MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR:

Jennifer Keahey

Dear Section Members:

It has been a difficult spring. The global outbreak of COVID-19 has uprooted all of our lives, and although some areas are beginning to reopen, the virus has yet to be contained.

We do not yet know how the pandemic will impact our profession, but a series of news stories paint a gloomy picture. According to Bauman (2020), universities in the US are facing an enrollment crash. Public universities that disproportionately support low-income, first-generation, and minority students may be hit hardest by declining enrollments, as these already have been struggling to survive state budget cuts.

Systemic gender, race, and class inequities are shaping our experiences with the pandemic. Examining early journal submission data, Flaherty (2020) finds that the quarantine is giving rise to unusual gendered patterns, with the scholarly
productivity of men increasing and the production of women either stagnant or in decline. These trends may weaken the bargaining position of women seeking promotion in the future.

Regardless of structural inequities, we all are experiencing some degree of exhaustion from our efforts to navigate the crisis. As teachers, we pivoted to online instruction at unprecedented speed. As researchers and practitioners, we have been forced to suspend field operations or to lock down far from home. As graduate students and recent PhDs, we suddenly face a frozen job market.

Like many of you, I have been struggling to find balance in the abyss of uncertainty. I have spent this semester maintaining my regular workload while mentoring anxious students, caring for an elderly parent recovering from cancer, and witnessing the slow demise of an uncle who was like a second father to me. Despite these difficulties, I have remained acutely aware of the privilege of being able to work from home. It is the essential labor of others who all too often are underpaid and undervalued in society that has enabled me to keep my family safe.

These realities have caused me to reflect on the meaning and value of the feminist ethic of care. Theorists traditionally define this ethic as “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher and Tronto 1990: 40).

As a radical ethic for grassroots development, the ethic of care provides a relational foundation for dismantling oppression in our everyday lives. It encourages us to build and participate in mutually supportive social networks that are welcoming of difference. It asks us to humanize institutional practices by slowing down enough to make compassionate and informed decisions about matters that impact people’s lives. It compels us to care for those who are suffering, and it asks us to take the time to care for ourselves when in need.

If the collective mood of the industrial revolution was one of hysteria then the modal personality of late-stage modernity is one of psychopathic insensitivity to pain and suffering (Segato 2016). In a world where wealth and power are increasingly concentrated and the voices of the dispossessed are silenced by shock-and-awe greed, the cultivation of care and compassion is nothing less than a revolutionary act.

With that in mind, I encourage you to take time to care for yourselves and others this summer. Please keep your eye on the listerv for announcements, and remember that this section is committed to supporting its members, whatever the future may bring.

Jennifer Keahey
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References


REFLECTIONS ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Novel Coronavirus and the Generation of New Sociological Knowledge
BY JOSEPH HARRIS

Sociology offers powerful lenses for understanding the destructive consequences of epidemics, which often magnify existing health disparities and run along the lines of class, race, and gender in distinctive ways. While the vulnerabilities of black and brown communities in the US have been laid bare alongside those of the poor, the elderly, those with disabilities, the undocumented, and the incarcerated, COVID-19 has also challenged us to think about the impacts this disease has had in relation to the Global South and how some of those experiences not only align with theoretical expectations but actually buck them.

The rapid widespread adoption of innovations aimed at fighting COVID-19 presses us to reconsider much of what we know related to the dynamics of diffusion. First, the speed with which masks and social distancing practices have become a widespread feature of life in societies unaccustomed to them is unprecedented. Few such changes have so fundamentally affected how we live and been adopted so quickly. The fact that the disease is airborne and sometimes lethal, with death often happening in isolation, are factors that have no doubt been a major factor prompting such rapid adoption. However, in the days before anti-retroviral treatment, the death rate from AIDS was 100% but took place over a long period of time. More research is needed to understand how social psychological factors interface with macro-social ones. Further research in this area would deepen our knowledge of the mechanisms of diffusion, which has classically involved learning, coercion, competition, and social construction (Dobbin et al 2007).

The fact that evidence for the efficacy of masks was developed in and diffused from the Global South cuts against the grain of existing theories. Classically, world culture theory has imagined policy models as emanating from the West to the global periphery (Meyer et al 1997). Other important work has explored dynamics of diffusion regionally within the Global South (Weyland 2005). Yet, innovations to fight COVID-19 have spread from Global South to North. These dynamics build on recent work by network analysts (Centola 2018) and also prompt us to think about how diffusion dynamics might be different for innovations adopted by people in societies versus governments.

While the HIV/AIDS epidemic hit the world’s poorest region – sub-Saharan Africa – hardest, it remains to be seen what effects COVID-19 will have in that part of the world. While we know socio-economic status to be a “fundamental cause” of mortality (Link and Phelan 1995), which might give us cause to think that the region will be hard-hit once again, a number of issues may mitigate the effects of coronavirus in the region. Understanding these different factors in relation to one another may reshape our broader understanding of theory.

Many governments in the region have responded swiftly, intervening early with strong measures. Nations in the region also have the experience of fighting HIV and TB to draw on, with some transferrable lessons to use in the fight against COVID-19. While crowded housing conditions may facilitate epidemiological spread among poor urban dwellers, the disease may spread less among more spatially diffuse rural populations. Careful investigation of the dynamics of transmission will tell us a lot about how the dynamics of transmission for an airborne disease like COVID-19 differ from other airborne diseases, like TB, and how they further differ from the spread of non-airborne pathogens, like HIV/AIDS.

The impact of cultural customs on the spread of the disease – both positive and negative – is yet unknown. Important work by sociologists has trained our attention on the role of cultural objects and practices in global health (Tavory and Swidler 2009; McDonnell 2016). The practice of clasping hands together and bowing, rather than shaking hands, may have slowed the spread of disease in countries like Thailand. We also know from recent struggles
in Africa with Ebola that familial desires to visit and bury the dead contributed to spread of that disease. Heartbreaking stories have pointed to isolation of the seriously ill with coronavirus in hospitals, often dying alone without family around. How such tragic social disconnection plays into the dynamics of transmission in parts of the world where healthcare facilities themselves are non-existent or few in number is an open question.

Understanding social dynamics related to COVID-19 may have broader implications for our understanding of the world, reshaping long-held theories and generating new ones. The discipline of sociology stands to contribute a great deal to that new understanding. But a great deal of work lies ahead of us to get there. Thinking about COVID-19’s unique features in relation to distinct local realities will play an important role in that process.

References


Joseph Harris is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Boston University and author of Achieving Access: Professional Movements and the Politics of Health Universalism.

“Break the Chain”: Exploring the Kerala Model of Pandemic Response

BY SILPA SATHEESH

Kerala—a south Indian state with a unique model of social development and history of progressive social movements and public action—receives accolades for its proactive and compassionate response to the fast-spreading pandemic. The nature of state response in Kerala assumes greater significance when situated against the U.S model guided by the logic of a capitalist, for-profit healthcare system. This article is an attempt to highlight some important facets of the Kerala model of pandemic response.

Kerala has occupied a distinguished place in the development literature (Drèze and Sen 1993; Franke and Chasin 1989; Heller et al. 2007) by achieving high social development indicators with limited economic growth. The focus on people’s well-being over capitalist accumulation is replicated in Kerala’s response to the pandemic. As the number of COVID-19 patients in the U.S reaches as high as one million, Kerala managed to bring down the number of patients to 34 with only four reported deaths. The success of Kerala reaffirms the importance of participatory democracy, progressive social movements, and, most importantly, the need for a system of socialized provision when it comes to healthcare and other necessities. Perhaps, Kerala is one of the many examples where the state urges
people to practice social distancing without compromising on social solidarity.

Break the Chain: A Campaign to Stop the Pandemic

“Break the Chain” has been the slogan for the state’s campaign for spreading awareness on social distancing. The slogan is apt considering the long history of working-class movements in the state fighting to break the shackles of capitalist exploitation and the current communist government. Operationalized through a decentralized model of health care delivery, the state meticulously implements contact tracing and publishes the route-maps in all mainstream newspapers and state social media handles. Crowd-sourced through public health workers, local self-governments, and community volunteers, this model enables the state to trace back, identify and quarantine all individuals who might have potentially come in contact with COVID-19 positive cases.

More importantly, the ways in which the local state and political leadership frame their response to the pandemic is distinctly different from the U.S model in terms of recognizing the responsibility of the state, in demonstrating leadership and in offering solidarity to the people in this troubled period. Interestingly, economy or forgone earnings never emerges as a priority in any of the media conferences or statements issued by the state government. Instead, the state frames the response in terms of compassion, collective responsibility, and solidarity.

A Model built on Scientific Temper, Solidarity and Socialized Provision

The interventions spearheaded by the Department of Health led by a woman minister, K.K. Shailaja, are grounded in science and are guided by experts while devising strategies for pandemic response. And this scientific temper is a reflection of the long legacy of progressive social actions and movements in the state, including study-classes, teach-ins, and community outreach programs such as the People’s Science Campaign (KSSP).

Despite being one of the smaller Indian states with limited economic resources, Kerala is offering free testing and healthcare not only to COVID-19 patients within the state; free quarantine homes and facilities for expats repatriated from other countries have also been set up. Kerala’s response to the pandemic stands out in bridging healthcare with the distribution of other essential services. Apart from offering free treatment and care to COVID-19 patients, the state ensures the socialized provision of food supplies through the Public Distribution System (PDS) and other essential commodities, including medicines for people who are currently cooperating with the nation-wide lockdown. The relief efforts also include monthly financial support provided to the socially vulnerable and marginalized sectors of society.

Aside from this, the state has set up community kitchens to ensure that hunger is eliminated as people self-quarantine and comply with lockdown measures. More so, the community kitchens are illustrative of the equity and social justice orientations of Kerala’s response. The free supply of food and provision demonstrates how the response to this pandemic can address the disproportionate vulnerability of poor and marginalized sections. Additionally, it reiterates the importance of formulating responses by taking social and economic impacts into consideration.

Because of these reasons, Kerala stands in stark contrast to the U.S. response, characterized by misinformation, dismissal of scientific facts, lack of empathy, and a complete disregard for the poor and the most vulnerable communities. Perhaps, the pandemic demonstrates how the size of the economy does not have a lot to do with the efficiency and humanity of state response. It is also indicative of the limitations of the capitalist system and logic in addressing crises. The success of the Kerala model forces us to revisit the priorities underlying our political, economic systems. An economic system valuing profits more than people is unlikely to make interventions in favor of people.

The Pandemic as a Collective Issue

The large number of community volunteers assisting the health experts and government institutions in fighting the pandemic reiterates the importance of community and social solidarity. As opposed to a model where the individual is held responsible and liable for their recovery and survival, Kerala con-
ceives the pandemic as a collective issue that requires collective solutions. The conception of the pandemic as a collective issue proved crucial in identifying solutions rooted in collective responsibility.

The focus on community and solidarity stands against the model of individualism underlying the U.S response. The scenario in the U.S is illustrative of the worst possible manifestations of the laissez-faire ideas such as freedom, individualism, and competition. The reports surrounding the hoarding of sanitizers or fighting for toilet tissue paper should be located within the larger frame of the capitalist economic system grounded in individualism and competition. There are protests across the U.S demanding an immediate reopening, so that people can exercise their “freedom” when the fatalities reach as high as 75,000. Early evidence confirming the increased vulnerability of racial and ethnic minorities to the pandemic demonstrates how healthcare disparities manifest themselves in the context of this pandemic.

The crisis is cataclysmic; however, it also offers an opportunity to break away from ruthless capitalism. Progressive social movements and collective action can play a huge role in steering shifting the focus away from profits and centering back on people.

References


Silpa Satheesh is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of South Florida.

COVID-19: Lessons from the Sociology of AIDS

*BY CATHERINE VAN DE RUIT*

HIV/AIDS is a chronic infectious disease transmitted by sexual intercourse or intravenous drug use. Thanks to antiretroviral therapy (ART), AIDS is now a manageable chronic condition, whereas COVID-19, an acute airborne disease, has thus far limited treatment options. While these distinct infectious diseases do not have biological commonalities, shared social factors including structural, institutional, cultural, and environmental conditions shape the biological trajectory of both diseases.

Sociological research on AIDS offers critical lessons for understanding the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic thus far. In particular, this review examines limitations of dominant epidemiological models of individual risk and the concomitant disease mitigation interventions emerging from this risk model that underpinned the global AIDS response. This risk model underpinning AIDS biomedical innovation may have saved countless lives, but the resulting health disparities are extensive and have ultimately undermined efforts to contain and eradicate the HIV virus.

The dominant policy response to AIDS focused on individual behavioral interventions influenced by epidemiological and biomedical conceptions of disease as a biological pathology. The emphasis on “risk groups” is a foundational approach within epidemiology and used as a tool to prevent and mitigate infectious disease by targeting groups within populations most likely to contract and transmit the
disease. AIDS public health programs identified high-risk groups to include gay and bisexual men, transgender people, sex workers, and intravenous drug users. By contrast, high-risk COVID-19 groups are identified as older age adults and people with pre-existing conditions who are immunocompromised.

There are several critiques of this individual risk approach: first, it obscures differences within groups, and thus public health interventions were unlikely to develop nuanced programming relevant to specific groups (Mojola 2011); second, it affirmed narrow individual risk reduction strategies that ignored the social and cultural characteristics of AIDS transmission (Swidler 2009; Auerbach, Parkhurst, and Cáceres 2011).

Third, narrow risk group models concealed how social marginalization intersects with AIDS risk. People with multiple minority identities are at higher risk of contracting AIDS and less likely to receive sustained access to treatment (Watkins-Hayes 2014). In the context of COVID-19 patterns of transmission inside the United States, minorities are at high risk of contracting COVID-19 and greater mortality relative to the general population (Johnson and Buford 2020).

In the COVID-19 crisis the UK and US initially targeted high-risk groups such as seniors and people with multiple morbidities rather than issue universal stay-at-home orders as the economic costs of social isolation were deemed too high. As a result of these initial narrow targeted risk group strategies, the US currently leads the world in infections and mortality. The UK radically changed course after epidemiological models suggested that unchecked COVID-19 related morbidity would overwhelm the health system (Booth 2020).

Prior to the introduction of standard antiretroviral therapy, global health’s reliance on individual behavior change prevention programs were largely unsuccessful and prompted sociologists to argue that the global AIDS response imported standardized AIDS prevention programs ill-suited to local contexts (Tawfik and Watkins 2007; Watkins-Hayes 2014). Similar concerns have been raised about standardized social distancing guidelines to mitigate COVID-19 that may not be appropriate for all country contexts particularly for countries in the Global South with large urban informal settlements. Aside from social isolation orders, such contexts may need tailored social and public health programs to address food insecurity and improve access to sanitation (Corburn et al. 2020). Similarly, in the United States low-income workers performing roles in the meat packing industry, supermarket and delivery services are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. These workers cannot afford to follow social distancing guidelines and work place protections against the virus are inadequate.

Inequities in both AIDS and COVID-19 patient prevention and treatment in turn translated into underinvestment in health care workers. The burden of care falls primarily on people who face forms of social exclusion based on their gender, race, class, and age, thus reproducing and exacerbating social inequality. For example, community health workers on the frontlines of the AIDS epidemic are predominantly women of color who do not receive formal wages, benefits, or workplace protection insurance (van de Ruit 2019). In the case of the treatment response for COVID-19 in the US, frontline health care-workers are predominantly women and racialized minorities performing low-paid work roles, with inadequate safety equipment and who face high occupational exposure risks (Robertson and Gebeloff 2020).

In closing, sociologists of AIDS identified how health disparities produced by misaligned prevention programming, inequities in patient access to AIDS treatment programs, and deficits in AIDS care contributed to the continued spread of the disease. In the absence of clinical treatments to effectively prevent and treat COVID-19, the inability of marginalized populations to practice social distancing, and stark health inequities in testing and available treatment in the Global North and South must be addressed if this virus is to be managed and ultimately contained.

References

Auerbach, Judith D., Justin O. Parkhurst, and Carlos F. Cáceres. 2011. “Addressing Social Drivers of HIV/AIDS for the Long-Term Response: Concep-
tual and Methodological Considerations.” *Global Public Health* 6 (sup3): S293-S309.


**SECTION ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Reminder: SocDev Member Feedback Survey**

If you haven’t already, please take a moment to give us your feedback via our Sociology of Development Member Feedback Survey:

[https://forms.gle/ETYR9cz34GF6QzB46](https://forms.gle/ETYR9cz34GF6QzB46)

Please fill out the 13-question survey by **May 30, 2020**. It should take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. The purpose of the survey is to continually improve our services to you. We will provide a report on the survey outcome this August during the ASA’s Virtual Engagement Event.

Contact Karin Johnson (University of California Riverside) at [john033@ucr.edu](mailto:john033@ucr.edu) with any questions. Thank you again and we look forward to your participation!

Sincerely,
The SocDev Survey Committee
Karin Johnson (Chair)
Sam Cohn (Member)
Alvin Camba (Member)
Annika Rieger (Member)
In these unprecedented times of the Coronavirus pandemic, the ASA annual conference has been canceled. In line with the ASA’s “Virtual Engagement” Event, the Sociology of Development Section is pleased to continue the Mentorship program in an online format.

If you would like to participate, we would like to solicit applications for mentors and mentees. Click here and fill out your information. Applications accepted through Friday, July 31st.

Karin Johnson (University of California Riverside), Mentorship Coordinator, will pair up graduate students and junior faculty with a scholar more advanced in their career. Pairs will be matched based on their desired areas of mentorship, then by substantive research interests. Mentorship groups will consist of at least one mentor and one or more mentees. Mentors and mentees will personally schedule and meet up anytime by video, phone, or whatever means preferred. You will be notified of your pairing by Monday, August 5th.

Questions? Email Karin Johnson at kjohn033@ucr.edu.

Want to Help Address Inequalities in Access to Educational Resources?

The Research4Life partnership offers educational institutions in resource-constrained countries free to low-cost access to a large number of online academic materials from journals and presses. Most institutions in sub-Saharan Africa and some in South Asia qualify for access to journal and press materials through Research4Life for free, while a number of countries in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia qualify for access for $1,500 USD per institution per calendar year. A map of access by country income group is available here, and a list of institutions already registered for Research4Life is available here.

What does this have to do with me? Why should I be concerned with this? Because deep divides exist between the Global North and South with regard to access to top journals and presses, and Research4Life offers a way of addressing inequalities in access to educational materials. If you work in countries that qualify for Research4Life, you may be able to play a catalytic role in working with local educational institutions to raise awareness about this program and enable access. Universities and individuals can also sponsor the annual membership of institutions in countries that qualify for membership at the $1,500 per year rate.

Want to play a role in addressing these inequalities? Check out this list to see if the country where you work is eligible. Then see if the educational institutions that you know there already have access to Research4Life. Then talk with your contacts to see if this is something they would be interested in participating in. Several institutions pay through WHO Country Offices. However, individuals and other organizations may also pay on their behalf.

Joseph Harris, Boston University

New Policy Briefs: Sociological Insights for Development Policy

The purpose of Sociological Insights for Development Policy is not only to raise awareness of the thought-provoking research being done by members of our section, but also to strengthen engagement between scholars, policy makers and development practitioners. Our long-term aim is to enhance sociology’s impact on development discourse and practice throughout the world. For more information about the series, or if you would like to contribute a brief, please contact Alaka Basu at ab54@cornell.edu.
New Policy Briefs:
“Competing Priorities: How intrahousehold relationships affect women’s business management and investment decisions,” by Sophia Friedson-Ridenour and Rachael Pierotti (2020, Volume 5, Issue 1)


New Issue of Sociology of Development Journal

Sociology of Development (http://socdev.ucpress.edu/)

This is an international journal addressing issues of development, broadly considered. With basic as well as policy-oriented research, topics explored include economic development and well-being, gender, health, inequality, poverty, environment and sustainability, political economy, conflict, social movements, and more.

Editors: Andrew Jorgenson & Jeff Kentor
Frequency: Quarterly in March, June, September, and December
eISSN: 2374-538X

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Mining and Defensive Mobilization: Explaining Opposition to Extractive Industries in Chile
Maria Akchurin
(pp. 1-29) DOI: 10.1525/sod.2020.6.1.1

Matthew Schneider
(pp. 30-65) 10.1525/sod.2020.6.1.30

Whose Legitimacy? China’s Drive for Electric Vehicles
Xiaoshuo Hou and Ping Li
(pp. 66-90) DOI: 10.1525/sod.2020.6.1.66

Are the Goals of Sustainability Interconnected? A Sociological Analysis of the Three E’s of Sustainable Development Using Cross-Lagged Models with Reciprocal Effects
Matthew Thomas Clement, Nathan Pino, Patrick Greiner, and Julius McGee
(pp. 91-115) DOI: 10.1525/sod.2020.6.1.91

Universal Social Protection: Is It Just Talk?
Amanda Shriwise, Alexander E. Kentikelenis, and David Stuckler
(pp. 116-144) DOI: 10.1525/sod.2020.6.1.116
Gift Memberships: ASA and ASA section memberships

ASA members can purchase ASA and section memberships as gifts at https://asa.enoah.com (Login required).

To gift an **ASA membership**, click “Purchase a gift membership for a student” under the Contribute/Give heading and then select “To search for or add a new individual, please click here.” Per the ASA, “Your gift will be redeemable by the recipient for a 2020 ASA student membership (or a $51 discount on another membership type for 2020). Your gift recipient will receive their gift credit via e-mail immediately after your purchase. Gift memberships are not refundable if unredeemed by the end of the 2020 membership year, September 30, 2020. Gift memberships are not tax deductible.” The deadline for a 2020 gift ASA membership for students is **July 31, 2020**.

To gift a **section membership**, click “Purchase a gift section membership” under the Contribute/Give heading and then select “Sociology of Development” from the dropdown option. Per the ASA “Section membership requires 2020 ASA membership. Only 2020 ASA members who do not already have a membership in that section are eligible to receive a gift. Your recipient will receive an e-mail immediately after your payment notifying them of the section gift. Your name will be included in this message. If the recipient declines the gift within 30 days of receipt, you will receive a refund by mail. Gifts are not tax deductible.” The deadline for a 2020 gift section membership is **July 31, 2020**.

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NEW MEMBER PUBLICATIONS

NEW BOOKS

https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691197852/give-and-take

Can foreign aid benefit development? While foreign aid has been attacked by critics as wasteful, counterproductive, and exploitative, *Give and Take* uses the case of local drug manufacturing in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to show the effectiveness of a particular kind of foreign aid: “developmental foreign aid.” Against the backdrop of East Africa’s colonial legacies, pursuit of economic self-sufficiency, bitter negotiations over affordable drugs, and the battle against AIDS and malaria, *Give and Take* offers an important corrective to popular views on foreign aid and development. The book shows that when foreign aid provides markets, monitoring, and mentoring, it can support the emergence and upgrading of local production. First, most funding provided by foreign aid is earmarked, but where donors were willing to procure locally, they created new markets that gave local entrepreneurs an incentive to produce new types of drugs. Second, donors often impose the wrong conditions in return to funding, but when donors enforced production standards as a condition to access their markets, they gave producers an incentive to upgrade their facilities and improve their quality practices. Third, donors rarely share their technology, but where technical know-how was not available and donors provided mentoring, local producers had access to guidance necessary for producing complex drugs and following international quality standards.

From Lake Chad to Iraq, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provide relief around the globe, and their scope is growing every year. Policymakers and activists often assume that humanitarian aid is best provided by these organizations, which are generally seen as impartial and neutral. In *Above the Fray*, Shai M. Dromi investigates why the international community overwhelmingly trusts humanitarian NGOs by looking at the historical development of their culture. With a particular focus on the Red Cross, Dromi reveals that NGOs arose because of the efforts of orthodox Calvinists, demonstrating for the first time the origins of the unusual moral culture that has supported NGOs for the past 150 years.

Drawing on archival research, Dromi traces the genesis of the Red Cross to a Calvinist movement working in mid-nineteenth-century Geneva. He shows how global humanitarian policies emerged from the Red Cross founding members’ faith that an international volunteer program not beholden to the state was the only ethical way to provide relief to victims of armed conflict. By illustrating how Calvinism shaped the humanitarian field, Dromi argues for the key role belief systems play in establishing social fields and institutions. Ultimately, Dromi shows the immeasurable social good that NGOs have achieved, but also points to their limitations and suggests that alternative models of humanitarian relief need to be considered.


Peace Corps volunteers seem to exemplify the desire to make the world a better place. Yet despite being one of history’s clearest cases of organized idealism, the Peace Corps has, in practice, ended up cultivating very different outcomes among its volunteers. By the time they return from the Peace Corps, volunteers exhibit surprising shifts in their political and professional consciousness. Rather than developing a systemic perspective on development and poverty, they tend instead to focus on individual behavior; they see professions as the only legitimate source of political and social power. They have lost their idealism, and their convictions and beliefs have been reshaped along the way. *The Death of Idealism* uses the case of the Peace Corps to explain why and how participation in a bureaucratic organization changes people’s ideals and politics. Meghan Elizabeth Kallman offers an innovative institutional analysis of the role of idealism in development organizations. She details the combination of social forces and organizational pressures that depoliticizes Peace Corps volunteers, channels their idealism toward professionalization, and leads to cynicism or disengagement. Kallman sheds light on the structural reasons for the persistent failure of development organizations and the consequences for the people involved. Based on interviews with over 140 current and returned Peace Corps volunteers, field observations, and a large-scale survey, this deeply researched, theoretically rigorous book offers a novel perspective on how people lose their idealism, and why that matters.
https://www.versobooks.com/books/3062-first-class-passengers-on-a-sinking-ship

The extent and irreversibility of US decline is becoming ever more obvious as America loses war after war and as one industry after another loses its technological edge. Lachmann explains why the United States will not be able to sustain its global dominance. He contrasts America’s relatively brief period of hegemony with the Netherlands’ similarly short primacy and Britain’s far longer era of leadership. Decline in all those cases was not inevitable and did not respond to global capitalist cycles. Rather, decline is the product of elites’ success in grabbing control of resources and governmental powers. Not only are ordinary people harmed, but also capitalists become increasingly unable to coordinate their interests and adopt policies and make investments necessary to counter economic and geopolitical competitors elsewhere in the world. Conflicts among elites and challenges by non-elites determine the timing and mold the contours of decline. Lachmann traces the transformation of US politics from an era of elite consensus to present-day paralysis combined with neoliberal plunder, explains the paradox of an American military with an unprecedented technological edge unable to subdue even the weakest enemies, and the consequences of finance’s cannibalization of the US economy.

https://www.dukeupress.edu/seeds-of-power

In 1996 Argentina adopted genetically modified (GM) soybeans as a central part of its national development strategy. Today, Argentina is the third largest global grower and exporter of GM crops. Its soybeans—which have been modified to tolerate spraying with herbicides—now cover half of the country’s arable land and represent a third of its total exports. While soy has brought about modernization and economic growth, it has also created tremendous social and ecological harm: rural displacement, land concentration, food insecurity, deforestation, violence, and the negative health effects of toxic agrochemical exposure. In *Seeds of Power* Amalia Leguizamón explores why Argentines largely support GM soy despite the widespread damage it creates. She reveals how the state, agribusiness, and their allies in the media and sciences deploy narratives of economic redistribution, scientific expertise, and national identity as a way to create compliance among the country’s most vulnerable rural residents. In this way, Leguizamón demonstrates that GM soy operates as a tool of power to obtain consent, legitimate injustice, and quell potential dissent in the face of environmental and social violence.

*The Transformation of Capacity in International Development* examines capacity as a concept within the global development agenda through an analysis of USAID projects and policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan between 1977 and 2017. It traces the evolution of donor discourses from the Cold War through the Global War on Terror, exposing the tensions within donor agendas between market, human rights and security-based narratives and discourses. As the global development agenda subsumes major areas of international debate defined by competing objectives, these tensions are absorbed, obscured and depoliticized with the transformation of capacity. Through an examination of the USAID example, this book exposes how the donor attempt to develop the capacity of “fragile” states and to manage transnational militancy reveals a fundamental struggle over the ownership and future of global governance and development. As the US-led war in Afghanistan approaches 20 years, the failure of capacity development requires a fundamental reexamination of the priorities of the international community and development efforts in conflict zones.


Corruption and ineffectiveness are often expected of public servants in developing countries. However, some groups within these states are distinctly more effective and public oriented than the rest. Why? *Patchwork Leviathan* explains how a few spectacularly effective state organizations manage to thrive amid general institutional weakness and succeed against impressive odds. Drawing on the Hobbesian image of the state as Leviathan, Erin Metz McDonnell argues that many seemingly weak states actually have a wide range of administrative capacities. Such states are in fact patchworks sewn loosely together from scarce resources into the semblance of unity. McDonnell demonstrates that when the human, cognitive, and material resources of bureaucracy are rare, it is critically important how they are distributed. Too often, scarce bureaucratic resources are scattered throughout the state, yielding little effect. McDonnell reveals how a sufficient concentration of resources clustered within particular pockets of a state can be transformative, enabling distinctively effective organizations to emerge from a sea of ineffectiveness. *Patchwork Leviathan* offers a comprehensive analysis of successful statecraft in institutionally challenging environments, drawing on cases from contemporary Ghana and Nigeria, mid-twentieth-century Kenya and Brazil, and China in the early twentieth century. Based on nearly two years of fieldwork in West Africa, this incisive book explains how these highly effective pockets differ from the Western bureaucracies on which so much state and organizational theory is based, providing a fresh answer to why well-funded global capacity-building reforms fail—and how they can do better.

The book examines social movements and transnational networks (Islamist, feminist, and global justice) in the context of globalization in all its forms (economic, political, cultural, technological) and in the context of the rise and spread of right-wing populist movements and governments. This third edition highlights the democracy deficits that have helped engender right-wing populism while also drawing attention to the potential for genuinely democratic alternatives existing among movements and governments across the globe.

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**NEW ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS**


OTHER PUBLICATIONS


Serrano, Angela. “Can Small-Scale Farming Save Oil Palm?” Edge Effects Digital Magazine.

OTHER MEMBER NEWS

Robert Wyrod, Assistant Professor of Women & Gender Studies and International Affairs at the University of Colorado Boulder, has been awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation to continue his research on China-funded development efforts in Uganda.

JOB MARKET CANDIDATES

CANDIDATE PROFILES

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Dissertation Title: “The Global Water Crises: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses and Implications”

Dissertation Abstract: Unequal social, political, and economic power causes severe damage to human well-being and ecological systems. Water issues constitute one of the great challenges in political ecology. On the one hand, there is a health crisis whereby over 700 million people lack access to safe drinking water. On the other hand, there is a growing environmental crisis regarding water scarcity, stress, and resource depletion. This dissertation uses network analysis, computational analysis, hierarchical linear modeling, and fixed-effects regression to interrogate the ways global organizations (governments, non-governmental organizations, corporations, aid agencies, and academics) aim to solve the water crisis. The analysis reveals that the actions to solve certain facets of the water crisis can have unintended consequences on related water issues. For example, water aid intended to provide clean water to populations in need negatively impacts environmental outcomes such as groundwater depletion, pollution, and water stress. The analysis suggests that these unintended consequences are partially due to lack of evaluation and reliance on existing norms and values that haven’t been adequately vetted. Thus, using methodologically diverse tools to analyze global interest groups, my work expands political-economic theories of development showing how power influences norms, resulting in activities that undermine development efforts and exacerbate environmental issues.
NOTES FROM THE FIELD

A Patient Approach: Research Access in the Aftermath of Vietnam’s Worst Environmental Disaster

BY ANDREW N. LE

Vietnam’s North Central Coast was devastated by a chemical spill in April 2016. This incident, which is widely considered the worst environmental disaster in the country’s history, involved the expulsion of 300 tons of toxins from a Taiwanese plant’s discharge pipe. The disaster incited a response, from both the society and state, that was unprecedented in 45 years of communist rule (Paddock, 2018). A large component of my dissertation explores how the disaster affected individuals’ ability to earn a livelihood, and its effects on subsequent migration patterns. For over half of my 15-month period of fieldwork, I lived with a host family and conducted participant observations in a fishing village near the spill.

Though several reports surfaced after the disaster, the experiences of affected individuals were entirely omitted and remained mysterious. As I soon learned, the lack of reporting came from above and below. The censorship from above was easy to understand. Since the disaster had a political dimension, the Vietnamese state banned unauthorized reporting. State officials believed the spill could be used as ‘political propaganda’ that could incite further dissent and eventually lead to a revolt (Hookway 2016).

The censorship from below originated in the basic mistrust, among affected citizens, toward authorized reporters. As locals shared with me, in the spill’s aftermath, state reporters arrived and asked less about the spill’s consequences and more about who was inciting political dissension. Some state officials went undercover and participated in local protests to obtain information about political sympathizers (see Trang 2017). The media’s failure to address the spill’s impact on the local community escalated to the point that locals eventually resorted to silence when approached by any reporter. As Bac Linh, a 56-year-old local man, stated “They don’t listen to us. We say 10 and they report 1, we say 1 and they state 10… That’s why I just smile and pretend to not know anything.”

As one can imagine, the censorship from above and below created much difficulty in initially obtaining access to the affected community. On the one hand, governmental officials believed I was a foreigner who stood in solidarity with the affected communities. On the other, members of affected communities believed I was a reporter who came to misreport the facts. During such a contentious time, both sides seemed to believe I was working with the other.

To overcome access difficulties, I relied on my host family for introductions. In their free time, my host brother and father brought me to their acquaintances’ homes, which provided an opportunity for me to familiarize local men with my project. Similarly, my host sisters allowed me to attend their bible study classes, which introduced me to women in the community. I also took walks around the community so my neighbors could be aware of my presence, and agreed to teach English in the evenings for anyone interested. I made it a point to attend any community gatherings to which I was invited, from soccer games to birthday celebrations. Understanding the importance of transparency, I asked the father of the local church to introduce me in his sermons.

My field experience reaffirmed the need to take a patient approach to gaining fieldwork access in a contentious situation. Although my first month was painfully slow, it was a necessary step in allowing villagers the opportunity to contextualize and make sense of my presence. Ultimately, my “slow and steady” approach seemed to pay off: locals eventually approached me for interviews. Van, a fisherman who spent his entire life in Ha Tinh province suggested, “a state official tells us the story and leaves after a few days… I talk to you because you stayed for months to listen to our stories.”
Understanding Ourselves from the Neighbors: A Note on Deceased Organ Donation in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan

BY WAN-ZI LU

When confronted with moral concerns over losing body parts, how do medical professionals overcome these concerns to increase organ donation for transplants? My dissertation, “Body Politics: Morals, Markets, and Mobilization of Organ Donation,” addresses this question. I locate my analysis in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, where the ethical principle to keep the body intact has dissuaded many people from donating their organs postmortem. As a result, the three polities have struggled to meet the dire needs for organs. During the past year and a half, I interviewed policymakers, medical professionals, and coordinators at the national registries at the three sites to understand how they resolve the problem by developing systems to respond to accidental deaths and practice deceased organ donation.

Since these three polities are known for their bureaucratic systems and professional-led development, I was not surprised that the policy and medical professionals were eloquent in outlining the procedures of donation practices and identifying other key players in their fields. From their descriptions, I soon realized that a working system to mobilize deceased organ donation requires inter-hospital networks and coordination across departments in each hospital. But to weave the details together, I noticed that the differences and similarities across the sites surfaced lucidly when the conversations turned to the other two polities—namely, the neighboring territories where my interviews took place.

On some occasions, this comparison occurred naturally to the interviewees as the sites are close in proximity and the exchange between them has been common. A director of a transplant program in Hong Kong shared, for instance, that he “realized how to refine the system here after serving as an advisor for the Singaporean program.” He pointed out a core issue that hindered organ donation in Singapore was that many hospitals refrained from reporting potential donors to avoid causing discomfort in donors’ families. To enhance inter-hospital networks in Hong Kong after he visited Singapore, he proposed to set up regional coordinators who connect ICUs between hospitals, and the setup soon brought the territory a jump in donation rates. The director recalled, “we are just more likely to improve our program when trying to help others solve problems.”

In other situations, the informants understand their own system from a different perspective only after learning about their neighbors’ experiences. For instance, when discussing the cooperation across hospital departments in facilitating donation, a Singaporean doctor noted how he “saw the systematic uniqueness in Singapore that contributed to shaping [their] donation culture” after we reviewed all the professionals...
involved, from pronouncing potential donors brain-dead to procuring organs in the three sites. He explained, “in Singapore, we enforced a clear division of labor by assigning each task to different personnel.” He went on to remark that he was surprised this practice was not common in other sites: “I thought this framework exemplifies the common practice until we talked about coordinators in Taiwan who walk the potential donors and their families through the whole donation process.”

Speaking of their neighbors provides my informants a distance from their daily routinized practices to flesh out the differences across systems. Such distances provide surprising clues to reconstruct the processes and systems of deceased organ donation. Meanwhile, I noticed that I, too, have benefited from this comparative research design to start distinguishing the organizational arrangements that I was not aware of. Building upon these interviewees’ observations, I detailed the structural differences—from the ecologies of the medical fields to subsidiary organizations dedicated to promoting donation—and discovered that these arrangements condition how successfully medical professionals are able to mobilize organ donation in the three polities. For instance, Taiwan has been the only site showing a steady increase in donation rates over the past two decades among the three polities as its system integrates networks within and across hospitals through full-time coordinators and organ procurement organizations.

**Wan-Zi Lu** is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago.

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**PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD**

These images are from fieldwork research that took place as part of the project “Violence and Land Dispossession in Central America and Mexico.” https://landandviolence.org/ (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada).

Image 1. House on occupied land in Chiapas, Mexico


Image 3. Police presence to execute eviction of peasant occupation over palm oil plantations on disputed territory in the Bajo Aguan region in Honduras (2019)

Image 4. Peasant movement in Chiapas Mexico blocking a road and demanding the release of a political prisoner (2019)
The research examines nature, prevalence and core patterns in the relationship between land dispossession and violence carried out by state and non-state actors in Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. So far this research has: 1) demonstrated the correlation between sites of land acquisition by agribusiness, mining companies, and other large-scale investment ventures and the violent displacement of small-scale farmers; 2) revealed core patterns in the way armed actors participate in processes of resource appropriation, dispossession and repression; 3) identified grassroots resistance strategies.

Jasmin Hristov is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Sociology at the University of British Columbia.

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