.

Building on care theory, two propositions drawn from Polanyi's analysis of the creation of market society are advanced here with the intention of contributing to the theoretical understanding of the political and economic dimensions of care and informing international research on the response to the pandemic. The first identifies problems of governance arising from the marketization of care; the second concerns the consequences of the commodification of public care, particularly as expressed in the reliance on the increasingly precarious labor of care workers and other frontline staff.

> ## Deaths in care homes

During the first wave of Covid in 2020, mortality data was often unreliable and understated. Deaths in care homes were initially omitted from national totals in some countries. Recent data published by the International Long-Term Care Policy Network in February 2021 show that in 22 countries for which reliable figures were available over the first year of the pandemic, on average 41% of all COVID-19 deaths were among care home residents. This ranged from 75% of all Covid deaths in Australia to just 8% reported in South Korea. The figures are disproportionately high in most countries for which data is available. In Canada, 59% of all Covid deaths were in care homes, in the Netherlands 51%, Sweden 47%, Austria 44%. In the USA, there were 139,699 deaths in aged care homes, 39% of the national total of deaths in the first year of the pandemic.

Care homes are funded and regulated by the state to care and protect older people in need of support. They should serve as safe havens from contagion, offering their residents protection. Instead, they became centers for the spread of infection amongst the most vulnerable age group, evidence of the widespread failure of public policies to provide protection. The failure of the care homes in comparison with home-based care to protect against the spread of infection cannot be attributed to either the age or chronic illness of their residents. Nor can it be attributed to the failings of individual members of staff. Although a host of specific, locally contingent factors played a part in each episode of contagion, the global phenomenon of such deaths emphasizes the importance of a more theoretically grounded and sociological approach that makes visible the common elements behind this failure of public care.

In many countries, including Australia, progressive voices have argued that the deaths are the result of policies that allow aged care homes to prioritize profits over people by operating as private businesses. Although there is much circumstantial evidence to support this argument in some countries, international comparisons suggest that the precise link between profit seeking and deaths is neither causal nor universal. There were many deaths in some for-profit homes, but others recorded none. At the same time, large numbers of Covid deaths were also reported from some non-profit homes. In other countries, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, there were large numbers of care home deaths reported that cannot be linked to the pursuit of profit by care home owners.

> ## Marketization and governance

Yet the market link should not be dismissed. State support for aged care homes developed in response to the historic failure of markets. But over the past 20-30 years, care markets have been reintroduced in affluent capitalist states, effectively ensuring that the operation of all homes affected is placed under competitive market pressures, regardless of legal ownership status. This process (marketization) echoes and closely resembles the process Polanyi documented for the introduction of the *laissez-faire* market systems in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In each era, market systems were deliberately created by governments.

Marketization is present today in the care and human services sphere as both a legitimating logic across the entire system and a mode of operation that shapes interactions between and within its component parts. Its effect has been to fragment the system vertically, by breaking down relations of hierarchy and bureaucratic authority, and horizontally, disrupting and overturning collaboration at the local and regional levels and within services and facilities. Although the term was not used by Polanyi, understanding the problems of "governance" offers a strong hypothesis that helps explain the link between Covid deaths and marketization. Importantly, the concept of governance emerged alongside marketization and is associated in practice with ideologies such as the "New Public Management."

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Under conditions of market competition, authority has been increasingly delegated to the corporate level of management, where secrecy and independence take priority over collaboration and system integration. In care homes, the market emphasis on consumer choice has been accompanied by a move away from more traditional responsibilities for medical hygiene affecting professional staffing requirements in many cases. Care homes were thus increasingly ill-suited to managing the containment of widespread contagion. Despite this, care homes were required to operate as self-contained units, as they were deliberately cut off by public health measures from the wider system of acute health care services, especially hospitals. Their autonomous governance, it can be hypothesized, made them uniquely vulnerable to the spread of the coronavirus.

> **The outcomes of precarious care work**

Also closely linked to marketization has been the increasing reliance of care homes on precarious, low-paid labor. Market pressures have been widely used to drive down wage costs to contain fiscal expenditure while continuing to ensuring the profitability of investments in care. This has resulted in a cost reduction that prior to the outbreak of Covid has largely been at the expense of care workers and other key domestic support staff in care homes.

Numerous epidemiological studies and reports by health authorities have pointed to the link between the insecure employment of these essential workers and the spread of contagion within and between homes. The spread of precarious workers, forced to take on employment in a number of different homes or to work in different jobs to earn a living wage, has clearly contributed to the pandemic's penetration of aged care facilities. The rise of precarious care work thus reflects that the limits of care markets have

been reached – so that the very measures taken to sustain care provisions now have served instead to introduce threats to their security and undermine their long-term viability. Treating care as a commodity to be traded in market terms thus appears to have seen care effectively become "a false commodity" in Polanyi's terms, as Brigitte Aulenbacher and her colleagues have recently argued.

> **Conclusion**

From the perspective of care as provided in care homes, the pandemic's effects appear to have been wildly destructive. But they have also been perverse, serving also to expose the limits of marketization and creating conditions under which it has been both necessary and popular for the state to move back towards the center of social and political regulation. Is this also a harbinger of deeper change, the kind of historic shift the Polanyian concept of a double movement identifies as a likely response?

The global pandemic crisis and its national expressions point out the opportunity for democratic social learnings to reclaim care as an essential social good, rather than see it continue to be treated as an economic commodity ripe for further and even more extreme exploitation. But can a progressive and popular social movement be expected to arise in response to the failings exposed by the virus? And if so, what social conditions would be necessary to ensure its success? What forms might that assume? As the rise of anti-vaxer movements – inspired by conspiracy theories and feeding on increasingly aggressive and intolerant forms of national political populism – over the first two years of the pandemic have demonstrated, this is surely the key question the pandemic raises for social theory and sociological research. ■

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> Towards a Contemporary
Theorization of Work

by **G. Günter Voss**, Professor Emeritus, Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany

In industrial capitalism, a narrow view of work as economic activity took hold, with other forms of work (e.g. domestic or family-related work) being further marginalized and almost becoming "invisible work." Credits: (left picture) Creative Commons; (right picture) ILO Asia-Pacific. Some rights reserved.

In sociological terms, work may be understood as a purposeful human activity using physical strength and psycho-physical skills. The fact that other criteria (effort, utility, tools, wages, etc.) are often additionally invoked as primary aspects indicates that the category as such is far from unequivocally defined. Even though work is performed by individuals, it is at least indirectly always integrated into and shaped by constantly changing social contexts that are based on a division of labor (cooperation, organizations, etc.).

> What is work?

Like almost no other concept, the notion of work has been subject to historical change both scientifically and particularly regarding social practice. More recently, there have been fierce controversies over the question of what work actually is or is supposed to be. What follows are a few reflections on how to define work more clearly.

One long-standing question is whether work is above all a "burden," or whether it can also provide "pleasure" – as

a result of the sense of achievement it gives people – and offer important opportunities for positive self-development. There are two distinct perspectives hidden in this differentiation. One sees work as the basis of human existence constituting an indispensable opportunity for experience, the absence of which implies a veritable denial of essential human needs or even human dignity. Concrete historical manifestations of work, however, have been (and continue to be) associated with burdens and hazards for many groups in society, leading to ever new forms of the disutility of effort. This is expressed, for example, in the difference between the Latin words "*labor*" (travail, or hardship) and "*opus*" (creation; what has been created), which is also mirrored in the difference between the English words "labor" (including denoting the act of giving birth) and "work," and which is furthermore captured in the German difference between "*Arbeit*" and the less frequently used German word "*Werk*."

Fairly widely known, of course, is the distinction made by Karl Marx (but also by Adam Smith, and even by Aristotle, the latter of whom used the terms *oikonomia* and *chre-*

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matistics) between two aspects ("the double character of work/labor"): the creation of practical "use values" through "concrete" productive labor, on the one hand, and the generation of economic "exchange values" through "abstract" labor on the other. The development of this contrast, the argument runs, is systematically facilitated under capitalism, thus leading to an increasingly significant social contradiction.

Although the assumption that the activity of working people in advanced societies is predominantly geared towards earning money ("gainful work") went unquestioned for a long time, today, a more broadly conceived concept of work reflects the increasing recognition that work has assumed a great diversity of forms historically, differing not only with regard to its substance, but also its social perception. This also suggests that the specific form work takes has always been and still is subject to constant change. Alongside the income-oriented forms (for the majority varying types of dependent wage labor, and for a small number of people, a substantial number of forms of self-employment), there is a remarkable diversity of other manifestations of work: "volunteer work" or "civic engagement" (usually without the aim of earning money); "mandate-based" or "political work"; "domestic work" (shopping, cooking, cleaning etc.); "family-related and care work" (child-rearing, nursing, care of old persons etc.); "self-sustaining work" and "subsistence work" (the direct production of goods, including for self-sufficiency); "forced labor" (performed by convicts, conscripts, slaves etc.).

Similarly, for a long time, work was regarded quite straightforwardly as a primarily material "productive" activity, which turned out to be a rather inaccurate description of reality in many ways, however. It was gradually conceded that even "unproductive" work is very important (e.g., administrative work, knowledge-based work) and that "services," which were poorly understood for a long time, are increasingly gaining in importance (e.g., directly/indirectly personal, informational, financial, and technical services).

And, equally significantly, it was reluctantly acknowledged that there are more than just a few variants of work that are explicitly "destructive" (war-related work, violent criminal activity, damaging modification and/or the outright destruction of the natural world). The latter illustrates that work always denotes a constant modification of forms, creating a new form (e.g., a chair) while destroying an existing form (e.g., a tree).

Furthermore, the assessment of the much-invoked "utility" of work can differ quite strongly, depending on the respective vantage point: what may appear advantageous in some contexts can turn into substantial disadvantage in others; what may be useful in the short term can cause large-scale damage in the long term.

What is also being raised in a new form today is the question of whether work is an inherently human feature and thus an evolutionarily exclusive core characteristic of humans as "species-beings" or *Gattungswesen* (Marx), or whether other living creatures perform work as well. More recent ethnological findings show that work-like activities, the random isolated use of rudimentary tools, and even certain forms of production are not exclusive to placentals, leave alone to humans. Marx in fact already conceded that animals perform work and even use tools. He asserted that human labor, then, is characterized by the production of tools, but, above all, by a controlling consciousness, which is what distinguishes even the "worst architect" from the "best bee," to reference an image Marx uses. Today, we would have to add the (sometimes rather unsettling) question: To what extent might complex machines and processes actually perform work as well (e.g., flexible automation, robots, artificial intelligence)?

> Historically changing conceptions of work

Such conceptual tensions show that the highly diverging notions of work throughout its historical process of change represent an inherently sociological concern. To illustrate this, let us take a brief look back at history:

• In Greco-Roman antiquity, the fabrication (today, conceived of as "labor"), through physical activity, of goods for everyday practical life was primarily the task of unfree slaves and women, while the activity reserved for the full (male) citizen was political or philosophical intellectual work and, to some extent, military service. The craft (*techne*) of artisans represented an intermediate form.

• In the early Christian feudalism of the European Middle Ages, the common notion of work was that of a physical, for the most part agricultural, activity performed mainly by unfree individuals. Besides this, there were the "free" activities pursued by elites (nobility, clergy). What is significant is the continuously negative construal of physical tasks as divine punishment for the Fall of Man in Paradise. What was highly valued, by contrast, was actual religious practice ("worship service"). This understanding of work gradually moved towards a more positive view of practical physical activities, which subsequently came to be regarded as reflective of divinity and even as God's will. In the monasteries, a work culture emerged in which productive work, although still not equal to religious service, was explicitly appreciated (*ora et labora*).

• Against the backdrop of the foundation of towns, the combination of an expanding crafts culture, cross-regional trade and technological advances increasingly facilitated not only a high valuation of productive work, but also an orientation towards earning income that was explicitly detabooed for good. Luther and the Reformation assigned

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gainful work the status of an almost divine ordinance (a "calling" or *Berufung*). Max Weber emphasizes this in his Protestant-ethic thesis by identifying the "restless effort" to search for signs of divine chosenness, inherent in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, through the aspiration of professional success as the crucial foundation of Western ("Occidental") capitalism. The Renaissance and Enlightenment simultaneously emphasized the importance of work as the foundation of individual self-fulfillment, if not as a natural human right.

• In industrial capitalism, an even narrower view of work as economic activity took hold, with other forms of work (e.g. domestic or family-related work) being further marginalized culturally and almost becoming "invisible work." Formally recognized forms of work were considered to be specialized activities on the basis of an increasingly focused acquisition of relevant skills. The majority of the population (including, as is still the case in some regions, children) were inescapably dependent on obtaining the now required monetary means of subsistence through the paid sale of their labor capacity on specialized markets ("labor market"). Individuals who were denied or who lost this opportunity were regarded as the "unemployed," people "without work" (which they were not).

The actual history of work unfolds in parallel to the evolving social concept of work, but the two are not the same. The dominant viewpoint in each case always captures only a snapshot of the range of relevant work activities. Many socially important tasks, by contrast, are systematically ignored and thereby devalued. Added to this, the actual history of work is also always a history of "tools" and thus a history of the interaction of humans as "natural beings" with their natural living conditions and their "inner nature" (Marx). In this sense, the history of work is, on the one hand, a history of astonishing developments of human abilities and skills, technological possibilities, and the use of the potential of nature. At the same time, it is also a history of the destruction of natural and cultural values, the exploitation and alienation of humans, and ceaselessly recurring forms of the disutility of effort. This remains valid to this day, and increasingly so the greater the distance is from the centers of modern capitalism. And this includes not least the history of those people who are systematically excluded – both locally and on a global scale – from work and thus from employment opportunities that would allow them to sustain themselves. Since the novel kinds of mass immiseration that emerged during the early years of industrialization have been mitigated through the establishment of (limited) social security systems in some regions, the hazards associated with the deregulation of social security systems and employment relations are once again increasing everywhere. To the occasional surprise of many, there is frequent evidence of the fact that work-related illnesses manifest not only physically, but also as severe

psychological conditions even in the welfare states of the Global North.

> Sociological theorization of work

Sociology has dedicated itself to the subject of work time and again (albeit often only rather selectively). In the process, sociologists have drawn on concepts from different disciplines. But it was only after the turn of the twentieth century that sociological theory formation became more broad-based. The following examples illustrate this:

• Georg F.W. Hegel, with his idealistic subject philosophy, is the most influential early modern theoretician of work. He considers work to constitute an intellectually guided "externalization" (and, at the same time, self-"alienation") of human beings, as the basis for the latter to see themselves reflected in their products and attain "self-consciousness" through the subjective "appropriation" of these products.

• Karl Marx proceeds from Hegel, yet conceives of work not as "purely intellectual," but also as "sensuous human activity" and as predominantly economic productive activity. He develops his initially generally positive view on work and expands it into a comprehensive analysis and critique of labor under capitalist social relations, referring to the common form of work under capitalism as alienated "wage labor." According to Marx, people can only exist if they sell their "labor power," i.e., their capacity to work, as a commodity. Work that is integrated into controlled and monitored processes in a workplace context constitutes the basis of economic exploitation for the generation of "surplus value" and economic "profit." The possibility of a self-determined human experience of work, plausible from an anthropological perspective, is thus systematically distorted and ultimately undermined.

• In one of his early writings, Émile Durkheim develops a model of social differentiation. To him, the "division of labor" implies a categorization of society's capacities into specialized professional functions. Historically, he sees a transition from a poorly developed "mechanical" division of functions to similar social units (a "segmental division of labor," with a "solidarity" ensured through collective values) towards a differentiated "organic" distribution of functions to increasingly dissimilar units (with a novel kind of social cohesion arising from functional dependencies).

• Hannah Arendt distinguishes between fundamental forms of human activity. Proceeding from the Aristotelian terms *poiesis* (make, produce) and *praxis* (activity of free people or the soul) she develops three categories: "labor" as the activity that serves the continued material existence of the species, implying not freedom, but the absolute imperative to sustain life. This is contrasted with "work," the physical production of durable things for everyday life, complete with the consequential emergence of an all-encompassing

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"artificial" world that humans experience as alien to them. "Action," as the third category, Arendt argues, pertains – in analogy to the Aristotelian *praxis* – to the formation of a social plurality through understanding. The individual can survive without performing "labor" or "work," but, as a social being, is existentially dependent on political "action."

• Jürgen Habermas contrasts two types of human activity: "instrumental" activity in the form of labor, geared towards functional material production, and "communicative action," the production of sociality. In historical terms, he considers socially indispensable understanding-oriented action in the social "lifeworld" to be threatened by the instrumental action executed mainly within efficiency-oriented "systems" (economy, society).

Even though "work" (in the broader sense) characterizes a substantial proportion of human activity, human existence cannot be reduced to it. Human beings are not (as some still seem to believe) predominantly acquisitive, work-obsessed creatures in a "work-centered society." Such a view fails to capture the distinctiveness of many other important human activities. Categories such as "rest," "recreation," or "sports" all seek to incorporate this "other" – sometimes encountering the same difficulties when trying to formulate accurate definitions (such as regarding work aspects of sports and play). The task at hand with respect to the concept of work is overcoming a binary view based on a static truth claim. What would be far more relevant is a relational understanding based on flexible parameters in order to identify the particular ways in which "work" features in distinct activities. Only in that way can the above highlighted diversity of modern forms and notions of work be fully understood. ■

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> COVID-19 and India's Migrant Workers

by **Rafia Kazim**, LNM University, India, and member of ISA Research Committees on Sociology of Education (RC04), Language and Society (RC25), Women, Gender, and Society (RC32), and Visual Sociology (RC57)

Migrant workers are marching back to their villages after the announcement of lockdown 1.0 in 2020 at the Delhi-Rajasthan border. Credit: Ibsar Hussain.

The Indian government's non-preparedness to handle a pandemic or any health crisis became clear during the COVID-19 pandemic when it abruptly announced Lockdown 1.0 on the night of March 24, 2020. Citizens were left in utter chaos with only a four-hour window at their disposal before the onset of the nationwide curfew. The state's apathy towards migrants and the urban poor became evident in the manner the lockdown was imposed, which failed to factor in the immediate catastrophic impact on daily-wagers.

With barely any savings in hand and the impinging danger of starvation in the face of uncertainty, a vast majority of them were forced to return to their native places. According to the World Health Organization, in the first week of Lockdown 1.0, close to 50,000 migrants began travelling back to their native places from metropolitan centers such as Delhi and Mumbai.

The instances of the ways in which migrant workers lost their lives while trying to reach home by covering miles of distance on foot further lay bare their precarious situation. On May 8, 16 migrant laborers who were sleeping on the railways tracks in Aurangabad were mowed down by a goods train. Instead of blaming the police, who were mercilessly thrashing those found walking on the roads, and who were responsible for scaring the migrants to take alternative and relatively hassle-free routes, the government put all the blame on the migrants for being stupid enough to sleep on the tracks. Returning migrants died on transit routes, far from their native places, succumbing not to COVID-19 but to governmental apathy.

Ironically, for the "welfare state," the migrant poor remain only a "target population," bereft of any sense of "legitimate citizenship." The state devises few welfare schemes for them, and these are given to them only after calculating the political gains expected to accrue from them.

> The quintessential non-citizens!

Migrants' lives are marked with hardships and uncertainties. Undergirding this precarity is the sense of alienation that the migrants experience at the hands of hostile urbanites. For the urbanites who claim to be the legitimate citizens of the civil society, the migrants are the "anonymous other," a demographic and empirical category of people who, though needed to clean houses and cities and to build roads, bridges, and shopping malls, remain unwelcome as a civic menace to the aesthetics of the urban landscape. It is this collective hostile antipathy of the state and its "legitimate citizens" that makes survival of the ur-

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ban poor difficult even in normal times and even more so during times of natural emergency. Living on the fringes of the urban space as the "anonymous others" migrant workers fail to develop a sense of belonging in the city.

> Identity and belonging

The politics of identity and belonging indicate who one is, and is not, i.e., where one does not belong. An understanding of "home" is informed by the interplay of belonging and identity and is not defined by mere spatiality or temporality. Thus even after having spent years working in host cities, migrants long to return to their native villages. "Belonging" thus refers to the inadvertent creation of socio-economic, cultural, regional, and caste boundaries. For instance, in Delhi a migrant from Bihar comes to realize who he is and where he belongs, with the creation of multiple boundaries highlighting his multidimensional identity as a Bihari, a migrant, a laborer, a daily wager, a slum dweller, uncouth, unclean, and an illegitimate entrant to the urban space. His regional identity (i.e., *Bihari*) is invoked by the "legitimate citizens of Delhi" as an explanation for any kind of violence, mishap, accidents, or criminal activity; these "legitimate citizens" believe that they have been invested with the legitimate ownership rights to Delhi, and concomitantly to its security.

> All for a grievable death?

According to Judith Butler, grievability is a function of who counts as human, whose lives count as lives, and whose lives are worth grieving. Migrant workers and the urban poor, on account of their being the "anonymous other," are nothing but faceless numbers who are rendered ungrievable. Hence they believe that by dying in one's own home (where one belongs) would raise the grievability quotient by the sheer fact that there, one is a "socially constituted body" attached to others. And since loss is accompanied by transformation, there is losing, and there is the transformative effect of loss on those related to the departed soul. It becomes abundantly clear that for these migrant workers, choosing where to die takes precedence over how to die, for the simple reason that at their native places their death and the accompanying grief would at least earn them some respect as human beings, and they would not be treated as a nameless, faceless, homeless, dispensable population.

This partially explains the reckless march back home by thousands of migrant workers, stranded across the length and breadth of India: their readiness to encounter multiple

These are the conditions in which migrant workers from rural India inhabit the city spaces in Hyderabad after the lockdown was lifted. They live by the roadside as squatters and work at the construction sites while also carrying on with their traditional trade as stone grinders. Credit: Rafia Kazim.

threats – of COVID-19, hunger, exhaustion, police brutality – signals the fact that more than financial insecurities, migrant laborers were concerned about their psychological and social securities.

The very thought of dying in *pardes* – alien land/cities – was psychologically unbearable for migrant laborers. Several of the migrants said that if they were to die, they would rather die at "home" than in the cities. Indeed it is the fear of ungrievable death that weighs heavily upon these, in Arjun Appadurai's terms, "infirm and insufficient humans."

> In conclusion

The fact that the Indian migrant workers do not have a collective voice leaves them bereft of any robust bargaining power. The wages that they earn are among the lowest by global standards. A majority of them survive on their meager daily earnings.

The need of the hour is that the governments concerned should come up with comprehensive plans for migrant workers. They should also create a data base for them by requiring all migrant workers to register officially. Governments need to be sensitive toward the urban and rural poor of the country and should accordingly prioritize rebooting rural India with the introduction and implementation of village-centric schemes. Migrant workers' lives matter too! ■

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> Informal and Precarious Work

in a Global Context

by **Chris Tilly**, University of California, Los Angeles, USA and member of ISA Research Committees on Sociology of Work (RC30), Labor Movements (RC44), and Social Classes and Social Movements (RC47)
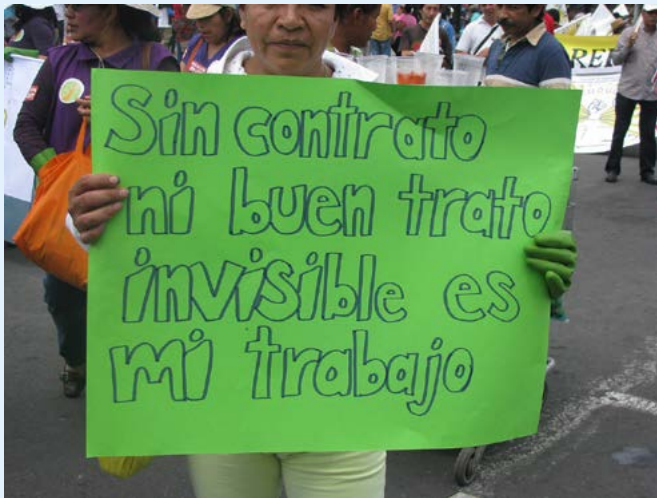
"With no labor contract nor decent treatment, my work is invisible." Domestic workers protest in Mexico City, 2018. Credit: Georgina Rojas-García.

> Precarity is spatially and temporally relative

Both precarious and informal work are defined in relative terms, so it is crucial to ground them in national contexts. At a conference ten years ago, I heard Ghanaian labor scholar Akua Britwum respond to a presentation on precarious work by International Labor Organization (ILO) officials by saying, "What you call precarious work sounds like what, in Ghana, we call… work." Years later, another ILO official commented to me, "What German workers complain about as precarious work, Korean workers would love to have. What Korean workers complain about as irregular work, South African workers would love to have."

So what is new about all this? Informality and precarity are definitely not new. In fact, the way Marx and Engels described manufacturing workers in 1848's *Communist Manifesto* sounds remarkably like descriptions of informal work today. This is not to say that all work was informal back then. Much of the world worked in unfree forms of labor governed by elaborate sets of rules – chattel slavery, indentured labor, peonage, sharecropping, and so on. It would be more accurate to say that in Marx's day new forms of precarious informal work were arising and growing.

For that matter, informal and precarious work never went away. For instance, Japan's famous lifetime employment model always covered only a minority of workers, excluding women, young and elderly people, and migrants. Even in Northern Europe and the United States and other former British settler colonies during formal labor's "golden age" in the 1950s-1960s, many toiled in informal or precarious jobs. This applied above all to women, young workers, and migrants. Migrants included both cross-border and internal migrants: in my country, the United States, the largest migrant group in those decades was six million native-born Black people migrating from South to North, but the *bracero* program importing guest workers from Mexico

Informal work is compensated work that is itself legal but falls beyond the reach or grasp of standard employment laws. "Beyond the reach" means work that simply is not covered by those laws. Self-employed workers like street vendors, but also many employed by others – domestic workers, agricultural workers, day laborers – are informal in this sense in much of the world. "Beyond the grasp" means that in theory the law applies, but in practice it is not implemented. This includes many workers in smaller enterprises – think of small retail stores or restaurants – but also some in very large enterprises. Informal employment is most emphatically not limited to people employed by informal, off-the-books businesses. In Mexico, for instance, most informal workers labor in formal enterprises. Though informal work may seem a marginal phenomenon of limited interest to many in the Global North, *most workers in the world work informally*, and it is past time to pay more attention to informal work and how it could be improved.

Another term, "precarious work," has recently caught on. The term, most often describing *formal* work that meets basic legal requirements, refers to work that is insecure and poorly paid compared to a normative "standard employment relationship." The two concepts overlap: precarious work does not necessarily avoid or violate employment laws, but most informal work is precarious.

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Myrtle Witbooi speaking at an International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) event, 2011. Witbooi, a South African domestic worker leader and herself a former domestic worker, serves as President of the Federation. Credit: IDWF.

also generated 4.6 million labor contracts over its 22-year existence.

What *is* new is in some ways a repeat of what was new in 1848 – informal and precarious work is spreading to places and populations where it hadn't been found before. This raises a question: informal and precarious work is defined relative to some "standard" form of employment. But what happens if that "standard" employment becomes so exceptional that it's hardly "standard" anymore? This question is particularly urgent in the Global South where informal work often employs most of the workforce (over 90% in India). The real problem here is not conceptual but practical: how can we defend the quality of jobs that are being degraded by informalization and precaritization?

> Organizing by precarious workers

A key part of the answer is organizing by the workers involved. Informal workers in Marx's day certainly organized, in some cases establishing trade unions that persist to this day. And today's precarious and informal workers are organizing as well, forming trade unions where it is legal, as well as associations, cooperatives, and other groups. Indeed, they have scored some of the greatest global working-class victories in recent years: for example, the ILO's adoption of Convention 189 affirming the rights of domestic workers, or India's recent law legalizing street vending.

Three things are particularly distinctive about how precarious informal workers organize. First, their relationship with capital is often complicated. The true employer can be concealed by layers of subcontracting, or workers may be exploited primarily by powerful suppliers or middlemen. Most have relatively little structural economic leverage – a strike may not be an effective tactic. And in many cases the government is implicated in the exploitation of informal workers, as when the US government set terms for the *bracero* program, or when the police harass or extort street vendors. For all these reasons, precarious and informal workers often target the state, pressing for benefits and protections.

Second, the groups most concentrated in informal and precarious work continue to be those who are marginalized in other ways, especially women, subordinated racial or ethnic groups, and migrants. Thus, they often organize around these identities as much as around work-based identities. In many cases their identities are intersectional, incorporating varied identities.

Finally, the fact that they seek to get the state to act on their behalf and the fact that they have varied and intersectional identities means that these groups of workers often build power by alliance-building – for instance with the women's movement, the immigrant rights movement, ethnic advocacy organizations, as well as unions.

Defending the rights of informal and precarious workers is the greatest challenge labor faces globally today. These workers themselves are taking the lead. The rest of us – as workers, scholars, and citizens – must join the fight as well. ∎

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Pablo Alvarado (far left), Co-Executive Director of the US National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), at the Pasadena (California) Community Job Center (an NDLON affiliate) with day laborers and supporters, 2017. Credit: Pasadena Community Job Center.

> Contested Care
in Austria, Germany, Switzerland

by **Brigitte Aulenbacher**, Johannes Kepler University, Austria and member of ISA Research Committees on Economy and Society (RC02), Poverty, Social Welfare and Social Policy (RC19), Sociology of Work (RC30), and Women, Gender, and Society (RC32), **Aranka Vanessa Benazha**, Goethe University, Germany, **Helma Lutz**, Goethe University, Germany and member of ISA Research Committees on Women, Gender, and Society (RC32), Biography and Society (RC38), and President of ISA Research Committee on Racism, Nationalism, Indigeneity, and Ethnicity (RC05), **Veronika Prieler**, Johannes Kepler University, Austria and member of ISA RC19 and RC32, and **Karin Schwiter** and **Jennifer Steiner**, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Credit: Eva Langhans.

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> Senior home care: new care markets and precarious migrant work

Like many other countries, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland are increasingly confronted with what are being called "care gaps." While their populations grow older, informal care capacities within families diminish, as the welfare state is reconfigured according to the now dominant adult worker model. At the same time, the state increasingly withdraws from the provision of social services – especially in long-term senior care. This has led to the emergence of a for-profit market that mediates transnational home care arrangements: care is outsourced to (mostly female) circular migrants from the new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe. These workers care for and live with seniors in their private homes for a few weeks or months at a time (live-in care). In this rapidly growing and highly competitive care market, brokering agencies play an increasingly important role. Although they have formalized the previously informal sector to some extent, this has not markedly improved working conditions: live-in care workers are often expected to be on call around the clock and their salaries undercut local wage levels by far. Although live-in care has emerged as a highly precarious field of work in all three countries, its differential regulation has shaped public debates and opportunities for critique.

> Austria: self-employed care workers

In Austria, live-in care is regularized as a self-employed profession. Working time or wage regulations do not apply

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to care workers. This makes the arrangement a flexible and comparatively cheap solution for households and for the Austrian welfare state. Nevertheless, the self-employment model has remained contested. Its opponents argue that – contrary to the ideal of care workers as independent market players – agencies heavily influence working conditions. For instance, they largely determine prices as well as salaries. Self-organized care worker initiatives thus call for abolishing what they see as bogus self-employment. Agencies and the Chamber of Commerce – which formally represents both agencies and workers – plead for further formalizing and professionalizing the existing model. The Austrian quality seal ÖQZ-24, for which agencies can voluntarily apply, can be seen as one result of agencies' lobbying work. It designates an attempt to reshape market competition in favor of agencies which commit themselves to minimal standards. As the quality seal aims at improving the quality of *care* (rather than the quality of *work*), the seal affects the working conditions only indirectly and does not treat them as an issue in its own right. Struggles by trade unions and care workers for better working conditions have intensified in recent years, but so far have had little impact on the field.

> Germany: posted care workers

In Germany, specific regulation for live-in care outside of generally applicable legislation does not exist. This is reflected in the multitude of legal frameworks to which agencies refer. Most agencies use the posting model: care workers are employed by agencies in the sending countries, which are supposed to pay their social security contributions. Still, agencies must adhere to basic working conditions in Germany (such as minimum wage and maximum working hours), even though these regulations are commonly circumvented. The transnational character of this work and the specific location of the workplace in private households hamper adequate control of working conditions. Furthermore, trade union representatives and other stakeholders criticize the regulatory gap and the subsequent lack of social protection for the workers. Achieving legal certainty is also a central goal of the industry – represented by the business interest association VHBP. Moreover, agencies strive to become officially accepted as a new pillar in the German long-term care sector and to shape legislation in their interest. This can be interpreted as an attempt to institutionalize the sector from below. On the part of the care workers, social media has become an important tool for communication and informal knowledge exchange – but to date, political self-organization in Germany is still in its infancy.

> Switzerland: care workers as employees

In Switzerland, live-in care is formalized as an employment relationship. Only agencies headquartered in Switzerland can lease workers to private households (personnel leasing) or broker arrangements in which workers are employed directly by households (personnel placement). In contrast to Austria and Germany, self-employment or posting are prohibited by law. In addition, live-in care has not been institutionalized as an additional pillar in the long-term care regime. Financial support by the state is limited to (medical) nursing services. Thus, people have to pay for live-in care out of their own pockets. In terms of labor law, work in private households is exempted from the Federal Work Act. This means that live-in caregivers do not enjoy the same protection as other workers in terms of maximum working hours or night work, for instance. And while the applicable law defines a minimum hourly wage, this is largely ineffective since on-call duty is not bindingly regulated. In recent years, there has been an ongoing regulatory and media debate which has problematized the precarious working conditions in the sector. In contrast to the other two countries, (self-)organized and unionized care workers have played a key role in it.

> Conclusion: live-in care as an intrinsically problematic model

Comparing the three countries we find that – especially in Germany and Austria – brokering agencies and their organizations have become powerful players in shaping regulations. Meanwhile, migrant workers' voices have remained largely absent. In the Swiss case, the formalization of live-in care as an employment relationship has facilitated grassroots organizing of workers and union representation. This has brought workers' concerns to public attention.

In spite of these differences, the live-in care model intrinsically builds on highly precarious working conditions for circular migrant workers in all three countries. In addition, it diminishes available care resources in Central and Eastern Europe. Based on these insights, we caution against further institutionalizing live-in care as a pillar in the long-term care regime. It can only ever be an exploitative quick fix. Solving the "care gap" sustainably requires a more fundamental revaluation of care work so that senior care can be provided by live-out workers who earn enough to live locally. ∎

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> The Future of Work
in the Digital Age

by **Ruth Castel-Branco**, **Sarah Cook**, **Hannah Dawson**, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, and **Edward Webster**, University of the Witwatersrand, and past president of ISA Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44)

Couriers informal work zone in Campus Square, Johannesburg, South Africa, March 2020. Credit: Fikile Masikane.

It is widely claimed that the rise of digital labor platforms is reshaping the future of work. While some praise the "platform economy" – both online web-based platform work ("crowd work") performed remotely and location-based platform work carried out in a specified area – for its promise of freedom and flexibility, research shows that the platform economy is deepening the casualization of labor and shifting risks such as occupational health and safety onto workers.

Much of the discussion assumes digital platforms are creating "new" types of work. However, most of these jobs have been around for a long time: metered taxis, restaurant food delivery services, and domestic cleaners. What, then, is "new" about emerging forms of gig work? And how are digital platforms changing what it means to be a formal or informal worker?

> ### > What is "new" about platform work in the Global South?

What is perhaps most distinctive about economies of the Global South is the high degree of informality. "New" forms of gig work take place in a context where informal work relations are already the norm rather than the exception. An ILO report on labor in digital platforms notes that in Africa, for example, more than 80 per cent of the population derives a livelihood primarily from informal activities.

Informal work relations have long been defined in contrast to formal employment – i.e., casual rather than regular jobs, the absence of a written and standard contract, no social benefits or protections, and lack of collective agency and representation. In reality, informal work involves an assortment of activities characterized by diverse employment arrangements. Chen[1] categorizes these as *own-account operators* who own the means of production, work autonomously, and sell their goods directly to market; *own-account workers* who are embedded in employment relations disguised as commercial ones; and *wage-workers*, who are excluded from labor and social protections due to employer evasion. Gender, race, and other structural hierarchies are often reflected in these categories: thus, men tend to dominate own-account work, where incomes are higher and the risk of falling into poverty lower, while women are concentrated in low-income activities.

Platform work reproduces many of these characteristics of informality. Platform workers are readily misclassified as *independent* contractors, thus lacking access to paid leave, benefits (including maternity benefits), social security, or occupational and health insurance. Yet, they are economically *dependent* on the platform and have little control over the app. Indeed, as Webster and Masikane[2] show, workers are subject to the app's "authoritarian algorithmic management," which assigns tasks, tracks performance, determines pay, and can terminate employment unilaterally.

Location-based work (e.g., delivery) is a primarily young, male activity, characterized by very long working hours and face-to-face contact. Although wages are low, earnings tend to be better than alternatives; and because de-

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mand and supply originate locally, it is easier for workers to organize collectively. In contrast, online web-based work (e.g., editing) is undertaken by invisibilized workers in the Global South for clients, most of whom are in the Global North. Characterized by shorter and more flexible working hours, it attracts more women who have to juggle productive and reproductive activities.

Digital platforms, while diverse, are highly concentrated: The 2021 ILO report mentioned above shows that 70% of revenues generated by digital platforms go to the United States and China alone. While this can undermine small and medium enterprises at the national level, it also creates new sources of power. In Gauteng, South Africa, Uber Eats riders are organizing in hybrid collectives, which originated as discrete mutual aid associations along national lines but have evolved into a region-wide network. Connected via WhatsApp, they have developed a repertoire of digital direct action, which includes collectively withholding their labor by logging off. Meanwhile, in Colombia, Rappi delivery workers developed a union app, UNIDAPP, with support from NGOs and the Central Workers' Union, and have successfully engaged in transnational direct action targeting the multinational platform.[3] In Uganda, the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union supported developing an app for *boda-boda* drivers, dramatically expanding its membership and improving couriers' conditions of work.

While interventions in the informal economy have often centered on enterprise development, ILO Convention 204 highlights the growing consensus that these must also involve the extension of hard-won labor and social protections to informal workers. In the UK, the Supreme Court ruled that Uber drivers are entitled to paid holidays, minimum wages, and pensions. In South Africa, the Competition Commission has launched an inquiry into the impact of platforms on small and medium enterprises.

> **What of the future?**

Two broad pathways can be identified: a deepening of the domination of foreign-owned tech giants with no national or global agreement on how to operate. This will create some informal jobs, but workers will be stuck in low-wage drudgery with none of the protections or benefits of formal employment. With profits and taxes retained abroad, this could be described as a form of recolonization of the Global South.

An alternative pathway could be a "digital social compact" created with the active participation of platform workers and their organizations. This would involve coherent global and national policies, including legislation to protect such workers. This optimistic path opens up the possibility of the extension of labor and social protections to informalized workers. ◼

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> Decoding Algorithmic Control

by **Sandiswa Mapukata**, **Shafee Verachia**, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, and **Edward Webster**, University of the Witwatersrand and past president of ISA Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44)

Illustration by Arbu.

The Justice League is a group of superheroes, including but not limited to Batman and Wonder Woman, attempting to save the artificial fictional world from the super villain Darkseid. The Algorithmic Justice League (AJL) founded in 2016, also aspires for a more just and equitable world, particularly in how artificial intelligence (AI) is used. The AJL focuses on promoting four key principles in fighting algorithmic control, namely, affirmative consent, meaningful transparency, continuous oversight and accountability, and actionable critique.

Although labeled "artificial intelligence" it is anything but artificial; as Kate Crawford writes in *The Atlas of AI*, "AI is both embodied and material." It is this materiality of AI that has seen the emergence of control over workers, a form of control that we define as algorithmic control. In this article we conceptualize algorithmic control and explore how it affects workers and how they are beginning to resist. We conclude with some suggestions on worker-led resistance to algorithmic control.

> What is an algorithm?

Across the globe, various stakeholders (including governments, academics, and activists) are grappling with how systems of algorithmic control are reshaping the world. The algorithm exists in an immaterial form, despite the fact that its existence and use have material consequences. An algorithm is a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations, especially by a computer. The rise of technologies like cloud computing, which allows the delivery of computing services over the Internet (e.g., Amazon Web Services), enables organizations and businesses to automate certain aspects of their operations. Some argue that algorithms are neutral. However, a growing body of work (see, for example, Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology*) shows how algorithms can be biased and discriminatory in practice as they are coded by human programmers based on a set of norms and instructions. If bias is fed into them, then the algorithms automate existing patterns of discrimination. This is especially true in the current ecosystem of Big Tech companies that are over-

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whelmingly run by white men. In her book *Algorithms of Oppression* Safiya Noble discusses how Google's algorithms have been discriminatory against Black women and girls.

> Algorithmic control – Reality

The algorithm has deepened control over work to a greater extent than ever before in the history of industrialization. It establishes control and profit maximization through the algorithm in the heart of the labor process. It is an example of what Marx called "valorization in command." The algorithms are designed to measure the workers' speed in completing the task. If platform workers do not perform the task according to the standards of the algorithm, management has the power to immediately alter the remuneration earned by the workers and/or dismiss (deactivate or disconnect their account) them from the platform. In December 2020, Uber drivers in Johannesburg, South Africa launched a protest by disabling the Uber app and not accepting requests for rides. Among the complaints of these drivers were the obscure way in which their accounts were blocked by Uber and the inequitable way in which the fees earned by drivers were unilaterally decided and implemented by Uber.

In *The Uberisation of Work* Edward Webster shows how, for companies like Uber, algorithms enable them to concentrate on high value-adding activities whilst simultaneously divesting from mainstream employment liabilities through the use of technology-enabled outsourcing and subcontracting practices. These companies display monopolistic tendencies, and bypass standard corporate governance as well as standard employment practices.

What is distinctive about algorithmic control is that it is invisible and inaccessible. In general, platform workers do not have access to the algorithm's source code. As the 2021 International Labour Organization (ILO) *World Employment and Social Outlook report* explains, accessing the underlying source code of an algorithm is the only way to determine whether that algorithm is producing outcomes that are anti-competitive and/or discriminatory. Because of trade secrecy laws and intellectual property rules at the level of the World Trade Organization, it is difficult to access this source code. The ILO further argues that information asymmetry augments the imbalance of power between algorithm owners and algorithm subjects.

> Algorithmic control – Resistance

Although algorithmic control appears insurmountable, employees are themselves using algorithms to fight for control over their working conditions. Following negotiations, Spain has passed the Rider Law that recognizes delivery riders as employees of digital platforms. Furthermore, it is mandatory for digital platforms to be transparent about how their algorithms affect working conditions. It is also critical to remember consumers when discussing algorithmic control and the resistance against it. Consumers have also become producers of value through the algorithms' mining of personal data. It could be argued that the consumer of Big Tech performs unpaid labor when making use of various platforms. This renders the consumers' position to be closer to that of the workers than to that of the managers of Big Tech firms.

When analyzing the experimentation around the resistance to these different manifestations of algorithmic control by Big Tech companies, researchers also need to consider the importance of space. Systems of algorithmic control have their own particularities across different spatial contexts. It is important to consider these differences beyond the national level. Given persisting inequalities that exist between the Global North and the Global South, both contexts bring to the fore important particularities that deepen conversations around resisting various forms of algorithmic control. It is critical to consider this when we think of how to formulate a conceptualization of a future of work that prioritizes the worker over the corporation. Cathy O'Neil captures this best in *Weapons of Math Destruction* when she writes that:

> *"Big Data processes codify the past. They do not invent the future. Doing that requires moral imagination, and that's something only humans can provide. We have to explicitly embed better values into our algorithms, creating Big Data models that follow our ethical lead. Sometimes that will mean putting fairness ahead of profit."* ◼

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> Online Labor Platforms:
Power Sans Accountability?

by **Kelle Howson**, University of Oxford, UK, **Patrick Feuerstein**, Social Science Research Centre Berlin, Germany, **Funda Ustek-Spilda**, University of Oxford, UK, **Alessio Bertolini**, University of Oxford, UK, **Hannah Johnston**, Northeastern University, USA, and **Mark Graham**, University of Oxford, UK
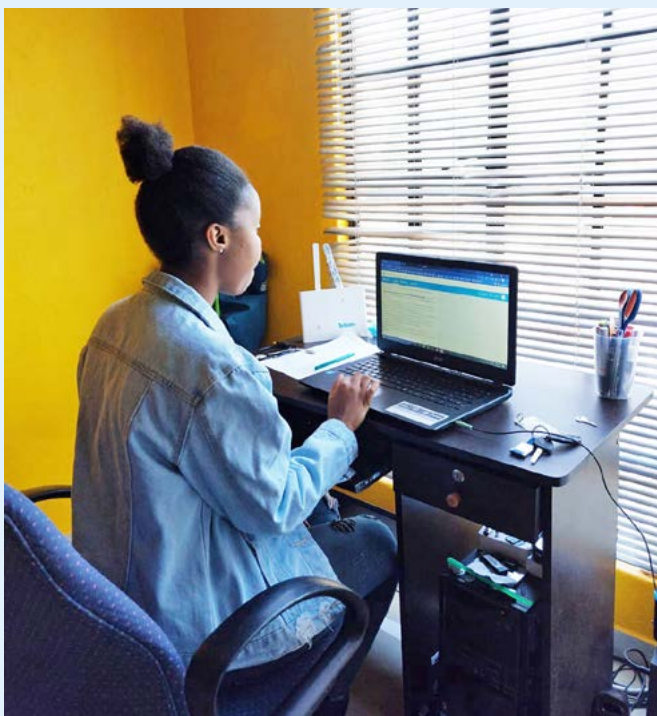
Online gig workers, or "cloudworkers" connect with clients through a platform interface, which extracts rents from transactions, and often exerts a high degree of control over the labor process.
Credit: Fairwork Project.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the widespread normalization of remote working for knowledge workers, with accompanying advancements in digital tools to facilitate this transition, including communications, video conferencing, algorithmic management and task allocation, and surveillance of workers. As the pandemic has shone a spotlight on and exacerbated many pre-existing inequalities in labor markets, a marked division has become apparent between those professions easily able to transition to remote working, and lower-wage service jobs which cannot be done remotely, and in which workers have faced the dual risks of exposure to the virus, and loss of income whilst quarantining or isolating.

While these inequitable labor market stratifications – between those with the ability to work remotely, and those whose work must be performed in person – may have become starker since the beginning of the pandemic, less widely discussed has been the fact that not all remote workers enjoy relative security. In fact, the online gig economy has thrived since the emergence of COVID-19. While these forms of labor contribute to the day-to-day conveniences of many, they remain less visible.

> **Labor control in cloudwork**

Online gig work shares defining characteristics with "geographically-tethered" gig work such as ride-hailing, food delivery, and cleaning (well-known examples being Uber, DiDi, Deliveroo). Online gig workers, or "cloudworkers" connect with clients through a platform interface, which extracts rents from transactions, and often exerts a high degree of control over the labor process. Platforms control how work is done, including through algorithmic management of task allocation, payment, and disciplinary actions. Like their counterparts in geographically-tethered work, they contractually designate workers as independent contractors or self-employed, thereby excluding them from key employment protections in most jurisdictions, such as minimum wage, sick pay, parental leave, and pensions.

However, unlike their counterparts in the taxi, delivery, and cleaning sectors, cloudwork platforms mediate work that can in theory be performed from anywhere in the world with an internet connection. They facilitate a complex web of cross-border linkages, and have been theorized to create a planetary-scale labor market. This dynamic creates novel opportunities for workers, but it also gives rise to vulnerabilities and puts workers at risk in specific ways.

First, platforms are constantly mediating relations between labor and clients in myriad jurisdictions, and this makes them difficult to capture in regulation. They own very few fixed assets, and maintain a contractual distance from

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their workers. This fluidity and ephemerality means they can evade local legislation designed to protect workers and the wider public, as well as tax and competition regimes.

This same dynamic serves to suppress workers' structural power. It is especially difficult for workers to organize, build solidarities, and take collective action to improve their working conditions, when they are atomized, geographically dispersed, and cast into competition with each other by the design of the platform. It is difficult to apply national regulatory frameworks that facilitate collective bargaining to global online labor platforms. The absence of formal structures of worker and public accountability in cloudwork gives platforms enormous power to dictate terms, shape working conditions, and ultimately behave as responsibly or irresponsibly as they wish.

Most cloudwork platforms have lower barriers to entry compared to standard employment. This can provide much needed opportunities to those who have been excluded from equitable participation in labor markets – such as workers in the Global South, people (predominantly women) with higher care and household duties, migrant workers, minority ethnic communities, and workers with disabilities. However, most international cloudwork platforms enroll a significant oversupply of labor. This helps clients find workers quickly and easily, but it means job availability and wages are suppressed for workers, who are in intense and increasing competition for a limited number of jobs.

On cloudwork platforms where tasks are especially short-term, known as "microtask" platforms (like Microworkers, Amazon Mechanical Turk, and Appen), workers might be participating in larger projects to, for instance, train machine learning systems by annotating datasets. These projects are broken down into very small granular tasks which can take a matter of seconds to complete. Here, hundreds of workers from dozens of countries contribute to the completion of a project for one client, in a very short space of time. This extremely granular outsourcing can serve to obscure the conditions of labor from the end product entirely, contributing to the invisibility of cloudwork, which in turn erodes workers' power, especially because individual workers are very easily terminated and replaced.

Because it can be very difficult for cloudworkers to exert their collective power and they are generally unprotected by national-level legislation, their quotidian working conditions remain precarious and risky. Most cloudwork platforms allow clients to reject work that might have already been completed by the worker, effectively allowing non-payment. Platforms may give workers the ability to contest rejections, but this is discretionary, often involves arduous automated processes which take more time than just completing another job, and because they have many more workers than clients, platforms commonly side with clients.

Workers on online labor platforms also face risks to their health and safety, including exposure to graphic or psychologically distressing content, as well as risks to their privacy, or inadequate data protection measures.

Finally workers are vulnerable to discrimination from clients, including discrimination based on assumptions or prejudices related to their gender, race, or geographical location.

> **Moves to protect cloudworkers**

Risky and exploitative conditions have proliferated in remote gig work in the absence of national or international regulatory approaches capable of taming platform power, and related barriers to worker organizing and collective bargaining. As insecure workers flock to remote working and online labor platforms as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, both grassroots labor power and policy solutions will be required to protect this class of workers. The Fairwork Project has co-produced with workers and experts a series of principles of fair cloudwork, to serve as a benchmark and a reference point for these efforts. The principles cover the dimensions of risk and harm discussed above, under the categories of Fair Pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management, and Fair Representation. We have assessed (scored) seventeen prominent platforms against these principles, to show the range of labor practices that exist in the online gig economy. While a few platforms achieved relatively positive assessments, ultimately our research shows that in a vacuum of accountability, platforms are constantly making choices that (often negatively) affect millions of workers' welfare and livelihoods, with a simple line of code. The first Fairwork cloudwork ratings aim to spotlight these deeply uneven power relations, and through subsequent annual scoring rounds we hope to contribute to combined efforts to introduce a fairer future of work for remote gig workers. ■

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> Holding
as Labor and Epistemology

by **Ariel Salleh**, Visiting Professor, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa and Life Member of the ISA
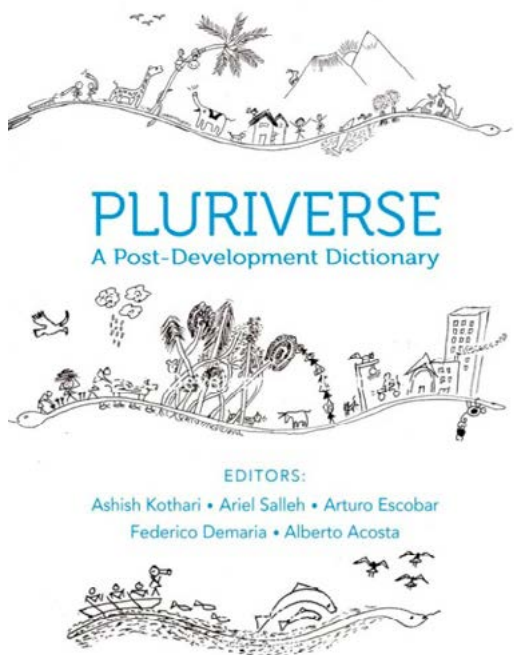
Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary. *Tulika Book (2019).*

The Eurocentric fantasy of "mastering nature" has always been a problematic ontology. And the originary link between matter and *mater* (Latin) is no coincidence. Early ecological feminists saw the civilizational drive to mastery as a sublimation of mother killing, allowing men to birth themselves culturally, without dependency on mysterious natural flows. Today, this same psychological dissociation that externalizes nature enables neoliberal powers, warfare, and modern science. Can the Oedipal deal that is academia come to terms with this?

> **Re-membering**

In any event, as the old culture of "othering" sets up a world of objects and abstractions, its mirror image remains sensuous and might be called "holding." Holding speaks to human embeddedness in the metabolism of nature; it reflects the originary moment of self-formation in a mother's arms. When people can sense themselves as nature-embodied, they readily understand how all Life-on-Earth is "entangled," as the New Materialists like to say. However, I am not drawn to that formulation; rather, I see holding

as a labor form   reproductive as distinct from productive. Deliberative holding energizes biophysical processes, such as the care of a child or Indigenous protection of a forest stand. Holding teaches an epistemology at once grounded and systemic.

In our edited collection *Pluriverse* (2019), Karin Amimoto Ingersoll describes this sensibility among Hawaiian fishermen:

"a non-instrumental navigational knowledge about the ocean, wind, tides, currents, sand, seaweed, fish, birds, and celestial bodies, as an interconnected system that allows for a distinct way of moving through the world... In this oceanic literacy, the body and the seascape interact in a complex discourse… alternative to the grand narrative of Western thought-worlds, which keep our 'selves' separate… Seeing thus becomes a political process, a reading of all memories and knowledges learned within oceanic time and space but which have been effaced by rigid colonial constructions of identity, place, and power… *[Too]* much of the world *proceeds without memory*, as if the spaces we inhabit are blank geographies, and thus available for consumption and development…" *[Italics added]*

> **Regenerative value**

As argued in the *Protestant Ethic* thesis, Christian patriarchalism and capitalism are historically nested frames. With the rise of global corporations and multilateral agencies, the othered knowledges of caregivers, small land holders, and First Nations peoples are demeaned as "cultural," not "economic." This keeps their astutely sustainable provisioning invisible in the white middle-class masculinist discourse, where both political Right and Left assume that labor must be "productive." That is, "real work" is about transforming matter into something "man-made" and thus having "value." Even progressive eco-socialists, Green New Dealers, and political economists argue quantitatively for relocating care inside the formal economy. As distinct from the Marxist use versus exchange dualism, reproductive or "metabolic" value does not need to be measured; it is experienced as ecosystems thrive, and human bodies with them.

There are many ways of meeting social needs without exploitation, extractivism, biodiversity loss, peak water,

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and climate change. And since the Seattle People's Caucus in 1999, the capitalist patriarchal imperium has been challenged by movements like the World Social Forum, Via Campesina, Indigenous Environment Network, World Women's March, and Extinction Rebellion, to name a few. Such initiatives take inspiration from decolonial thinkers like Ivan Illich and Wolfgang Sachs, and from ecofeminists like Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva with their powerful critique of "mal-development." The 2019 *Pluriverse* project opens up a cross-cultural sharing among Andean *buen vivir* exponents, Indian *swaraj* communities, European de-growthers, and others with the call the "global is local." To paraphrase Manfred Max-Neef: small self-managed economies are "synergistic," satisfying many needs at once – ecological regeneration, daily subsistence, learning, innovation, identity, and belonging.

> Structural parallels

Holding labor by housewives and peasants is recognizable in neighborhood and village efforts to stop pesticide use or mining. So too, these workers note the structural parallels between the commodification of nature and that of the bodies of women and Indigenous people. In the worldwide movement of movements, the political choice for women in the Global North is thus much the same choice as for racialized peoples in the Global South. There is either emancipation via the civic mechanism of legal rights or there is self-realization through communal reciprocity.

In the twenty-first century many people are taking big civilizational steps to put humanity and nature back together. The holistic science of the New Water Paradigm or the Peoples' Tribunal on the Rights of Mother Nature typify this re-membering. Food sovereignty is a central goal of pluriversal activism in the North and South – not to be confused with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization concept of "food security." The latter simply brings more

profiteering, dispossession of livelihoods, petro-farmed mono-crops, and polluting transcontinental Free Trade. Mainstream feminists, as well as some Left activists, and Greens talk confidently about adjusting the dominant capitalist paradigm. But too often, state powers capture well-intended actions for change with a repressive form of tolerance. This is seen already with the circular economy, green deals, and earth system governance.

> A bio-civilization?

A "fair and sustainable distribution" of the world's social product sounds good but makes no thermodynamic sense. As Jason Hickel points out: to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the global economy will have to grow 175 times its present size, as it already overshoots planetary capacities by 50% each year. Holding economies respect the material limits of nature in their commoning for local production. This people's paradigm reaches for a "bio-civilization" to replace the lonely high-tech individualism and life-negating formulae of viral states. Against the dissociated *cogito*, "I think, therefore I am," contrast the South African *ubuntu* ethic premised on the holding logic of "I am because you are." Related ways of worlding are *buen vivir*, eco-villages, the gift economy, *kyosei*, *sentipensar*, now in dialogue as a global tapestry of alternatives.

Could eco-socialists "re-embody" their materialism and consider the historical agency of an "othered" labor class – "meta-industrials" – from the domestic and geographic peripheries of capital? Here, at the edge of theory, are unspoken workers who meet the material needs of all classes. In fact, they even make capitalism possible by holding together the humanity-nature metabolism. This global class has no need of the rigid abstractions of a dying Eurocentric era – subject over object, humanity over nature, man over woman, white over black, economy over ecology.[1] ■

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1. The text adapts a lecture delivered to "Femmes, écologie et engagements politiques du Sud au Nord", Paris, June 2021.

> Miyazaki Anime:
Animism for the Anthropocene

by **Shoko Yoneyama**, University of Adelaide, Australia

My Neighbor Totoro *(1988).*
Credit: Studio Ghibli.

There is general agreement that addressing climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other existential crises associated with the Anthropocene requires a rethinking of human-nature relationships. But we have not progressed very far. Perhaps we need to envisage a totally different kind of relationship. Amitav Ghosh suggests we are suffering a crisis of imagination because we lack a cultural frame of reference that would enable us to imagine alternative ontologies. Is it possible that animism could help find a solution?

But isn't animism a "simple faith" of "primitive people" like hunter-gathers who are far removed from modernity? This is how animism is typically framed in Western orthodoxy: that it is basically an erroneous epistemology. "New animism," a more recent school of thought, takes a more positive view, presenting animism as a useful critique of modernity. The full promise of new animism, however, has yet to be realized. For the most part, animism still remains in a specimen-like position in university anthropology departments in the West.

> The global popularity of Miyazaki anime

Miyazaki Hayao, animation film director of Studio Ghibli, has a valuable role to play in inspiring deep engagement with the challenging realities of life in the Anthropocene. Animism as presented in his anime has the power to open the hearts and minds of millions of viewers to a positive reimagining of human-nature relationships. Miyazaki anime inspires our imagination with highly accessible images and stories of animism.

"You've got to be joking!" a colleague exclaimed at conference a few years back when I gave a paper making this same point. "Miyazaki anime is kid's stuff. My son watched *Totoro* when he was five." It's true: Miyazaki's work is mainly for children, but thanks to his movies, "Japanese children sense Totoro the tree spirit whenever they see trees," observes Takahata Isao, former co-director of Ghibli. This may very well be the case for children all around the world. The global influence of Miyazaki anime has grown exponentially since Disney began distribution of Ghibli films in 1996, *Spirited Away* received the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2003, and the films began to be streamed on Netflix and HBD Max.

> Critical animism

So what has the global popularity of Miyazaki anime to do with the Anthropocene?

Representations of animism in Miyazaki anime, especially in his signature films such as Nausicaä of the *Valley of the Wind* (1984), *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001), and *Ponyo* (2008), allow us to dig deeper into a reimagined human-nature relationship.

Reimagined? The situation is different in Japan, where animistic ontology and epistemology have continued to this day in parallel with modernity. There, animism exists as what UNESCO calls an intangible cultural heritage. In addition, a new kind of animism has evolved in response to the negative aspects of modernity, I argue, and "pow-

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Kodama (forest spirit) in Princess Mononoke *(1997). Credit: Studio Ghibli.*

ered up" (like the transformation of Pokémon) to form a reflexive critique of modernity. This is what I call "critical animism" or "postmodern animism."

Critical animism evolved from the discourse of Minamata disease sufferers: victims of one of the worst cases of industrial pollution in human history that has been ongoing since the 1950s. Filmgoers may be familiar with Johnny Depp's 2020 film *Minamata* that depicts the life of Eugene Smith, the photographer who took the iconic picture "Tomoko Uemura in Her Bath."

Sociologist Tsurumi Kazuko first observed this grassroots discourse on animism as a critique of modernity. I have pursued Tsurumi's "animism project" in my book *Animism in Contemporary Japan: Voices for the Anthropocene from Post-Fukushima Japan*[1] Miyazaki is one of four prominent Japanese intellectuals whose life narratives I examine in the book, exploring how these creative thinkers came up with the idea that animism could save the world.

Miyazaki Hayao maintains that animism is needed to save the world. The dissemination of animism therefore is his life project. The philosophical foundation of his work can be found in the manga version of *Nausicaä in the Valley of the Wind*, an epic story of over one thousand pages about human-nature relationships, which took him twelve years to complete (1982-94).

There are three components of Miyazaki's (critical) animism. One is the beautiful illustrations of nature endowed with agency. Nature is presented as a non-dualistic combination of the life-world and the spiritual-world, as symbolized by the Kodama, the forest spirit, in *Princess Mononoke*. The second component is the significance of place and the local, which sets his animism apart from the ideological and jingoistic discourse of state-led Japanese animism. His positioning of animism opens the possibility for it to be loosely connected with animism in other places to form what Arif Dirlik calls "translocal alliances." The third is the negation of dualisms, such as human/nature, good/evil, life/death, spiritual/material, seen/unseen, and light/dark, which has powerful theoretical implications.

Miyazaki Hayao's animism is theoretically radical as it challenges the taken-for-granted premises of the paradigm of social science and modernity, which are all based on hierarchical dualisms: 1) humans over nature (anthropocentrism); 2) the rational over the spiritual (secularism); and 3) the European tradition over the others (Eurocentrism). In other words, his animism disrupts the existing paradigm. It presents the potential to stimulate our imagination in a new direction to envisage a different paradigm that is free from hierarchical dualisms. For details, see my paper "Miyazaki Hayao's Animism and the Anthropocene" in *Theory, Culture & Society*.

With these theoretical implications, the global popularity of Miyazaki anime constitutes a significant sociological phenomenon. Miyazaki projects powerful images of animism into the hearts and minds of millions of viewers, just like Totoro planting tree seeds with children. The massive popularity of Miyazaki's work may suggest an intuitive grasping or hunger for his animistic stance. It is possible that his films of a re-enchanted world prepare viewers (including social scientists) to be more attuned to animistic epistemology and ontology, in a way that redresses Ghosh's crisis of imagination. In that sense, Miyazaki Hayao provides a "perfect story" for us to respond to the "perfect storm" of the Anthropocene. ■

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> The Anthropocene
and its Discontents

by **Gaia Giuliani**, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal

Cabo Verde.
Credit: Gaia Giuliani.

Recently, the Anthropocene as a concept and as a set of processes and phenomena has been brought to the center of debates in politics, as well as the arts, culture, and academia. Controversially, its more mainstream meaning refers to processes that have been traced back by scholars either to the second or the third industrial revolutions, when human intervention supposedly began having a great impact on the geological, physical, and biological composition of the planet.

> Critical views on the theory of the Anthropocene

In more critical views, the Anthropocene and the public debate on it serve to reconceptualize colonial and capitalist modernity (according to these critiques, the Anthropocene is a modern fact) and the relations between the human, the non-human, and the inanimate that have been privileged since. This reconceptualization takes place from a radical reconsideration of power structures governing organic and inorganic elements on a planetary scale.

These critical positions germinated at the intersection of anti-capitalist and decolonial approaches, from global anti-racist, feminist and queer critiques and epistemologies across disciplinary fields, from biology, geography, geology, and physics to cinema, sociology, anthropology, politics, philosophy, poetry and performative art. They draw from two important ideas developed within a transdisciplinary dialogue in environmental humanities, the first, that the environment is also a social phenomenon and the second, that in order to reverse the violent impact of the Anthropocene on any living being, the interdependence among humans and other living and inorganic components of the Earth has to be acknowledged and made political.

> The Anthropocenic Anthropos and its monsters

This brief contribution stems from these critical reflections, focusing on a specific feature of the Anthropocene related to the semiotic productivity of imaginaries, rhetoric, and practices, as well as juridical, political, and popular cultures emanating from a collective transcendental subject (Foucault) which can be identified as the Anthropos of/in the Anthropocene.

As Elisabeth Povinelli stresses, this Anthropos encompasses the Cartesian subject identified in postcolonial and

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decolonial critiques and the liberal man of the social contract, identified by feminist scholars as tied to the emergence of the violent Eurocentric and Western modernity that reshaped the world. Attached to this Anthropos is a vision of the world, history, geography, and humanity that – in semiotically constituting mind and body, human and not-human, man and woman, white and not-white, good and bad, rational and irrational, secular and fanatic, right and wrong, superior and inferior, salvific and deadly as separated entities – has imposed ontologies and logics that sustain and reproduce capitalism and its violence since the medieval premises of Eurocentric modernity.

Connecting theories and reflections on the entanglements between ontologies and logics of the Anthropocene on the one hand and racial capitalism, patriarchy, and coloniality on the other, I explore the crucial role the historically-produced discursive process of *monstrification* plays in constituting the Anthropos of the Anthropocene and in contributing toward the creation of the hegemonic "we" at the center of power structures and the extraction of value that have their origins in capitalist and colonial modernity. This survey reveals the relations between the operation of ontologies and logics of the Anthropocene and their legitimation across time and space, unveiling connections between the process of monstrification and the violence against colonial rebels, fugitive slaves, *quilombolas*, witches, infidels, rioting peasants, striking industrial workers, and indigenous resistance. It does so by linking the discursive construction of moral panic against them to colonial violence, state authoritarianism, and deadly extractivism.

In my most recent book *Monsters, Catastrophes and the Anthropocene: A Postcolonial Critique*, I explore European and Western imaginaries of natural disaster, mass migration, and terrorism through a postcolonial inquiry into modern conceptions of monstrosity and catastrophe. Established icons of popular visual culture in sci-fi, doomsday, and horror films and TV series, as well as in images reproduced by news media, help trace the genealogy of modern fears to ontologies and logics of the Anthropocene. The book does not stop at unveiling the inherent violence of the Anthropocene but goes on to propose a feminist, postdevelopmental and ecologist epistemology and a political project that embraces a new conception of *the political*.

> A feminist political project for the present

In response to the Anthropocenic logics and ontologies, I suggest the *political project of interdependent care, self-care, and Earth care*. From Western modern feminisms, I borrow the centrality of care – that is, that the well-being (psycho-social and cultural, sexual and economic) of individuals and communities is considered as a commons, a resource and a social duty (Nancy Fraser; Stefania Barca). The issue of care, nonetheless, is read through queer critiques, and those of Indigenous, Black, and working-class women. Drawing from Sara Ahmed and Audre Lorde's articulations, I consider self-care as a feminist project for individual and collective autonomy that integrates care, otherwise structured by patriarchal, racist, and capitalist gender roles, and that presupposes mutual care between humans and not-humans.

In the context of people on the move, the decolonial and anti-patriarchal struggles of minorities, as well as local and Indigenous resilience and resistance against environmental disasters and their neocolonial securitization, self-care means individual and collective autonomy, self-preservation, and solidarity against state surveillance, discipline, and abuse. *The political project of interdependent care, self-care, and Earth care* couples anti-authoritarianism with anti-colonial struggles against extractivism, exploitation, and vulnerabilization. This project is based not only on the understanding that capitalism and patriarchy, with their militarized walls and borders, camps and carceral archipelagos, systems of surveillance, immobility and forced mobility are essentially racist, but also on the premise that the coloniality of racial capitalism and patriarchy (Cedric J. Robinson, Ruth Gilmore, Laura Pulido) is grounded in a relationship with the planet that is solely profit-driven.

The anticolonial foundations of such a political project are thus necessarily anti-extractivist and based on the interdependence of all human, non-human, and inanimate components of the planet.

Such a conception brings to the foreground the issue of Earth care, that is, an anti-capitalist relation between all the planet's components. Drawing from Indigenous pluriverses, political movement epistemologies such as Kurdish *jineolojî*, and Western intellectuals like Donna Haraway, Stacey Alaimo, and Karen Barad, this plan extends the idea of care to non-human life. It is only through the triad of care, self-care, and Earth care that *human responsibility towards human and non-human life and nonlife becomes a political value*.

Many Global South and Indigenous communities, marginalized inhabitants of the Global North, and political movements across the planet embody these principles. Only a radical planetary political project that acknowledges the deadly monstrosity of the Anthropocenic logics and ontologies, and recognizes the situatedness and vital multiplicity of the responses to them, is able to actively contrast it. ■

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> The Imperial Mode of Living
and Capitalist Hegemony

by **Ulrich Brand**, University of Vienna, Austria and **Markus Wissen**, Berlin School of Economics and Law, Germany

One of many examples in which the high consumption of avocados in the global North leads to significant water withdrawal in the global South. This is a photo of a young high density planting in South Africa. Credit: Edrean 2013/Creative Commons.

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Critical social and social scientific thinking has a rich tradition of conceptualizing and concretely analyzing stability, change, and crises in capitalist societies. While mainstream social sciences usually speak of problems (to be solved) without looking at the root causes of those problems, analyses inspired by critical theory have as their starting point the inherently contradictory and also contested character of social relations. The concept of the "imperial mode of living"[1] aims to grasp some historical and current contradictions with an emphasis on a major challenge of our times: the deepening ecological crisis and its relationship to globalizing capitalism.

The deeply rooted patterns of production and consumption, which dominate above all in the early industrialized capitalist societies, presuppose a disproportionate access to nature and labor power on a global scale. This leads to the destruction of ecosystems, the overstretching of ecological sinks, high unemployment in many countries, and an uneven division of labor which tends to place extra burden on precarious workers, women, and (undocumented) migrants.

One of developed capitalism's characteristics is its need for a less developed or non-capitalist geographical and social "outside" from which it obtains raw materials and intermediate products, to which it shifts social and ecological burdens, and in which it appropriates both paid labor and unpaid care services. It is exclusionary and exclusive and presupposes an imperialist world order. At the same time, that order is normalized in countless and structured acts of production and consumption, which render its violent character invisible to those who benefit from it.

> Hegemony

The socially and ecologically problematic but also attractive fossil-industrialist, i.e., imperial, mode of production and living is broadly accepted, that is, hegemonic in terms of Antonio Gramsci. It creates material wealth (for many in the Global North and some in the Global South), profits and jobs, it is inscribed into dominant discourses ("the need for growth") and subjectivities ("to have more," "to get things cheaper") that are increasingly shaped by digitalization. The exploitation of labor and nature elsewhere is a condition of

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social compromises between capital and labor. And it takes place in the class, patriarchal, and racialized societies of the Global North itself, where significant social and geographical inequalities exist and have increased in recent decades.

In the Global North, the infrastructures of everyday life in areas such as food, transport, electricity, heat, or telecommunications to a large extent rely on material flows from elsewhere, on the workers who extract the respective resources, and on the ecological sinks on a global scale that absorb emissions produced by the operation of infrastructure systems. Workers in the Global North draw on these systems not just because they consider them to be components of a good life, but because they *depend* on them. Mostly, it is not an individual choice that makes workers purchase cheap "food from nowhere" (Philip McMichael), drive a car, or light their homes with electricity that is generated by burning fossil fuels. Rather, they have to do so in order to nourish their families, to get to work, or because the utility does not offer renewable alternatives since in many countries renewable energy has been offered at a higher price so far. Thus, workers are forced into the imperial mode of living simply because the latter is materialized and institutionalized in many of the life-sustaining systems of the Global North.

> ### North-South relations

The imperial mode of living implies a hierarchy on a global scale: Since the onset of colonialism, the working and living conditions in the economies of the Global South, with their predominant forms of resource extraction and industrial or service production, have been largely geared to the economic needs of the capitalist centers. Domestic class, gendered, sexed, and racialized relations are not exclusively, but essentially, oriented towards these needs.

The concept of an imperial mode of living therefore aims to show and explain how domination, power, and violence are normalized in neocolonial North-South relations, in class and gender relations, and by racialized relations in the practices of consumption and production, so that they are no longer perceived as such. Many women, in particular racialized women, are placed at lower rungs in the division of labor, and their labor and also their bodies are more exploited; there is a tendency towards a feminization of poverty. This mode of living is not only deepened but also geographically expanded into the countries of the capitalist semi-periphery.

The current global constellation, including its historical formation, has both productive and destructive characteristics, it is shaped by uneven developments and interdependencies, crisis tendencies, and the stabilizing aspects of the imperial mode of living, that is, its crisis deepening aspects that – at the same time – are part of dealing with the crisis.

A prominent example of this contradictory dynamic is the current enormous effort to replace the combustion engine of cars with the electric engine. The economic, political, and scientific protagonists of this strategy promise that it will deal effectively with the climate crisis (the transport sector is still a main contributor to greenhouse gas emissions). Actually however, electric cars hardly contribute to overcoming the socio-environmental problems caused by automobility. The raw material dependency will merely be shifted from fossil to metallic resources, a boom in electric cars will result in devastated landscapes in mining areas mainly in the Global South, and the domination of urban and rural spaces by cars at the expense of bikes, pedestrians, and public transport will remain.

The "Green Economy," of which electro-automobility is an outstanding symbol, promises a high return on investment, jobs, and a mitigation of the ecological crisis. In doing so it remains in the corridor of an ecological modernization which does not question the foundations of the capitalist mode of production and living. A green capitalist formation in which green economy strategies like the European Green Deal might result could contribute to processing the socio-ecological contradictions that have become ever more manifest in recent years. But it will do so in a spatially exclusive and temporally limited manner that continues to produce social and environmental costs and to externalize them in space and time.

> ### A heuristic to be discussed

The heuristic of "the imperial mode of living" draws on a diverse and rich intellectual tradition not only from the Global North but also from the Global South. Latin American forms of critical thinking, visible among other things in contributions to dependency theory or political ecology and in concepts such as "structural heterogeneity," "*caudillismo*," the "coloniality of power" (developed by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano), or the "coloniality of knowledge" (suggested by Edgardo Lander) are particularly worthwhile mentioning here.

Continuing the dialogue among these approaches and further applying them in empirical research will further enhance our understanding of the imperial mode of living and its increasing contradictions. Even more important, it will help to detect the alternatives that emerge when ruptures occur and supposed normalities are not considered normal any longer, and thus to excavate the potentials and contours of a solidary mode of living. ∎

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1. Brand, U. and Wissen M. (2021) *The Imperial Mode of Living. Everyday Life and the Ecological Crisis of Capitalism*. London: Verso.

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> Unthinking the Anthropocene:

Man and Nature in the Capitalocene

by **Jason W. Moore**, Binghamton University, New York, USA

Street-art version of "Big Fish Eating Small Fish" from Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Credit: Cecily Bang.

The Anthropocene is the most influential environmentalist concept of the new millennium. Is it also the major dangerous?

Anthropocene? Age of *Man*? The words are seemingly innocent and scientific. The grim realities of climate crisis are framed as a momentous collision. It is a Tale of the Fall. *Man* is "overwhelming the great forces of nature." For the Earth system scientists, *Man and Nature* is decidedly apolitical. The reality is starkly different. For the same scholars committed to finding "golden spikes" – a *Geological Anthropocene* – moved immediately to spin stories of human affairs. They replaced modernity's contentious histories with techno-demographic narratives. The *Popular Anthropocene* was born. Its twin pillars were Watts' steam engine (1784) and "the rapid expansion of mankind." If the history was poor, its ideology was worse. For Man and Nature is not innocent. It has been the operating system for imperial-bourgeois hegemony. Thomas Malthus' counter-revolutionary tract (1798) appeared amid unprecedented social radicalism. Paul R. Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968) appeared just as worker, peasant and student revolt threatened postwar capitalism. In both moments – like today's Anthropocene – the world's fundamental socio-ecological cleavages are cleansed in the baptismal fount of Naturalism. Its message? Pay no attention to *The Man* behind the curtain. The best we can hope for is the effective management of "natural laws."

> Man and nature, from bourgeois naturalism to 'There is no alternative'

If you've ever felt that it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, that's why. Bourgeois naturalism erases the history of struggles for a more just and democratic world. In this light, the Popular Anthropocene is an ecology of hopelessness. It is the environmentalist expression of neoliberal dogma: *There is no alternative*. One can only accept the inevitability of planetary management. (And even this seems unrealistic.) Man and Nature are the perfect opiate for an Environmental Imaginary that has always wanted to tell us the End Times are here, and never wanted to name – much less abolish – the System. Since the early 1970s, this has enabled an outpouring of sincere but politically useless hand-wringing on the part of the world's professional and managerial strata. Meanwhile, the One Percent drives us headlong into the planetary inferno.

Man and *Nature* are, then, hardly innocent. These words (and their cognates, like Society) gained their contemporary English-language meanings only after 1550, a turning

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point in the history of capitalism. It was an era of climate crisis, breakneck proletarianization, and plantation revolution. In this tumultuous era, Man and Nature took shape as *ruling abstractions*: practical guides to reorganizing human and other webs of life in service to endless accumulation. Cohered by civilizing projects, these abstractions framed an ethos of domination – of Man over Nature – that readily produced modern racism and sexism, all bound together by bourgeois naturalism and the world-historical drive to advance profitability. This was the dawn of the *Capitalocene*, a geohistorical era that unified new strategies of domination, exploitation and environment-making.

The emergence of capitalism as a world-ecology of power, profit and life therefore extended well beyond the economic. The Capitalocene knitted together new patterns of class exploitation and surplus accumulation in the web life. The creation of a capitalist Pangea after 1492 was a biogeographical watershed in planetary history. The Orbis Spike of 1610 – which for Maslin and Lewis marks the Anthropocene's *geological* origins – became the "golden spike" of carbon drawdown, the direct result of genocide, itself driven by slaving and other Cheap Nature strategies.

> Prometheanism: The geocultural logic of historical capitalism

Those strategies were not the disembodied logic of capital accumulation. They were enabled through a novel mode of geocultural domination: *Prometheanism*. Here Man, which had nothing to do with the human species, stood before Nature as God stood before Man. For sixteenth-century Spaniards, the imperfect natures of indigenous peoples might be saved through hard work for good Christians. Prometheanism was an animating principle of every great empire, whose priests and soldiers, merchants and planters, quickly "discovered" colonial peoples to be savage, irrational, and otherwise unfit for Civilization. Such peoples – indigenous, African, Celtic, Slavic and countless others – were Naturalized, the better they could be Civilized. Empire became a "school for civilization." Every empire that followed brought Civilization, and later "Development," to the savages.

What does this have to do with the climate crisis and the Anthropocene? Everything. Nature became everything that the bourgeoisie did not wish to pay for. Its *Cheapness* was a strategy of domination and accumulation that joined the "economic" moments of *valorization* to an unprecedented apparatus of geocultural *devaluation*. This is the heart of the Capitalocene alternative.

We may then pause to reflect critically upon IPCC's recent statement: "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land." This is unequivocally true – and unduly partial. For "*human influenced*" is the most ideologically charged phrase imaginable. We rightly question a starkly egalitarian distribution of historical responsibility for climate change in a system committed to a violently unequal distribution of wealth and power.

Anthropogenic climate change appears as a special brand of blaming the victims of exploitation, violence, and poverty. A more nearly accurate alternative? Ours is an era of *capitalogenic* climate crisis: the geological Anthropocene is made by *capital*, not "human influences." Since 1854, ninety corporations emitted two-thirds of industrial CO_2 emissions. Today, the richest one percent emit twice as many greenhouse gases as the poorest fifty percent.

> Capitalogenic climate change: Towards the euthanisation of the Capitalocene

Making sense of today's climate politics requires us to rethinking the class politics that have unfolded under the banner of Prometheanism since 1492. The Capitalocene perspective identifies the patterns of domination, accumulation, and environment-making at the heart of twenty-first century climate crisis. Crucially, it highlights the relations between geopolitical economy and geocultural domination in the web of life, producing a *capitalogenic* trinity: the climate class divide, climate apartheid, climate patriarchy. The intellectual – and therefore political – challenge is to engage these world-historical webs of life, domination, and accumulation. Against Big Green's planetary managerialism, we might begin to outline a working-class politics that treats webs of life not as things to be managed by (some) Men, but as comrades in a worldwide struggle for emancipation and a just sustainability. ◾

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> Sociology in the Maghreb:
History and Perspectives

by **Mounir Saidani**, University of Tunis El Manar, Tunisia, *Global Dialogue*'s Regional Editor for the Arab World, and ISA Executive Committee member (2018-22)
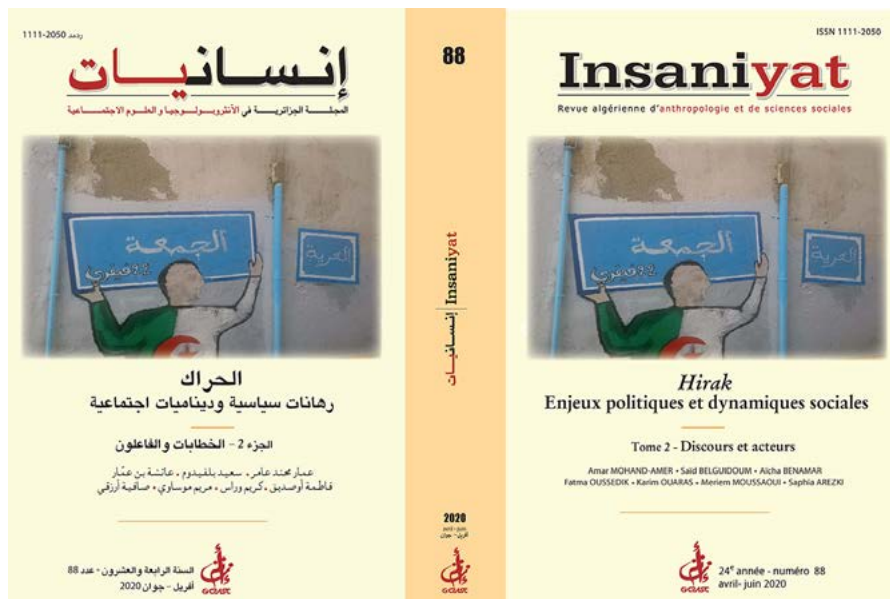
Insaniyat *("Humanities"), journal of the* Centre de Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle *(CRASC), the Cultural and Social Anthropology Research Center based in Algeria.*

The opportunity given by *Global Dialogue* to Maghrebian sociologists to disseminate insights into their work and process of scientific production is a great occasion to shed light on an "invisible" sociology. To be fair, "native" sociologists as well as their Diaspora colleagues scattered all over the world have so far made little effort to be visible. This is true even if the situations in Anglophone and Francophone worlds are dissimilar. *Global Dialogue,* whose discussions I have been close to over the last decade, is a rare opportunity that sociologists located in the Maghreb ought to take advantage of. When *Global Dialogue* editors proposed to give voice to North-African/Maghrebian sociologists, its Arab World editorial team decided to solicit sociologists throughout the region (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) to participate. Unfortunately, we managed to obtain no more than three articles.

The first article provides a brief history of sociology teaching and research in Libya. Libyan sociologist Mohammad Eltobuli's historical review harks back to the very beginnings of Libyan University and the inception of the first sociology department and gives interesting insights into the discipline's subsequent developments in the country. In the second article, Algerian historian and sociologist Hassan Remaoun makes us relive the postcolonial turn of sociology in Algeria since the early 1960s and then details the current situation of sociology teaching and research in Algerian universities. In the third and final contribution, I address the performance of Tunisian sociologists as they face the challenge of a threefold crisis in the country. Such analysis, merging the history and sociology of sociology, aims to initiate a discussion among Tunisian sociologists, in connection with regional and global realms.

The three articles point out the achievements and weaknesses of sociology produced in the Maghreb. The fairly long history of Maghrebian sociology, some aspects of which are exposed in the articles, raises several scientific issues: the paradigmatic identity/identities of the knowledge produced; the structuration of the local/regional scientific community; its position among international sociological schools and currents; etc. This short set of articles thus aims to launch dialogical feedback nationally, regionally, and internationally. ◼

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> Sociology in Libya

by **Mohammad Eltobuli**, University of Benghazi, Libya and former President of the University of Benghazi

Logo of the University of Tripoli, the oldest Libyan university.

Sociology became an important subject in Libya at the time when the Libyan University was established in the city of Benghazi in 1955. The Faculty of Arts and Education was created with five majors: Arabic language, history, geography, philosophy, and sociology. The faculty started with 33 male students, 13 of whom were sociology students. The first class of nine students graduated in the 1959-1960 school year. The Department of Sociology was then changed to a Department of Philosophical and Social Studies. In the 1972-73 academic year, the two departments were divided into independent departments. In 1966-67, a Faculty of Education was established in Tripoli, and a Department of Sociology was opened there in the year 1971-72.

> Further developments

As a result of the political, economic, and social changes that occurred in Libya after the discovery of oil in 1959, the Libyan government started paying much more attention to education in general and higher education in particular. Many graduate students were sent overseas, especially to the USA and Western Europe to pursue their postgraduate degrees.

Due to the development of higher education in Libya, and the need for more faculty members to teach in the newly established universities and departments of sociology that began to grow in various local universities, more graduate students were sent abroad. As soon as they graduated, they started teaching and assisting the foreign faculty members who were at the time the main staff members in every sociology department. By the year 2002-03 there were more than 27 faculty members throughout Libyan Departments of Sociology. These departments offered a variety of courses in sociology, including Social Theories, Research Methodology, Social Statistics, and Data Analysis as core courses. Other courses included Social Change, Modernization, Demography, Industrial Sociology, Social Issues, etc.

Thousands of students graduated from all the departments opened across the country. Such a huge number of graduates and the increasing number of qualified staff members to teach at the graduate level led to a focus on graduate studies within the country. This was also due to the external conflict that was going on between Libya and the Western countries, mainly America. Graduate programs were established in the two major universities in Libya: the University of Benghazi, and the University of Tripoli. At the moment, the majority of the departments offer at least a master's degree in sociology. One of the most important achievements in education in Libya was the establishment of the Libyan Academy for Postgraduate Studies in Tripoli in 1988. It has branch campuses in Benghazi, Misurata, Darna, and Ejdabia. The Academy offers various masters and PhD degrees in different fields of knowledge such as the sciences, engineering, law, languages and literature, and social sciences.

Most graduate programs in all sociology departments were mainly focused on issues of concern to the Libyan society, such as modernization and development. Now, the attention is directed to issues related to globalization, (post)modernization, poverty, international conflict, epidemics, and so forth.

> Challenges

This is how sociology became rooted and grew into one of the most important social sciences in Libyan universities and within the Libyan Academy for Postgraduate Studies. At the same time, sociology in Libya

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has faced many barriers, including the lack of solid qualified staff members for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs; most faculty came from neighboring countries for short periods to get college teaching experience before they went on to other schools, especially in the Gulf States. On the other hand, most staff members who taught at the University of Libya were well-known scholars in their original universities.

Other obstacles include the deficiency of libraries and the lack of books and journals. In addition, there is a lack of advisors to guide graduate students and lead them to choose the right research topics, theory, or methodology. To illustrate these problems, I will refer to interviews conducted by my colleague Omran M. Al Gueeb who dealt with sociology in Libya in an article delivered at a national conference. Among other problems, he cited the lack of a solid and clear strategy for graduate studies.

One outcome of this was that some of the topics chosen by students and their supervisors had little relevance for Libyan society.

As a result of improving the quality of both undergraduate and graduate programs, and establishing quality control offices in each university and college in the beginning of the 1990s, things got much better. Solid courses in various areas of sociology were introduced in the programs, and very competent staff members in research methodology, sociological theories, social statistics, and data analysis joined sociology departments in most universities. These efforts were paying dividends as Libyan students now did not have problems pursuing higher degrees abroad.

> **Conclusion**

The above describes how sociology in Libya was rooted with the establishment of the Libyan University in

the mid-fifties and developed through the years to become one of the most important fields in most Libyan universities. On the other hand, it faced many problems that have affected its development, including weak curricula, especially in theory and methodology. Libyan scholars, like so many elsewhere, failed to develop their own theories and applied Western theories to analyze social phenomena in Libya. However, due to the increasing number of sociology graduates from Western and other universities, sociology has grown into a more solid field among the social sciences in Libya. Moreover, a lot of sociology graduates have become leaders in Libyan institutions, and a few of them hold very high positions in various ministries such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education. ◼

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> Sociology in Algeria:
Teaching, Use, and Status

by **Hassan Remaoun**, retired professor, University of Oran 2 and Associate Director of Research at the Centre of Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology (CRASC), Oran, Algeria

The Algerian Hirak (an Arab word to name the 2019-2020 social movement). Credit: Creative Commons.

How can the question of use and status of a discipline such as sociology in Algeria today be discussed as concisely as possible? To be brief, it seems to me that at least three aspects should be taken into consideration:

(1) The teaching of sociology and its evolution since its introduction at the Algerian University.

(2) Social demands and opportunities for the discipline.

(3) The status which it seems to have in the field of knowledge and the overall dynamics characterizing it in relation to other social disciplines.

> The teaching of sociology

It was through the French academia, on which the University of Algiers depended until 1962, that the teaching and use of sociology – following the Durkheimian tradition – was introduced in Algeria. The discipline had to be grafted first of all onto the teaching of other degrees, such as philosophy, with the institutionalization of a certificate in morality and sociology. The sociology degree and the postgraduate doctorate date back to 1958, and in the same year the former Faculties of Letters were transformed into the Faculty of Letters and Humanities. Algeria, which gained its independence in July 1962, inherited this model. The University of Algiers was equipped in the following years with a sociology degree taught through four higher education certificates ("certificats d'enseignement supérieur," or CES): general sociology, social psychology, political and social economy and, as an option, ethnography of North Africa or demography.

From the 1970s and 1980s onward, this teaching has evolved with the break-up of the CES into more targeted teaching modules and hourly volumes integrating both theoretical courses and supervised or practical work and tutorials, as well as field internships during the first years. Instruction is given for four years with a common core of two years and a period of specialization of the same duration which leads to the writing of a dissertation at the end of the cycle. In the meantime, the universities, which had been limited since 1958 to Algiers and its annexes of Oran and Constantine, have seen their number multiply to reach several dozens today. Depending on their means, these can open one or more specialties (sociology of work, urban sociology, rural sociology, cultural sociology, political sociology, etc.). The teaching, which was initially in two different languages of instruction (Arabic and French), was completely Arabized at the beginning of the 1980s. This was done even earlier, in the 1970s, for philosophy and history. It should also be noted that the Bachelor of Arts, Master, and doctorate (in French "Licence-Master-Doctorat"), namely the LMD system (as generalized in Europe), was adopted about ten years ago. Finally, I would like to point out that, apart from the Durkheimian and Weberian traditions, some generations of Algerian sociologists have been influenced in their theoretical approach by Ibn Khaldun and

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Marx, as well as by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Berque (particularly on Algeria and the Maghreb).

> Social demand and opportunities for the discipline

With the expansion of the university system throughout the country and the demographic surge that has had a strong impact on the educational system, thousands of sociologists enter the labor market every year. But not all of them work in jobs that are directly related to their educational profile. They are often found in a wide variety of occupations depending on the availability of jobs, mainly in the public service (administration, teaching, press, police, economic sector, etc.), but also in the private sector. In fact, students who end up in the sociology stream often do so only because they are oriented there by the admissions system, especially when they have baccalaureate degrees in the humanities acquired with marks close to the lowest average needed to pass.

However, there is demand – both public and private – for the work of sociologists. Public institutions, in particular, require expertise in statistical surveys such as population censuses (dating back to 1850), which need assessment and planning where they take place. Social welfare, forecasting and control of social movements, to mention but a few, are other issues of needed sociological expertise. Public authorities mainly favor empirical surveys. The sociologists' approach to university teaching and scientific research is also appreciated. The latter is carried out through university theses, laboratory activities available at universities, and national research centers. Thus, the 1998-2002 Law on the orientation and five-year program of scientific research and technological development, which continues to establish priorities in the country, sets out 30 national research programs, ten of which directly or indirectly involve sociological know-how. The "Population and Society" program, which is entirely aimed at sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers, lists 118 themes, divided into 32 axes and 7 research areas: (1) City and urban space; (2) Rural space; (3) Family, women, and society; (4) Migration and spatial distribution of the population; (5) Work and employment; (6) Social mobility; (7) Knowledge, expression, and imagination.

> Status and role

The national state that emerged in Algeria after the country's independence inherited the university and scientific system bequeathed by colonization. Nevertheless, it criticized it, especially in the field of social sciences and humanities, which it considered to have served as a means of perpetuating and legitimizing the colonial order. This was particularly the case with regard to the racist assumptions informing disciplines such as historiography and ethnography, or even psychology and psychiatry, as practiced by the "School of Algiers," which operated at the university where the colonial elites were trained. The young state had therefore to reformulate the field of knowledge according to its own objectives in order to re-found society, targeting first and foremost the reclaiming of a national identity that had long been violated, as well as the need to promote economic and social development.

The sciences of man and society, or who uses them, had therefore to respond to these two imperatives by restructuring themselves within the framework of two paradigms:

The first, for identity purposes, was dominated by historiography (or rather national history) and included disciplines such as philosophy, theology (Islamic sciences), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), Arabic language studies, or even psychology linked to personality and education.

The second, supported by developmentalism, was framed by disciplines that could serve socioeconomic promotion and modernization, with the sociologist being called upon in the same way as the geographer or the linguist (translator), as well as the clinical or work psychologist and the specialist in positive law.

In this overall context, sociology, like all other cited disciplines, is torn in its implementation between its own epistemological imperatives and the permanent pressure of institutional and ideological constraints. From this viewpoint, negotiation and circumvention are permanent temptations and practices. It should also be noted that anthropology, which was relatively marginalized a few decades ago, is now being redeployed in university curricula, sometimes merging with sociology within the framework of socio-anthropology. ■

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> Tunisian Sociology:
Facing a Threefold Crisis

by **Mounir Saidani**, University of Tunis El Manar, Tunisia, *Global Dialogue's Regional Editor for the Arab World, and ISA Executive Committee member (2018-22)*

The Centre d'études et de recherches économiques et sociales *(CERES) was the first Tunisian social research center, founded in 1962. Since 1964, it has been publishing the* Revue tunisienne de sciences sociales *(Tunisian Social Sciences Journal).*

Over the past few decades, Tunisia has widely been analyzed in positive terms as a changing society. No more than ten years following the 2010-2011 Tunisian Revolution, however, analysts are less optimistic, developing stories of failure and crisis. Over the last year, the health crisis has become a social one, plunging nearly a quarter of the population into poverty. The crisis Tunisia is witnessing is threefold: it is at the same time economic, political, and sanitary.

The question I intend to answer hereafter is: How have Tunisian sociologists dealt with this triple crisis shaking Tunisia?

I will begin by depicting the structural landscape of Tunisian sociologists, go on to evaluate the prevailing paradigm in Tunisian sociology, and finally, appraise the participation of sociologists in public debate. In my conclusion, I will attempt to look beyond the crisis.

> A weakly organized scientific community

The XXI Congress of the Association Internationale des Sociologues de Langue Française (AISLF) which took place in 2021 was the second to be held in Tunisia. Yet, despite this history of membership in the association, the opportunity to promote an audience for Tunisian sociology wasn't grasped successfully. Tunisian participation in ISA scientific meetings goes back to the 1990s but only a few Tunisian sociologists have registered in subsequent meetings. The weakening of the Arab Sociology Association founded in Tunisia (1985) provides another example of the low collective commitment of Tunisian sociologists. However, they do partake in almost all the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) activities and in the Global Institute for Arabic Renewal (ARIG, founded in 2019), and the International Network for Arab Societies Study (founded in 2020). Some more renowned Tunisian sociologists also participate in sociological activities – such as webinars, conferences, and lectures – in neighboring countries.

In participating in international events, Tunisian sociologists are looking for networking, dialogue, and recognition. Yet, all participants express only an individual commitment. One of the many reasons behind this individuality is the absence of any associative structure for the Tunisian sociology community. The Tunisian Sociological Association (founded in 1988) has hardly held any activity over the past four years. Its third and last issue of the *Al Muqadima* journal goes back to 2010. The regulating deadline for organizing its triennial congress expired several months ago. Within the new generation of Tunisian sociologists there prevails a feeling of exclusion by the older generation, towards which they respond by a counter-exclusion. It is almost impossible to hold social science activities without collaborating with more financially and organizationally strong scientific

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institutions such as the Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, Tunis.

With such weakly structured networks, it is very hard for a "scientific community" to cope with the daily changing context for performing sociology. Yet, I argue that Tunisian sociologists are also expressing a more substantial inability to cope with social change. This inability has something to do with the paradigm that has so far been prevalent.

> A paradigm that denies social change

Like in other neighboring North African countries, modern Tunisian sociological teaching/ research activities were founded upon a colonial legacy. Postcolonial – yet not necessarily decolonial – sociology inherited a vision which looks at social change from a state molding-from-above lens. With a central nation-state-society relationship frame, developmentalist-modernizing sociology was to some extent myopic. Being near-sighted, its conception of social change granted society only a minor role in (re/de) constructing the configuration of the "rapport de force" between the three entities. The authoritarian – not socially anchored and disrupted – state was privileged as *the* historic change actor. The Tunisian nation was seen as merely chimerical and "invented" and its ability to control its historicity was denied. Thus, when the 2010-2011 popular Tunisian Revolution occurred, it didn't fit the then prevailing model for the analysis of social change.

The historical turning point of the 2010-2011 Revolution clearly demonstrated the need for a new sociological paradigm to understand what was going on. The existing lens made the "societal revenge on the state" hard to see, understand, conceptualize, and model. Meanwhile, the sanitary-social crisis further complicated any sociological work on the theoretical-paradigmatic level. A Tunisian sociol-

ogist performing in the field since the late 1960s assessed COVID-19 as a "*fait social total*" (a total social fact, following Mauss' words). This was a highly expressive depiction of the new lens with which social change is to be viewed. But only a few discussions are aimed at re(debating) objectivity/subjectivity, inside/outside, local/global, historical/structural issues in doing social research. There is still a very long way to go to draw away from the old prevailing views. The coming-from-below societal voices have not yet managed to obligate sociologists to reconsider their positions and analytical standpoints.

The shift to a new paradigm is a bold move and is just at its dawn. It will not be successful unless there is a wider dissemination of social knowledge.

> A non-public sociology

One of the results of the two previous characteristics of the hard-to-build Tunisian sociological field as well as scientific community is that sociological knowledge remains elitist. The first cause for this obviously lies in the long history of dictatorship under which Tunisian universities were isolated from society and social scholars excluded from social debates. The legacy of a lack of engagement in public debate has proved to be one of the most concerning issues facing sociologists in Tunisia.

As for the specific characteristics of social knowledge produced in Tunisia, it is worth highlighting that the language issue is crucial. On the one hand, sociology in Tunisia, despite an early-initiated Arabization policy going back to the mid-seventies, is still, partially at least, taught in French. The main conceptual tools, when presented to students, are usually followed by their original/translated to French "counterparts." While English mainly goes missing, an important part of the sociological research is delivered in French as a "foreign" language.

On the other hand, and in the event of quasi-total Arabization, sociological knowledge and findings remain hard to popularize. Thus, one can argue that, as formulated in its scientific jargon, sociological discourse hardly manages to be extendable. This is especially true when it comes to challenging other, more grounded, social discourses. The over-politicization of all the social debates in a country caught in the torment of unstoppable social change and uncontrollable "*prise de parole*" ("taking the floor", from French sociologist de Certeau) makes different sorts of social discourses seem equal and interchangeable.

In such situations, it is hard for scientific voices to be distinguished and heard. Thus, it is hard for Tunisian sociologists to legitimately claim the "rational expert" standpoint to be referred to in a fully organized public debate and rationally functioning public sphere.

> Conclusion

The performance lens taken in this article shows how, throughout its history, Tunisian sociology has been challenged to prove its very existence. The article also provides insights into the specific challenges of the last decade. The current threefold crisis in Tunisia is yet another turning point for Tunisian sociology, and one it does not seem well armed to handle successfully.

This article aims to animate a deep discussion on the future. One way to kindle this discussion is by bridging the gap between different generations of Tunisian sociologists, their individual career needs, and collective action. Enhancing their networking capabilities must be done simultaneously on the local, regional, and international levels. In our globalized world, such a well-armed Tunisian sociology can offer a valuable contribution to debates and the advancement of international social knowledge. ∎

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> Addressing Inequalities
in the Covid Response

by **Wilma S. Nchito**, University of Zambia, Zambia

The jumbo handwashing stations installed at Kasamba School and 58 other schools. Credit: Lusaka Water Security Initiative (LuWSI).

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When the first case of COVID-19 was announced in Zambia in early April 2020 the flurry of commentaries on social media pointed to the fact that the disease was thought by many to only affect certain sectors of society and not others. The fact that the person had just arrived from a holiday in Europe fueled the perception that the more affluent were the ones who were susceptible to this new disease whilst the masses had some level of immunity. As the first wave progressed it was evident that the most affected were indeed from the more affluent communities. This made it difficult for public health messages to penetrate unplanned settlements and rural areas as the question one would be asked was "have you ever seen anyone who died from COVID-19?" Without tangible evidence the pandemic remained a hoax to many. Others protested that it was just a way for government to get donations.

> ### The second wave

The second wave was not much different and the conspiracy theories raged on. All the while the general public in low-income communities paid little heed to public health warnings. Wearing a mask was considered unnecessary and in some regions of the city those wearing masks were considered as the ones who were spreading the virus. It was clearly a case of a tale of two cities, as one part wore masks whilst the other did not. Whilst Covid responses and actions were going on at the national level, it was hard to see what was taking place on the ground, at the grassroots in the unplanned settlements. What was being done to prepare these densely populated areas for the subsequent waves of the pandemic? This is where the Lusaka Water Security Initiative (LuWSI) comes in. LuWSI is a multi-stakeholder collaborative system involving the public and private sector, civil society, community-based organizations (CBOs), and local and international NGOs. LuWSI's aim is to attain "water security for all and to support a healthy and prosperous city." The initiative, started in 2016 through the support of the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) Natural Resources Stewardship (NatuRes) Programme, has grown to a membership of 30 partners. The partners have their own mandates but strive to work together to improve water security in the city.

> ### Grassroots response to Covid

When the Covid cases started rising in the country in mid-2020, the partners in LuWSI started considering ways in which they could contribute to improved hygiene practices in low-income communities considering that Covid required increased use of water and the purchase of ex-

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Water tanks donated to schools to promote handwashing. Credit: LuWSI.

tra soap and sanitizers. Low-income communities were already stretched by day-to-day livelihood struggles and COVID-19 was now presenting another cost at the household level. In response, different partners came up with various interventions and, despite the death rates being comparatively low in Zambia, continued upscaling their efforts and devising different methods of providing help to the underprivileged communities. The result has been several interventions carried out within the city of Lusaka. Activities like the cleaning and disinfecting of markets, provision of wash basins and soap, "hands-free" handwashing points, and raising awareness around Covid were some of the initial approaches.

The realization that school children in low-income communities were being left out of the messaging and interventions despite being potential carriers of the virus led to the launch of the "Safe Back To School Campaign" (SB2S) by the Lusaka City Council under the Green Schools Partnership Programme to provide outreach and support to over 100 schools around the city. The lead partners are WaterAid, the Lusaka City Council, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health. The SB2S campaign included training community members on home-based care, improving the COVID-19 response in schools, and hygiene promotion. Under this campaign, schools are being equipped with multiple "hands-free" handwashing stations to limit the possibilities of cross infection as school children wash their hands. The schools were also equipped with large water tanks to mitigate water shortages.

Another intervention carried out by LuWSI was the development of COVID-19 response plans at ward level.

Ward Development Committees (WDCs) were trained in communication skills to enable them to tell their Covid stories in their neighborhoods. After the training of the WDCs, grassroots communities have been provided with PPE (personal protective equipment) materials as another ongoing intervention under LuWSI. Under this initiative the WDCs that participated in the development of COVID-19 response plans are being given items like gloves, cleaning agents, sanitizers, soap, chlorine, wheely bins, brooms, and water tanks.

> Small steps to success

The interventions mentioned in this article may appear limited and small in scale. But when one asks what would have happened if LuWSI collaborative platform had not intervened in these low-income schools and communities, the answer is most likely "nothing." Granted, the central government has made efforts to educate on the guidelines that should be followed under Covid. The government has also issued directives requiring schools and business premises to ensure that they supply adequate sanitizing or handwashing facilities but most schools service communities that cannot afford to pay for these additional requirements brought about by the pandemic. In this case LuWSI has been able to consolidate resources from different partners on the platform to provide the much-needed help in low- income communities. The collaborative platform has shown that other stakeholders can successfully assist central governments in the fight against COVID-19. ■

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> Ibn Khaldun's paradigm

within Kuhn's philosophy

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

Statue of Ibn Khaldun in Tunisia. Credit: M. Dhifallah/Creative Commons.

This article focuses on Ibn Khaldun's discovery and invention of his New Science called in Arabic "*Ilmu al umran al bashari*", that is, "the science of human civilization and social organization" in his famous book *The Muqaddimah*. Here I use modern philosophy's perspective of science and Kuhn's concepts of paradigm, normal science and revolutionary science to shed light on the process that led Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) to discover his *new social science paradigm*.

Familiarity with the literature of modern philosophy of science is highly relevant to capture the revolutionary scientific spirit of the author of the *Muqaddimah*. I outline Kuhn's concepts in order to understand what he calls the shift from normal science to revolutionary science and to evaluate Ibn Khaldun's social thought.

> The concept of paradigm

In ordinary speech the word "paradigm" designates a typical example or model to be replicated or followed. In normal times, there is a consensus across the relevant scientific community about the theoretical and methodological rules to be followed, the instruments to be used, the problems to be investigated, and the standards by which research is to be judged, as Kuhn writes in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. This consensus derives from the adoption by the scientific community of some past scientific achievements as *its model* or *paradigm*. As explained below, this concept of the "paradigm" revolutionized thinking about the philosophy of science.

> Normal and revolutionary science

In his book, Kuhn refers to two types of science: *normal* science and *revolutionary* science. Kuhn considers normal science as a science where scientists share common knowledge, concepts, theories, rules in their fields. Deviance from that would make them outcasts from the domains of sciences. As such, normal science is based on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like. Normal science views past scientific achievements as legitimate foundations for its further practice. To this end, normal science often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments. Thus, as Kuhn explains, normal science can achieve progress and advancement through *the cumulative process* of scientific achievements.

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However, Kuhn points out that a scientific revolution is a *non-cumulative* developmental episode in which an older paradigm is replaced in whole or in part by an incompatible new one. In Kuhn's view, a scientific revolution that results in *paradigm change* is analogous to a political revolution. The latter begins with a growing sense by members of the community that existing institutions have ceased to meet adequately the problems posed by an environment that they have in part created: *anomaly* and *crisis*. Transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one from which a new tradition of normal science can emerge is not a cumulative process.

> ## The crisis of Arab Muslim historiography

Kuhn's perspective could be applied to Ibn Khaldun's scientific scholarship. The first step in Khaldun's scientific road is represented in his *strong critical position* on Muslim historians. He explicitly shows that Muslim historiography was in *full crisis*. His own terms, as reproduced below, speak very loudly about his attitude toward the lack of scientific credibility among those historians. The discipline of history or what Ibn Khaldun calls "*the Art of History*" did not appear to be in a good state in his time and before in the Muslim world. In Kuhn's terms, Muslim historiography was in crisis and needed a solution in the form of a new *revolutionary paradigm*, previously defined as divorced from the cumulative intellectual heritage of Muslim historians. The author of the *Muqaddimah* criticized Muslim historians of different periods. This sole quote describes Ibn Khaldun's view of the state of Muslim historiography:

"The outstanding Muslim historians made exhaustive collections of historical events and wrote them down in book form. But, then, persons who had no right to occupy themselves with history introduced into those books untrue gossip which they had thought up or freely invented, as well as false, discredited reports which they had made up or embellished. Many of their successors followed in their steps and passed that information on to us as they had heard it. *They did not look for*, or pay any attention to, the causes of events and conditions, nor did they eliminate or reject nonsensical stories. *Little effort is being made to get at the truth*. [...] *Blind trust* in tradition is an inherited trait in human beings."[1]

> ## Ibn Khaldun's revolutionary New Science

Ibn Khaldun's discovery of his New Science matches Kuhn's paradigm of revolutionary science. Ibn Khaldun states that his science *is not the result of a cumulative process*. As such, it is really a revolutionary science, in Kuhn's terms. The author of the *Muqaddimah* admits that *nobody* has written in the subject of his new science: "In fact, I have not come across a discussion along these lines by anyone." Ibn Khaldun mentions a number of thinkers and books like Aristotle's *Politics* and the work of Mobethan[2] and books by Muslim thinkers. He affirms that his new science is not inspired by the thought of those books: "We became aware of these things with God's help without the instruction of Aristotle or the teaching of the Mobethan." Ibn Khaldun spells out some features of his new science: " [The subject] is in way *an independent science*. [This science] has its own peculiar subject – that is, human civilization and social organization. The discussion of this topic is something new, extraordinary, and highly useful." However, Ibn Khaldun remains modest concerning the scope of his new innovated social science: "If [...] I have omitted some point, or if the problems of [this science] got confused with something else, the task of correcting remains for the discerning critic." ∎

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1. Khaldun I. (1980 English edition, tr. F. Rosenthal) *The Muqaddimah*, vol. I :6-7.
2. The word Mobethan refers to an Indian book analogous to Aristotle's *Politics*.

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> Social Imaginary
and the Sociology of Law in Brazil

by **Francisco Bedê**, IESP-UERJ, Brazil and **Gabriel S. Cerqueira**, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil

"A Justiça," by Alfredo Ceschiatti. The statue is located in front of the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court building. Credit: Ricardo/ Creative Commons.

The concept of the imaginary is becoming increasingly central for understanding the way the law works in contemporary Brazil. It is a crucial concept to analyze how the interaction between the social system of Brazilian law and the other aspects of social dynamics and national politics (the object of sociology of law) affects the concretization of values and aspirations that are central to modern life, such as: (1) a democratic political life, subordinated to the active involvement of citizens through their representatives instead of an oligarchical rule; (2) an economically autonomous and efficient national development; (3) a social life based on individual liberties, in which the effective functioning of the state happens within the limits of its citizens' fundamental rights.

Imaginary, here, should be understood as the worldview encompassed in the subject's representations and practices, insofar as these are mobilized as a common reference for collective dynamics and the functioning of institutions, in what Cornelius Castoriadis called the "social imaginary." In this sense, the concept of the imaginary stands not so far from the concept of ideology, as long as one doesn't understand ideology merely as a "false consciousness" (as a wrongful representation of reality), but as something that provides the coordinates of meaning for our concrete actions. Furthermore, we're mobilizing this concept to draw attention to the fact that worldviews are always deeply linked to aspects that are not immediately logical (i.e. that cannot be reduced to mere rationality). That is, the social imaginary operates, to a great extent, in between the lines, evoking implicit emotions and meanings.

> ## The abstract character of modern law

The abstract character of modern law is the main reason why the sociology of law should consider incorporating the concept of the imaginary. Modern law is anchored in the institution of citizenship that defines each individual as equal and free, as an autonomous subject and bearer of fundamental rights. It presupposes a highly abstract subject of rights: what defines a citizen is the fact that he/she is free and holds the same inalienable rights as every other citizen. The aspects of reality and of the concrete life of the individuals beyond that abstract equality are, therefore, renounced by the law as part of the dimension of private life and not as an object of rights. Thus, for something to become part of modern law and the modern legal order, it must be defined based on this abstract form (so that even specific rights and the so-called minority rights need to be elaborated as an expression of the citizens' fundamental freedom and equality).

Even though the normative foundation of this abstract and "universal" legal framework vetoes any arbitrary and particularistic enforcement (since the modern law is not the expression of the will and interpretation of its jurists and lawyers), this same legal framework compels its operators to transform abstract codes into concrete decisions about concrete issues. So, the decisive aspect here is not that the legal system is subordinated to politics or the interests of particular actors (although that occurs), but that

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in the passage from the abstract law to the concrete decision the imaginary imposes itself by providing the coordinates that the abstract law cannot offer.

> Anchoring law in the social imaginary

On the other hand, the introduction of the notion of the (abstract) citizen in the legal paradigm of modern law is also marked by the production of a space of non-citizenship. Paradoxically, the transition from the absolutist sovereign authority to the notion of popular sovereignty, while redistributing the political content of the absolutist sovereign to the "citizens," also leaves a part of the social body devoid of political authority. If this gap is not explicitly consolidated within the positive legal order, it is, nonetheless, present in everyday social life. Its contradictions are often imposed on the operators of the law.

Walter Benjamin was one of the first to notice this and to develop an interpretation that seeks the interconnections between law and the imaginary (under various manifestations). According to this interpretation, the institution of law would be constitutively split between its social externality (terrain of the abstract law) and the irrational violence of the law's founding arbitrariness. This law is simultaneously (and synchronously) an enunciation of a "reasonable" content and an arbitrary "irrational" injunction. As the narrative of the constitutive moment of the law is always built *a posteriori*, this split element is hidden retroactively by dogmatic interpretations of law, by what the jurist Pierre Legendre calls "dogmatic order."

In this way, a door of investigation for the sociology of law opens, one that considers the internalized social imaginary that provides an elaboration (a worldview) around this split legal order of modernity – what we can call imaginary anchoring. Through this path, one can explore forms of subjectivity marked by national historical formations, which are (re)produced in the dynamics of legal training and the social relations that the practice of law entails, and which establish an internal order in the system of law.

It is not by chance that Brazilian law handles the (il)legalities of the popular and dominant classes in a highly selective manner, in broad daylight, without any constraint. The imaginary order acts to replace the inherently contradictory, conflicting, and fragmentary part of the law (between modern abstract law and its arbitrary and violent superegoic substratum) that sustains, in law, this behavior and gives it its legitimacy. What authorizes and legitimizes a judicial decision to establish that, "because of their race," an individual is linked to a criminal group? What legitimizes, even if only between the lines of the legal discourse, the often illegal police actions in Brazilian favelas, against the black and poor population? Or the casuistic decisionism that daily prints the pages of newspapers? An interdisciplinary theoretical-methodological engagement is essential to understand the complexities and contradictions of Brazilian law. This would require combining not only the lessons of more traditional sociology of law but philosophy, psychoanalysis, and history, without which one cannot properly see the centrality of the notion of the imaginary in the field of law. ◼

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