SECTIONCULTURE

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Letter From the Chair

I consider myself lucky to have been at the helm of the culture section this year. While devastated by the impact of COVID on our communities, and drained/exhilarated/consumed by the anti-racism protests of this spring and summer, we have also been able to take actions to address these crises, thanks to many people – section leadership such as **Ruthie Braunstein** and **Terry McDonnell** as well as the members of the section's outstanding council. These folks were extraordinarily responsive, despite having small children, working across multiple time zones, and managing the impact upon their own lives of the coronavirus and protests against police brutality. Thanks to them, we were able to:

- distribute $8000 in emergency COVID grants to young scholars – graduate students and early career faculty – whose research was hard hit by the pandemic.
- pledge $1000 a year for the next three years for the Minority Fellowship Program, and spearhead a campaign that ended up securing the pledges of all 52 sections of the ASA to contribute to the MFP.

- plan and approve a host of anti-racist actions, including naming a diversity and inclusion council member; highlighting work that critiques prior culture scholarship weaponized against Black communities; amplifying Black and Brown intellectual contributions; and sharing bibliographies and syllabi that help to diversify the work through which we teach and think about culture.
- set up an inaugural mentoring program for the section.

We also made some changes this year to the way the section is run. Those kinds of changes are a bit quieter than the initiatives listed above, but also important – sort of like getting a new roof or earthquake retrofitting. You can't see it normally, but I hope it will make the section run better in the future.

Mostly, my goal has been to make things more transparent, more responsive to the membership, and more systematic. Award committees are now chaired by elected council members. A program committee helps the chair shape the section's ASA sessions. There is a membership committee devoted to member service. Committees are peopled by volunteers from the section membership selected for diversity of all kinds – racial/ethnic, gender/sexuality, institution, national origin, rank/position type, etc. There is a diversity and inclusion council member keeping anti-racism and social inequality front and center. All committee chairs submit short reports in August detailing their processes and what changes they recommend, and we save these reports year to year, so people are not reinventing the wheel every Fall. Finally, with a landslide of approval from the membership for the bylaws change (thank you), we will be adding another council member to the roster starting next year. These changes are perhaps a little less exciting than new grants, but they were still warranted.

A few more thanks are due, as the annual meetings draw near. Thanks to our award committee chairs (**Gabi Abend** for the Douglas award; **Mariana Craciun** for the Geertz award; **Ming-Cheng Lo** for the Petersen award; **Victoria Reyes** for the COVID grants) and their committees of volunteers for their herculean efforts (see inside for the award announcements). We also all owe a debt of gratitude to **Dustin Stoltz**, who is stepping down as webmaster and social media representative for the section. Dustin has served ably in this role for three and a half years, and we are very appreciative of all of his efforts. Thanks to **Patricia Banks**, **Ming-Cheng Lo**, and **Joanna Peppin**, council members who are stepping down this year. Finally, please congratulate **Ruthie Braunstein**, whose three years as COO are coming to a close – what a fine job she has done as the section's chief financial steward! Thanks to all of these people, and to the many other volunteers that help the section do its job.

Thanks are also due to the newsletter trio (**Yu Ching Cheng**, **Johnnie Anne Lotesta**, and **AJ Young**) for putting together a fabulous issue. See inside for an interview with Cecilia Ridgeway, readings about intersections of culture and race, a set of papers submitted by members addressing how culture helps us think about COVID19 and vice versa, and other excellent features. We all benefit from the efforts of this editorial dream team.

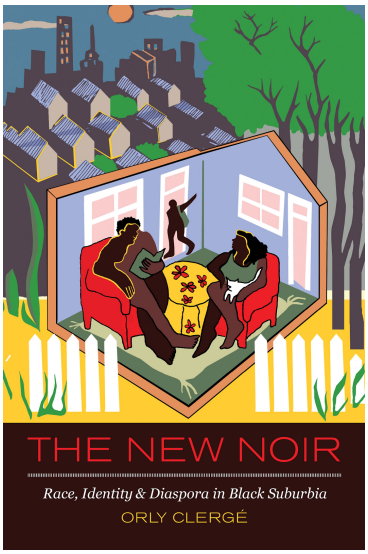
When I was asked to come up with a statement for the chair's election in February 2018, I wrote about three ways the culture section was unique: 1) our large budget surplus, 2) our informal and sometimes opaque governance, and 3) our tradition that the chair-elect plans the program. I wrote then, "A little rationalization (but not too much) can be a good thing." We have put in place some new systems.

Yet 2019-2020 has meant so much more. The year of pandemic and protests elevated our mission beyond these planned infrastructure improvements, to instead call upon us all to address the meaning and impact of our intellectual legacy, and to take steps towards transforming that legacy. While this process has only just begun, it has been an honor to be there for that vital work.

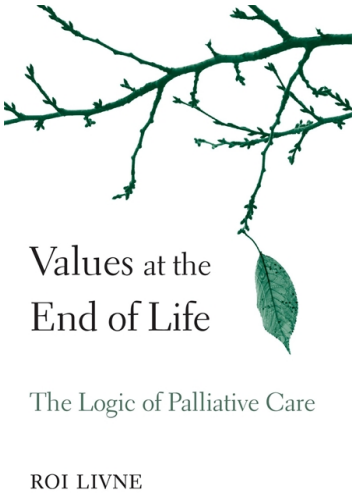
Culture Section Awards

Winner of the 2020 Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book

Orly Clergé. 2019. *The New Noir: Race, Identity, and Diaspora in Black Suburbia*. Berkeley: University of California Press



Roi Livne. 2019. *Values at the End of Life: The Logic of Palliative Care*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press



Winner of the 2020 Clifford Geertz Prize for Best Article

Hallett, Tim, Orla Stapleton, and Michael Sauder. "Public ideas: Their varieties and careers." American Sociological Review 84, no. 3 (2019): 545-576.

Winner of the 2020 Richard A. Peterson Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper

Lindsay J. DePalma (UC, San Diego). "The Passion Paradigm: Professional Adherence to and Consequences of the Ideology of 'Do What You Love.'"

Honorable Mention, 2020 Richard A. Peterson Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper

Jeffrey Swindle (University of Michigan). "Pathways of Global Cultural Diffusion: Media and Attitudes about Violence against Women.

Cultural Sociology of "Home" as a Research Program for the Post COVID-19 Sociology

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As a response to COVID-19 pandemic, governments all over the world induced several social distancing measures to flatten the curve of spreading the disease. Although these measures have differed from country to country, all included some form of 'stay-at-home' directives. Among others, such directives have recalled the dominant public discourse in Western societies of a home as a private sanctuary from external dangers. This private sanctuary of home lies in contrast to the public space, which might carry some of those dangers and - as Laurent Berlant (2004) reminds us – which might inhibit or even forbid expressions of private engagements to a socially acceptable level.

While recalling this modern narrative of a home as a private place to be where you can be in shelter from the outside world and where you can get recognition for your feelings (see Hochschild, 2003 for discussion), these stay-at-home orders have at the same time damaged this narrative. Domestic violence linked to the lockdowns experienced a terrifying surge worldwide, making the issue of "femicide" a prominent topic of the Western media. Not that it would be new to talk about domestic violence, but the extensive relying on home and the limited access of the affected groups to public space have created new conditions for discussing the issue in public. Similarly, stay-at-home orders have been accompanied by excessive patronizing or discriminatory behavior toward vulnerable citizen groups.

Putting an unusual stress on citizen, cases as these expose *emotional boundaries* of home. These boundaries become visible through the exceptional situation of a pandemic creating the urgency to discuss issues related to home outside the usual context of counselor services or expert circles. We can better understand these boundaries, and propose how to analyze them, if we observe the particular ways in which discussions on home surge in public debate and become part of a general discussion on societal developments and culture in times of COVID-19.

Public exposure of issues that were otherwise dedicated to particular spheres of society is understood by Jeffrey Alexander as a process of 'societalization of social problems' (J. C. Alexander, 2018). Societalization enables us to observe discursive conditions through which a specific issue is opened to a public scrutiny and becomes part of a broader discussion on societal conditions. Societalization is also an analytic tool to understand the culture we live in and that we see to evolve under sudden changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Anchored in the Strong Program in Cultural Sociology (Alexander & Smith, 2001), Alexander proposes to understand culture through meanings reflecting and creating the norms of behavior of society. From that perspective, 'home' entails a configuration of rules that are designed through individuals and are reflective of their feelings and emotional needs but that are at the same time affected by culture comprising public regulation as well as external events (i.e., the pandemic).

Understanding emotional boundaries of home through societalization means to assess the divergence of home by linking the emotional conditions of home with the way social conditions and regulations on home are discussed in public. While the home can receive drastically divergent contours and even represent a danger, the issue is

commonly discussed primarily in dedicated expert circles and rarely in the public space. In addition, the emotional conditions of home are often tabooed, which is a substantial part of the related public discussions on home. As we know from sociological research on emotions, home is an emotionally loaded sphere (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019; Jupp, 2016) rife with negotiation of an acceptable equilibrium between individual longing and collective cultural norms(see Durnová, 2018 for discussion). Emotional conditions of those sharing a home are intertwined with societal and cultural conditions enabling such spaces for sharing. Combining societalization with these insights on emotions' capacity to impact collective understandings of the culture we live in (Berezin, 2009) might thus represent a research program offering a better understanding of evolving of cultural norms and their relation to emotions experienced in the context of extreme experiences such as COVID-19 pandemic.

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Face-to-Face with Zoom?: Remote Teaching During the Coronavirus

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In the time of COVID-19, tools for remote learning, exemplified by the now-ubiquitous videoconferencing platform Zoom, have gone from convenience to necessity. As faculty rushed to move classes online, they have become suddenly aware of the drawbacks and potentials of such tools. How can they be used effectively to promote learning? The format (manuscripts, books, electronic media, etc.) of information shapes the potential for knowledge.

Berger and Luckmann (1966:28) noted that face-to-face interaction is prototypical. All other types of interaction, including writing, are either remote in time or remote in space. Far from a superior form of interaction, writing must be supplemented to account for its remoteness. Historically, written formats slowly developed social procedures for authentication, including formatting devices like title pages with authors' names and editorial oversight such as peer review. In the absence of face-to-face information about authors' social positions and credibility, such procedures somewhat recreated oral presentations of the same information.

The internet, through digital tools like Zoom, reembodies some social information by transporting images and audio, together, over time and space. Zoom indeed may—or may not—have some features of face-to-face interaction. In Zoom, all participants appear on screen, displaying faces and some elements of social positionality. However, once the Zoom meeting gets underway, it is clear to everyone that

participants are still remote in time and space. Turn taking is slow—especially if the facilitator has to unmute each participant to talk. As in face-to-face group interaction, sometimes individuals talk at the same time, but it is much more slowly sorted out on Zoom than in person. Network latency and slow internet connections sometimes result in delayed facial expressions, making it difficult to judge whether the speaker has been correctly understood. Another weird half-reembodiment is that everyone can see the eyes of all the participants, but no one has eye contact. These conservational interruptions are minor with a small group, but they make a medium- to large-sized class run awkwardly, half as fast and productive as usual. A genuine intellectual discussion is difficult. And, of course, persistent inequality limits many individuals' access to fast, reliable internet and adequately-equipped devices that can reduce these delays and interruptions.

Another huge difference from face-to-face interaction, and one that is new historically, is that on Zoom, the participants also see themselves. Partly as a result of delayed facial images and no eye contact, but also because of the novelty of seeing ourselves while talking, we catch ourselves looking at our own squares instead of our audience. We are not sure if others are also looking at themselves or not! It's impossible to tell without genuine eye contact. Particularly among students, however, the vision of themselves creates a panoptic space (Foucault 1979), where individuals engage in self-surveillance. In an in-person classroom setting, faculty often decry students' sleeping or viewing electronic materials unrelated to the class content. Now, since Zoom is a highly performative space where students are visible—even to themselves—students comment that they feel pressure to look intelligent at all times. Faculty also report that students are suddenly eager to talk to their colleagues in breakout rooms when, in an actual classroom, it is often hard to promote such discussion. Of course, some of this may be because many undergraduates under stay-at-home guidelines have had limited contact outside of their household for several months! At the same time, the range of the Zoom panopticon is limited. Participants can be seen only from their shoulders upwards, eliminating the view of pajama bottoms. Similarly, participants can look quite attentive while engaging in another task just out of camera range, such as a cell phone or book (knitting is Emigh's favorite). The only giveaway is the lower eye gaze, but students might be looking at their lecture notes! Individuals can also post background images, ranging from the mundane to the absurd, to obscure the décor of their household that might give away information about social class or racial background. Other aspects of remote course management, however, may actually heighten the panoptic character of schooling by intensifying surveillance, such as through exam proctoring tools that firewall "forbidden" resources, use students' cameras to record them, and even deploy artificial intelligence to analyze their behavior. While in-class exam proctoring typically involves some degree of surveillance, these tools now allow direct surveillance at a level impossible to achieve by instructors and teaching assistants roaming the aisles. Far from approximating face-to-face interaction by digital means, these tools have the capacity to perfect the panoptic principle in ways that would likely be regarded as unduly intrusive if implemented in a traditional classroom, even if instructors are unlikely to scrutinize the recording of each student.

Finally, interactions remote in time and space work best when accompanied by social norms. A faculty meeting on Zoom was relatively painless, as faculty already were used to raising their hands, being on a speaking list, and adjusting their remarks based on the ensuing proceedings. They also adjusted quickly to interrupting each other and forgetting to unmute or mute themselves. The classroom is newly extending these skills and norms to students, making Zoom much more difficult. New norms previously developed around email and text, but since neither has video, they cannot mimic face-to-face interaction. In this sense, email and text are much more like manuscripts and books than Zoom. For Zoom, however, it is not yet clear whether it can mimic

face-to-face interaction effectively. Instructors may need to cultivate intentionally norms that deliberately compensate for the absence of face-to-face interaction. Software development oriented around user experience and faster and more responsive hardware would help. As is clear historically, from manuscripts, books, email, and text, developing these social norms takes time.

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Urban Social Life on Hold: Italian Communities and COVID-19

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When, on March 11, the Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte announced a strict stay-at-home order for the whole country, media worldwide broadcasted pictures of unusually empty Italian piazzas (squares). Those images, which soon became the symbol of COVID-19 in Italy, mirrored the shock of a society for whom urban social life is vital. For centuries, urban centers—especially piazzas—represented the heart of the country's social, economic, and religious life, being the places where institutions such as city halls, churches, and courthouses are located. But, most importantly, piazzas are traditionally the places of Gemeinschaft, where many vital of social practices take place, from everyday interactions to formal public gatherings. Throughout history, in the piazzas, Italians built a sense of community, collectively applauding the end of wars, worshipping saints, protesting for their rights, or simply meeting with other members of the community. In such a context, what are the effects of the enforced lockdown on Italian society?

As soon as the government issued the stay-at-home order, people all over the country organized neighborhood-based activities. From their balconies and backyards, and for days, neighbors who before were strangers sang, worked out, and chatted together. While the news was announcing that, in some towns, the average death rate was increasing by 400%, that common effort to raise each other's morale acquired an important social significance. During one of the most challenging situations in recent history, neighbors tried to recreate and spread among themselves a modified piazza-like atmosphere.

Moreover, every April 25 since 1946, Italians have gathered in the piazzas to commemorate the date marking the end of Mussolini's dictatorship. After 74 years, however, that tradition had to be put on hold. Having to cancel all the parades planned for Liberation Day, Italians decided to transform, once again, their neighborhoods into city centers. Forced to stay at home under the threat of an invisible enemy, people looked at the value of the freedom their ancestors conquered 75 years earlier with new appreciation. To honor the partisan movements who fought against Mussolini's troops, people met on their balconies to sing "Bella Ciao," the anti-fascist resistance anthem. Less than a week after Liberation Day, on May 1st, Italians faced a similar challenge, not being able to celebrate Labor Day. For the first time in decades, people could not gather in the piazzas to honor the most important day of the year for workers' rights movements, in a moment in which working conditions are currently the object of heated debates.

If neighborhood gatherings substituted Liberation Day parades, in the case of Labor Day, the media became the new piazzas. Instead of using megaphones while marching around city centers, union representatives used social media and TV programs to communicate the immediate need for worker support measures. In particular, on that day, the media became the voice of those invisible African immigrants who, for the whole lockdown, had worked uninterruptedly in Southern Italy's fields, and in extremely poor and dangerous

conditions. With the media becoming an online piazza and laptops virtual stages, those exploited laborers were finally able to make the Italian audience aware of their situation.

Balcony and virtual gatherings represented a successful alternative to the piazza, especially in terms of social solidarity. However, there are some urban cultural practices that were not only hard to substitute, but that, when lacking, led to the disorientation of entire strata of the population. After carefully following the Italian case, I could not help but notice an interesting pattern, especially in a moment, like this one, in which sociology is increasingly interested in the role of the senses. During the lockdown, I watched a large number of interviews with Italian journalists asking people about their cities being empty. The majority of interviewees mentioned sensorial urban experiences among the aspects they missed the most; such as the sound of church bells, the smell of espresso coming from the cafés, and the shaking of hands between friends in the piazza. However small and repetitive these actions might seem, they represent reference points for a large number of the population, especially in the case of vulnerable groups. One example above all are the elderly, who are at greater risk not only from a health, but also from a social perspective. Often using public spaces, such as parks and piazzas, to meet with peers, during the coronavirus the oldest strata of the population suffered from a degree of isolation that neither Skype nor FaceTime was able to offset.

At the moment I am writing, Italy is in Phase Two, so while people may now walk in the piazzas, they still have to maintain social distance, cannot drink espresso in the cafés, and are not allowed to hug or shake anyone's hands. For almost three months now, Italians could not conduct those practices that, historically, built their sense of Gemeinschaft. Unable to undertake everyday social activities, during the lockdown, people tried to find substitutes for those elements that century after century built the country's material and symbolic culture. But, when asked about their empty cities, Italians explained that their social and sensorial experiences cannot be replaced.

Being born and raised in Italy, I often tell my American colleagues that it is not possible to translate the meaning of the term "piazza." I explain that the only way to understand it, is to live it. COVID-19 in Italy did not only have tragic consequences in terms of health issues. The pandemic paused, for the first time in centuries, an ongoing series of social practices deeply rooted in urban life. When, at the end of February, Italy became the epicenter of COVID-19, a social media comment by a friend captured my attention. "One day," it read "our prime minister will announce that this nightmare is over, and we will all meet in the piazzas to celebrate." Waiting for that day, Italians can only be patient, knowing that a cure or a vaccine against coronavirus will help heal the entire society, and not only from a health-related point of view.

Bridging Physical Distance: Solidarity Rituals During the Early Stage of the Coronavirus Pandemic in Italy

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In late February 2020, Italy became the European epicenter of the novel coronavirus contagion. The *Dipartimento della Protezione Civile* (the national body that deals with emergencies) began publicly sharing data on February 24: 221 people were confirmed as positive and 7 dead. Four days later, the CDC travel recommendation for Italy went from level 2 (Practice Enhanced Precautions) to level 3 (Avoid Nonessential Travel). Nine days later, on March 8, with 6,387 confirmed cases and 366 deaths, a lockdown was announced for most of northern Italy. The next day, the lockdown was extended to the whole country. Ten days later, on March 19, Italy recorded 33,190 confirmed cases and 3,405 deaths, more than any other country in the world.

Fig. 1: Italians sing the national anthem from their balcony. Source: twitter.com/Petit_Wendy35

Fig. 2: PM Giuseppe Conte's message to Italians. Translation: "Let's remain distant today to hug each other with more warmth and run faster together tomorrow. We will make it."
Source:https://www.facebook.com/GiuseppeConte64/posts/866165293865437

With events accelerating dramatically, millions in Italy had to quickly adapt to "social distancing." Not only did this involve school and non-essential workplace closure, but most notably, home isolation. These measures increase the physical distance between infected and non-infected people, but they come with remarkable costs. Home isolation, for instance, is particularly damaging to those who lack safe shelter, such as homeless people and victims of abuse. Broadly, isolation harms health and it may hinder the kind of solidarity that is most needed in times of national emergencies. We know little about what happens when a whole society is forced into self-isolation. I argue that Italians responded to this crisis by creatively using pop culture and digital technology to mobilize three modalities of unity at the local, national, and international level.

Soon after the lockdown, the hashtags #andràtuttobene (everything will be fine) and #flashmobsonoro (audio flash mob) started circulating widely on social media to invite people to go onto their balconies or lean out of their windows and sing. Many Italians, varying wildly in talent, responded to this call and interacted with their neighbors to sing their national anthem (Figure 1) and many popular songs.

While neighborhoods, towns, and cities reunited through singing, playing, and cheering from balconies, national narratives of solidarity emerged around the figure of Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. In June 2018 Conte, a professor of private law, became PM of a populist government formed by the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the League. After this coalition collapsed, Conte remained PM with the support of M5S and center-left Democratic Party. Initially regarded as a "minor figure," Conte gradually grew in popularity. In response to the coronavirus outbreak in the country, he issued measures imposing physical distancing with words emphasizing social connectedness. Conte explicitly cited German sociologist Norbert Elias in his address to the nation on March 11: "Every individual is benefiting from one's own sacrifices and the sacrifices of others. This is the strength of our country, a 'community of individuals' as Norbert Elias would say." His last remarks, displayed on his official Facebook page (Figure 2), evoke images of corporeal unity: "Let's remain distant today to hug each other with more warmth

and run faster together tomorrow. We will make it." These messages soon echoed through social media, generating a stream of memes that romanticized Conte and even depicted him as the protagonist of a romance manga (Figures 3-4).

Fig. 3: A romanticized version of Conte's message. Translation: "Everything will be fine. We will get over this together."

Finally, Italians looked to the rest of the world. In a popular Reddit thread, thousands of Italians shared their (at the time, still rather uncommon) experiences. On March 15, a collective of filmmakers based in Milan released a YouTube video where isolated Italians talk to their 10-days-ago-self. The video, which within a few days was subtitled in 23 languages and surpassed 7.5 million views, urged the rest of the world not to underestimate the virus and not to "f**k up." As we know now, few countries took the advice.

Fig. 4: Manga-style Conte addresses the nation. Translation: "Let's remain distant today to hug each other with more warmth and run faster together tomorrow. We will make it."

To conclude, forced into physical distancing, Italians creatively engaged in pop culture and digital technology to build social solidarity across their balconies, their country, and the world. The events described in this essay are consistent with the first stages of solidarity rituals that tend to follow a threat. Almost three months later, the country is slowly easing restrictions to mobility. The emotional response has gradually faded and has been replaced by numerous conflicts, which these forms of solidarities may encourage. The political mismanagement of the pandemic (both at the national and local level) is under scrutiny. Tensions arose among citizens on their levels of compliance to the lockdown. Anti-EU sentiments may rise following a lackluster European support. The economic downturn, rising unemployment, and slow welfare response could eventually threaten PM Conte's popularity, still high according to early May polls. It is unclear what will happen next. In fact, COVID-19 is essentially different from more typical forms of threats, such as a terrorist attack, because – without a vaccine or herd immunity – it challenges directly any idea of "normalcy" after the crisis. Future research is due to investigate the complex nexus between leadership style, solidarity building, and long-term effect of the COVID-19 across the world.

Health Behavior Disparities Along Party Lines and Associative Diffusion

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A striking pattern that we see in Americans' response to the coronavirus pandemic is the variation in response predictable by political party identification. Specifically, American Republicans are much less likely than American Democrats to engage in and endorse health behaviors that are at the time of writing recommended by the World Health Organization (Kushner Gadarian et al 2020). From the perspective of associative diffusion (Goldberg and Stein 2018), this division can be explained by a parsimonious set of initial conditions including animosity between the two political parties and the salient political leanings of sources of opinions concerning the pandemic. Here, I briefly describe polarization in response to the pandemic from the perspective of associative diffusion, contrast this perspective to an alternative explanation that revolves around the idea of "political echo chambers", and offer interventions to mend the American divide suggested by the associative diffusion model.

Associative diffusion is the process through which both consensus in schematic representation of the world and behavioral differentiation simultaneously emerge from interactions between individuals (Goldberg and Stein 2018). In this model, individuals have preferences for certain behaviors, observe others' behaviors from which they infer the associations between those behaviors, and accordingly update their behavioral preferences to reduce cognitive dissonance, caused by e.g. having high preference for two behaviors that are negatively associated in one's mental model of the world. This perspective brings to light two important pre-conditions for the behavioral differentiation we observe at present.

The first pre-condition is animosity between the two major political parties, demonstrated by unprecedented levels of affective polarization among Americans (Iyengar et al 2019). If intergroup animosity is related to a perceived dissimilarity between the groups (van Loon et al under preparation), then we can infer that even before the pandemic, Americans generally viewed Democrats and Republicans as more distinct than they have in recent history. From the perspective of associative diffusion, this sets the stage for especially strong and persistent behavioral divides between the groups, since a perceived association between endorsement or rejection of a behavior and political identity would present strong psychic incentives for partisans to act in accordance with members of their own party.

The second pre-condition is the politicization of the American news media. In the current American media environment, sources of information on the pandemic are attributed widely agreed-upon and oft discussed political leanings (perhaps the two most salient being CNN, associated with "the left," and Fox News, associated with "the right"). As a consequence, when Americans "interact" with news personalities who are also a salient source of endorsements or rejections of these health behaviors, political identities are extremely salient. This then sets the stage for correlations in health behavior rejection or endorsement among news personalities to create the cognitive association between their respective political identity and the endorsement of these health behaviors foreshadowed above in the minds of Americans.

An alternative explanation is as follows: individuals are uniformly subject to social influence from any particular source they are exposed to, but individuals will naturally be exposed more to sources that share their political identity. The result is that even slight chance variation in attitudes or behaviors at the outset will lead to much great differences over time. This explanation is consonant with explanations provided by Axelrod (1997) for cultural variation in general and DellaPosta et al (2015) for lifestyle politics in particular and accords with the popular concept of "political echo chambers". It is worth noting that in this alternative explanation,

cross-aisle interactions hamper behavioral differentiation, while from the lens of associative diffusion such interactions potentially accelerate and maintain it.

This alternative explanation, however, has difficulty in explaining why US Republicans went from mixed support of health behaviors to a more wide-spread rejection of these behaviors. Bursztyn et al (2020) documents how in the early days of the outbreak, two influential news anchors associated with the political right had discordant reactions to the burgeoning pandemic, with one downplaying the danger posed by the virus and the other taking it more seriously. During this same time, news anchors associated with the left showed a more united front, more universally endorsing caution. From the alternative explanation's perspective, whether or not a more somber assessment of the virus would become the norm among American Republicans is essentially a coin flip—dependent completely upon what proportion of American Republicans were privately leaning towards endorsement at the outset. From the associative diffusion perspective, however, the outcome is more predictable: with mixed feelings in one group and largely unanimous feelings in the other, audiences watching these programs would see a correlation between rejecting these health behaviors and political identity – leading to a mutual embedding of the meaning of these practices and political orientation. What it meant to be an American conservative became, in part, rejecting these health behaviors, and vice versa.

This simple analysis elucidates several possible interventions to increase Republican endorsement of recommended health behaviors. First, the wide-spread shaming of Republicans writ large among Democrats will likely only serve to worsen the issue, as it will make more salient the behavioral disparities between the groups. Making examples of Republicans who endorse these health behaviors more salient could serve to lessen the troublesome perceived association. Additionally, the political identity of prominent instances of individuals or groups who happen to both identify as Republican and reject these health behaviors should be made as inconspicuous as possible, perhaps by focusing on other characteristics of the individuals (though this runs the risk of recreating these behavioral disparities along a different demographic axis). Finally, in discussions where the behavioral disparity along party lines has already been made salient, one should take a page from research on moral reframing (Feinberg and Willer 2015) and attempt to make salient connections between these health behaviors and values that are widely endorsed by US Republicans (e.g. patriotism and the sanctity of life).

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The Mediatized President and the Pandemic

David L. Altheide
Arizona State University

During the terrifying 2020 pandemic that was killing thousands of Americans, President Trump tweeted:

> *"President Trump is a ratings hit. Since reviving the daily White House briefing Mr. Trump and his coronavirus updates have attracted an average audience of 8.5 million on cable news, roughly the viewership of the season finale of 'The Bachelor.' Numbers are continuing to rise...(President Trump tweet, March 29, 2020)*

Digital media are putting people Americans at risk. The United States' slow response to the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) is partly due to President Trump's self-promotive reliance on digital media—especially twitter—that are instantaneous, visual, and personal. Notwithstanding scientists and other experts' views that lives have been lost because the U. S. response was woefully inadequate and slow, the President enjoys favorable support from his political base. On April 9 with more than 16,000 Covid-19 deaths in the United States, 80% of Republicans polled said the federal government was doing a good job, while 85% of Democrats disagreed. Certainly, part of the discrepancy rests with liberals' and conservatives' reliance on different media.

Increasingly, social life is reflexive of communication technologies and formats (Altheide, 2018). Propagandists consider the formats and audience preferences in constructing messages. The expanded use of social media enables politicians-as-actors to self-promote themselves with political drama and attention-based politics, "in which politicians use their communication to draw the attention of the biggest possible crowd of the audience (voters) to themselves or to the themes they propose in the multitude of information or news flows." (Merkovity, 2017, p. 66).

The President's use of social media to promote himself hinges on approval from an adoring political base connected through digital media and Fox News. President Trump primarily addressed the coronavirus crisis by engaging in attention-based politics via twitter. President Trump's messages and some 11,000 tweets since being in office promote himself rather than the country or even his political party (Altheide, 2017). On March 6, 2020 he stated to reporters that he preferred that 21 passengers on a cruise ship remain on board, *"I like the numbers being where they are. I don't need to have the number double because of one ship."* His messaging is reflexive of the rules and assumptions for digital media, including familiarity, brevity, and congruity with expectations. While only about one in five Americans use twitter, and only single digits of those claim to follow Donald Trump, his tweets are intended to be amplified by a hybrid media system. Trump told an interviewer in June 2019:

> "I put it out, and then it goes onto your platform. It goes onto ABC. It goes onto the networks. It goes onto all over cable. It's an incredible way of communicating."

His messages draw attention to himself more than the specific content (Shifman, 2013). Many of President Trump's tweets have a common form, language, symbolic characteristics, and reflect awareness of other tweets. Merkovity observed that 70% of his presidential campaign tweets included attention promoting exclamation points, with many texts in capital letters (Merkovity, 2017, p. 66). As Shifman (Shifman, 2013) notes:

> Internet memes are digital content units with common characteristics, created with awareness of each other, and circulated, imitated, and transformed via the Internet by many users.

Virtually anything tweeted will resonate meaningfully and emotionally with sympathetic supporters who are looking to confirm rather than challenge their champion. Accordingly, Donald Trump communicatively became an internet digital meme in his own right. He became what Republicans should embrace, even if his concern was with personal ratings.

Presidential loyalty is not healthy. The mediatized presidential meme reinforced a personal definition of the virus situation. A world-wide pandemic would not be in his personal interest. Supporters on Fox News and elsewhere promoted the narrative that the virus was a Democratic Party hoax to hurt the President's reelection bid. So the leader of the free world, and many supporters, disregarded information from the World Health Organization and experts from the CDC, and continued to deny that the virus was a serious problem. In one of 43 tweets on January 30, 2020, the President tweeted, *"Working closely with China and others on Coronavirus outbreak. Only 5 people in U.S., all in good recovery."* In a speech that night on Jan. 30, He said, *"We have it very well under control. We have very little problem in this country at this moment — five. And those people are all recuperating successfully."* President Trump's repeated assurance throughout January to the middle of March that there was nothing to worry about and that *"It will all work out well,"* delayed a rapid public-health response that could have lessened the growing impact of this virus. On March 10, he promised: *"It will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away."* When this position was taken by Trump, supporters viewing his hundreds of tweets could hardly disagree if they were to remain committed to what he represented to them. They saw his self-promotion as their struggle, too: They could not be be critical of federal actions with the virus, while they were connecting with a meme-like President—who was always being criticized by "fake news". Therefore, many of Trump's supporters watched Fox News and believed that the federal government was doing a good job with the virus, and that established media "fake news" exaggerated the virus risk for political reasons (79%). So it is not surprising that several polls showed that Republicans (42%) were less concerned about Covid-19 than Democrats (73%).

As a reflexive propagandist, President Trump emerged as a meme that was experienced by an audience as a businessman-outsider-nationalist, who would promote himself as the surrogate of those who shared his views, to combat all critics, journalists, other politicians, etc., who disagreed with him. The President's insistence that the problem would go away curtailed the government's preparation to rush more testing and prevention materials such as masks and protective gowns for health workers, the all-important ventilators to aid the stricken, and to coordinate the public health response that might reduce contagion and save lives even as the virus began to spread. The consequences of his self-promoting decisions to define the threat of Covid-19 were powerful, immediate and lethal for thousands of Americans.

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Time, Culture, and Covid-19

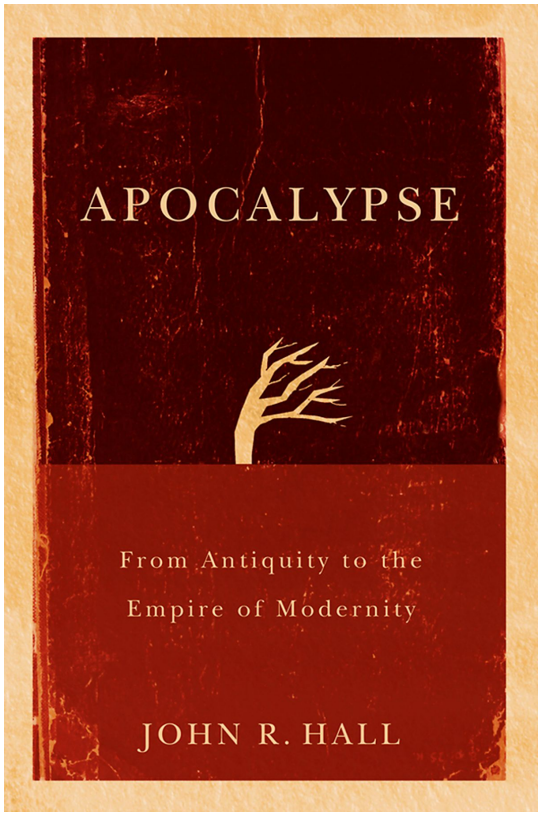
John R. Hall
UC, Santa Cruz and Davis

One hundred years ago, on June 14th, Max Weber, then 56, died of pneumonia, possibly a victim of the "Spanish flu." Little more than a year earlier he'd given his "Politics as a vocation" lecture (Hall 2019). As Marianne Weber recounted, in his last days her husband anxiously engaged with German politics and debated the attractive but daunting prospect of adopting orphans left by the suicide of his younger sister. Alternately energized by scholarly projects, exhausted by editing forthcoming publications, and worried about money matters, Weber pushed ahead with lectures until fever forced him to bed. Days later, death divested him of all plans and anxieties (Weber 1975: 685-98). Weber, who once called himself "unmusical" in matters of religion, embodied the Protestant ethic in its intensity and its neurotic possibilities.

Weber was only one among many millions who died in the wake of the 1918 pandemic, but he provides a talisman for considering the relationship between pandemics and culture, both because his dying days embodied a specific culture and because his approach to analyzing culture focused on the kinds of enactment of culture that his dying pandemic days embodied.

Weber's approach to culture, social action, and organization gains theoretical coherence by identifying the temporal structurations of his concepts (Schutz 1967; Hall 2020). Applied empirically, this phenomenological weberian approach offers an alternative to sociological and historical analyses based in objectivism. It theorizes bureaucracy as centered in the diachronic time of clock and calendar; community, enacted in the collective synchronic here-and-now of ritualized communion; and competition and conflict as unfolding strategic temporality (Hall 2009). Such an approach is especially relevant to understanding historical epochs that Walter Benjamin (1968: 263) described as "shot through with chips of Messianic time."

Even before the Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd, as the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded, a hard-nosed empirical sociologist, Michael Hechter, observed, "This *is* the Apocalypse!" Truly. We have reached "the end of the world as we know it." There will be no "return to normal," only, if we are lucky, some "new normal."



Note: 20% discount code for John A. Hall's book *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* is VBT70, valid only on purchases made through Polity's website until October 31st 2020.

Social and religious researchers now understand that an apocalypse is "socially constructed," and can be studied like other constructed social realities – bureaucracies, social movements, war, and so on. Paralleling the Edinburgh School's "strong programme" in the sociology of science, a strong program in apocalypse studies concerns itself not just with "real" apocalypses but with the whole gamut of apocalyptic social phenomena.

The Apocalyptic is an overarching temporal structuration of the social in which many people at once orient action toward the "chips of Messianic time" that Benjamin invoked. To take stock of an apocalyptic event in cultural terms, we can identify how its temporal structuration connects cultural scripts with social action and organization in diverse spheres (Hall 2009).

In the CoronApocalypse, society all but shuts down. Streets empty except in hot spots of demonstrations, looting, and police riots. Orderly lines of cars form at Covid-19 testing locations and food distribution sites. The forces of nature gain ground: air quality improves globally, and wild animals appear in suburban neighborhoods. The sheer scale of developments makes 9/11 and the "Great Recession" look like mere social hiccups.

The CoronApocalypse has, in a matter of months, upended the life of virtually every person on the planet. The exception establishes the rule: at the isolated meditation center, participants seek transcendent ecstatic consciousness "outside" history, only experiencing the worldly trauma if they gear into the apocalyptic times beyond their own *umwelten* (Hall 2020: 208; "Did I miss anything?," NYT 6/2/2020). For everyone else, taken-for-granted life in the here-and-now is transformed by: anxieties about death; new routines of self-discipline (practiced, disregarded, and policed); spatial shifts in the zones of action; boredom; emergent practices of mutual-aid; and immediate and virtually mediated transformations of intimacy and social intercourse.

Under the sign of modernity, Jürgen Habermas argued, the system colonizes the lifeworld. Its diachronic, clock-and-calendar routinization of things subordinates everyday life. Such systemically organized modern society is predicated on the assembly line, planning, projections, logistics, and in a general sense, *making* the future (Andersson 2018). Thus, the pandemic's engulfing interruptions of the diachronic constitute its great apocalyptic break. In the heat of the pandemic, Mark Lilla claims that we can never really know the future (Sunday Review, NYT 5/24/20: 4-5). Modernism seemingly capitulates to apocalypse.

Yet modern societies have increased their capacities to undertake "rationalization of the Apocalypse." The iconic pandemic example is the epidemiological effort to "flatten the curve" of contagion. This effort may or may not decrease the incidence of Covid-19, but it manages the epidemic so as to avoid shortages of intensive-care unit beds and ventilators. The example is telling. Yes, the diachronic is reasserted, but only through the transformation of old routines and the deployment of new ones. Action in *strategic* time becomes the basis for consolidating a transitional diachronic.

As for the collective synchronic here-and-now, its face-to-face ritual mechanisms sustain social solidarity in domains of religion, community, and nation (Hall 2009: 14-15). Yet pandemic policing restricts these potential hot spots of viral super-spreading. Death itself is robbed of the communion of collective mourning.

Then there are the pandemic's mirrored temporal pre-apocalyptic and postapocalyptic cultural manifestations. Preppers, other-worldly sects, and survival groups are presumably having their day on the "other" side of the Apocalypse. And they are now joined by the affluent who have chosen to decamp from cities to their summer retreats, precipitating conflict with tourist-destination locals, some of whom regard their communities as engaged in quasi-pre-apocalyptic war with an invasion of infection-bearing zombies.

Meanwhile, in pre-apocalyptic hot zones, even ordinary people become survivalists – hording, sheltering in place, maintaining social distance, wearing masks, and taking up mutual aid. In the US, the culture wars inflect the Apocalypse: not wearing a mask symbolizes red-state male fortitude (NYT 6/2/2020). Massive demonstrations following the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis may precipitate broader insurrection, civil war, or social revolution, while strategically opportunistic looters and thieves use cell phones to coordinate

their own strategic actions amidst the cover of chaos. A former CIA officer calls the turmoil "what happens in countries before a collapse" (Washington *Post*, 6/2/2020). Antifa versus Boogaloo movements rehearse an apocalyptic holy war. President Donald Trump fans the flames of confrontation with a photo-op walk that can only proceed by tear-gassing non-violent protesters, and letters to the editors of newspapers across the country compare Trump to Jim Jones, his "base" to Jones's followers "drinking the Kool-Aid." We are awash in manifestations of apocalyptic culture. Take your pick.

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Culture Section Officers

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Four Questions For Cecilia Ridgway

Dustin Stoltz (Lehigh University) interviews **Cecilia Ridgeway** (Stanford) on the past, present, and future of cultural analysis and sociology.

DS: How did you become interested in sociology and the study of culture?

My undergraduate background was in a joint sociology and psychology program in psychology at the University of Michigan, which was actually in its very last stages — it collapsed right after I left! I took courses that were jointly taught by a sociologist and a psychologist, and I was drawn to the sociologist. So, I became interested in this sociological social psychology approach with a focus on interactions and groups which came out of that. I always traversed across the line. I went to graduate school at Cornell, and they had a joint program, but it was still two separate departments—it collapsed too! (A lot of things happened in the disciplines to drive them apart in the 70s.) But, Cornell let people outside of the sociology department be on dissertation committees, and I ended up having a committee with a sociologist, an anthropologist, and a psychologist. The anthropologist and the psychologist were interested in understanding social interaction, so they weren't typical of their disciplines, and the sociologist, Robin Williams, was a mainstream institutional sociologist. William Lambert was the psychologist, and he was associated with the "Six Cultures Study,"[1] very much a Harvard Social Relations kind of guy. John Roberts was the anthropologist who was interested in American culture which was atypical at the time, particularly the culture of games. I became fascinated with that and I think that is what started me down the culture path. I was essentially interested in games as cultural schemas—the word wasn't used then—but cultural schemas of conflict that people use to manage social life.

I actually did my dissertation on music, which I ended up moving away from. But, I became interested in music as a cultural representation, how people use it, the relationship between music and cognition, and how it structures emotional responses. This had some clear lines to my later work on culture and cognition about gender. But, at the time, one didn't really study gender, gender was a chapter in the book on family. I was always interested in gender (my mother was a proto-feminist), and I was also interested in inequality and how inequality is done to people in the room. Those two things lead me to status, and status is a cultural process because it is rooted in beliefs about the value of different types of actors.

DS: What work does culture do in your thinking?

I'm closer to those who see culture as schemas that people use, ways of doing things, as a kind of virtual plan that people learn and use to enact a given structure. For example, the way my anthropology advisor thought about games, you enact the rules of the game and it has material results. And, I think status functions very similarly. A lot of aspects of society have these kinds of schemas that people use to enact familiar structures, and that is the sense in which I've mostly studied culture.

There are also important cultural processes associated with status, like Michelle Lamont's work on boundary maintenance and development of boundaries between different groups. Groups must be differentiated for some groups to be considered higher status than others.

I've always been more interested in micro-structural events, and that's where people

[1] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022022110362567

act on cultural schemas. So, it's not that I think broader cultural processes, like ideology, are not important. They are likely quite important in shaping the context in which these micro processes happen. This has just been where my interests are, rather than a theoretical stand. But, I do see culture as the means by which people enact structure. People cannot create the structural without the cultural because people use beliefs to coordinate. If they don't share those beliefs, coordination is not going to be easy. So, culture is not epiphenomenal. At the same time, I do think that cultural elements change most powerfully through structural and material changes. It can happen that ideas change other ideas or beliefs or similar processes, but I think it is most likely that you change the structure of people's interest or material context will lead to more dramatic changes in culture.

It's also important to emphasize that culture is not just what one person thinks or believes on a first-order basis. It's what *I think you think*, and *what you think I think*, and *what we think most people think*! It's true that individuals carry culture, but they carry it as a third-order belief. And there's plenty of evidence that what you think most people think is a bigger determinant of your behavior in a social context than what you think. I think a lot of people miss this, sociologists included.

DS: What guides your choice of research topics, settings, and methods?

I did an experiment for my dissertation, which has always been unusual in sociology, but they were more common at that time because they were exploding in psychology around 1970. It was more my substantive interests that drove my methodological approach — but I guess I had a taste for the experimental method. Because I was studying social interaction, which was more amenable to experimental methods—I wasn't studying conflict between nations.

I also liked the logic of inference underlying experimental methods. The purpose of the experiment is to test a logical proposition from a theory. What matters for generalizability with experiments is not whether the exact results in this particular setting would be the exact results in a different situation. Instead, what matters is whether you support the theory in this situation. Then you can derive new hypotheses from the theory about different situations and test them there too.

So, I came to my methods because I had a taste for the them and my substantive interests were amendable to them, rather than saying "I'm interested in culture, and culture is best studied this way…" A lot of cultural questions are probably not best studied with experiments, but the process of making and employing culture can be. For example, I've done experiments on people forming status beliefs by getting people into a room and forming beliefs based on made up differences — that's the creation of culture.

DS: Where is your work taking you now and where do you hope cultural analysis in sociology will go?

I'm working on another book—wisely or unwisely! When I wrote my gender book, I really wanted to think through a deeper story of why I think gender is persistent and powerful even in contemporary society. In a similar vein, I wanted to write a book on status, essentially focused around what is the nature of status as a form of inequality—*what really is it*. We know pretty well what power and resources are, but there's a way status is weird. It's ancient, it's universal, and it's clearly everywhere in society. It's in your clothing. It's in organizations, It's in the world system. The question is, what is its nature? How is it that it's everywhere, how does it exist in small societies and also interpenetrates our (sort of) meritocratic modern bureaucratic institutions. And, even if it does suffuse social life, why does it matter? I'm not sure I can really answer that, but I'm going to make an argument.

It drives inequality based on perceived social differences, and it also encourages people to perceive social difference, to emphasize it. You can take the grand social differences in society that are major axes of social inequality, and you can sufficiently mixing them up with other kinds

of differences to suppress them. That way we don't have a few social differences that drive everything, that are in the Blauian sense "consolidated." I don't think status will go away. But, this way your status goes up and down as you go in and out of different rooms. There's not just a few characteristics that always dictate your status in the same way across all situations. So, maybe we can reduce the extent to which, say, race, gender, class, education are the major determinants of status. Doing that will be an important part of achieving a more egalitarian society. A necessary condition of that is reducing the consensuality of these status beliefs — consensuality in the sense that people think that other people hold these beliefs. Now, how you do that is a long and complicated story.

As for the field, I see a lot of increasing specialization in sociology, but less talking across specialization, and quite a lot of academic stratification. Not just institutions of different academic status, but also specialities of different academic status. I say this as a gender scholar, where it is dominant and yet not thought to be mainstream! Given that, I worry a little bit that we might not have enough common focus. I'm not despairing, but we're pretty fragmented. Maybe I'm wrong about this, but I have the sense that some cultural sociology will assume processes that take place at the micro- or cognitive-level without actually learning from the work being done in those areas within sociology, social psychology, or psychology. They can end up making assumptions about identity or beliefs or cognition that do not have empirical support. Culture often comes across as a macro field, but if our theory involves micro-processes, then we need to read across levels of analysis and disciplines.

Cecilia Ridgeway is Lucie Stern Professor in the Social Sciences and, by courtesy, of Education, Emerita at Stanford University. She completed her bachelor's degree ('67) at the University of Michigan in a joint sociology and psychology program in social psychology. She went on to complete doctoral work in sociology at Cornell University ('72), where she studied with Robin Williams, Jr (a sociologist), William Lambert (a psychologist), and John Roberts (an anthropologist). Her dissertation, *Affective Interaction as a Determinant of Musical Involvement,* explored the emotional dimensions of listening to music using experimental methods. Prior to Stanford, she held positions at Univ. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Univ. of Iowa. She has published books and edited volumes on gender, inequality, status, and small group processes, and is well-known for her book *Framed by Gender* (Oxford, 2011), and is currently working on a book on status. In 2012, she was president of the American Sociological Association, and received the W.E. DuBois Career of Distinguished Scholarship in 2007 and the Jessie Bernard Award in 2009, among many other accolades.

Contact us with suggestions for essays, book reviews, symposia, reports on conference panels, etc.—or just themes or topics you'd like to see covered in the newsletter. Graduate students are especially welcome to be involved!

Contact us at asaculturenews@gmail.com.

ASA Online Sessions

LIVE

Section Business Meeting

The business meeting will meet, over zoom, at the same time as it is currently scheduled. As I wrote earlier, however, we plan a few modifications to the content (e.g., streaming awards announcements; posting the treasurers' report) to make the content delivery part of the meeting run shorter than usual, allowing more time for Q&A. We will post someone to manage the chat as well, highlighting folks' questions from there as well, so we anticipate more give and take than those meeting sometimes involve. Furthermore, there we will discuss an exciting proposal for how to foster the section's intellectual life over the 20-21 year. Please attend to find out more and to shape the plan.

Sat., Aug. 8
11:30 a.m. PDT (2:30 p.m. EDT)
https://virginia.zoom.us/j/94843613911?pwd=UEVLY0MybWNKSGRPVDM4RzVtTHVwUT09
Meeting ID: 948 4361 3911
Password: 174694

Mind and Matter: Synthesizing Cognition and Materiality

Cognitive approaches to culture have become increasingly dominant, and interest in materiality and meaning making is on the rise. Griswold's definition of cultural object is implicitly cognitive (shared significance) and material (form). Cognitive "types" rely on material "tokens." Work on distributed cognition suggest much cognition is distributed through environments of objects and people. Despite the affinities between these approaches, the literatures on cognition and materiality in sociology are usually siloed. New work is starting to synthesize these approaches, and this panel invites papers engaging the intersections of these agendas.

Sat, Aug. 8
4:30 to 6:10pm PDT (7:30 to 9:10pm EDT)
https://notredame.zoom.us/j/92050266592?pwd=MkhtRGlxa3Riam8rUTdwUldkdVQ0UT09
Password: 608150

Populism and Civic Cultures in a Global Context

From the US to the UK, from Brazil to the Philippines, the rising trend of populism poses serious threats to democracy around the globe in recent years. The session "Populism and Civic Cultures in a Global Context" seeks papers that discuss how political discourses of populism are nurtured, or potentially challenged, by local and global civic cultures. Examples may include, but are certainly not limited to, how populist discourses draw on legitimate cultural codes or social narratives in civil society, how particular social narratives or civic interactions serve to disrupt or transform certain populist narratives, or how local and global populist discourses interact and intersect across national boundaries. Papers that are both theoretically informed and empirically grounded are particularly welcome.

Sun, Aug. 9
8:30 to 10:10am PDT (11:30am to 1:10pm EDT)
https://ucdavis.zoom.us/j/92783772228?pwd=aFBiZjV4WnZsQzBoZ2k3Z3dqUDBPdz09
Password: 895665

Resurrecting the Macro in the Sociology of Culture

Reflection theory left its mark on the sociology of culture by effectively curtailing macro-level work and pulling the field towards micro and meso-level approaches. This panel invites a creative array of empirical, methodological and theoretical papers that operate at the 'macro' level and broadly fall within the sociology of culture. This includes both longitudinal and historical comparative writings in the vein of Tilly, but also work that investigates cultural change and diffusion as a macro-level phenomenon.

Sun, Aug. 9
10:30am to 12:10pm PDT (1:30 to 3:10pm EDT)
https://harvard.zoom.us/j/99183609261?pwd=MGJrSTlFMHhWVTc0SEo2dnlGaW9Fdz09
Password: 647440

Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity: Understanding the Good in a World Gone Bad

How are we to understand how, why, and when people do good in a world gone wrong? What distinguishes those who take moral action to help others from the bad? Why do people persist in working collectively for a good society against steep odds? How do people contest their own marginalization and create empowerment? Given the challenges that contemporary societies face due to patriarchy, racism, exploitation, nationalism, environmental destruction, and violence, among other problems, this open session examines the meanings, practices, institutions, processes, cultures, and movements intended to benefit the welfare of others. The session includes papers that approach this topic from range of methodological and epistemological perspectives.

Sat, Aug. 8
10:30 am PDT, Live via Zoom

Art, Aesthetics and the Social

Papers in this session offer new understandings of sociological meaning-making through cultural institutions and materials, including art and aesthetics.

Tues, Aug. 11
8:30-10:10 am (PST)
https://virginia.zoom.us/j/8611626812
Password: 057731

Cultures of Classification: Race, Gender, and Class

Scholars have long recognized the role cultural practices of classification play in producing and reproducing social inequalities. They stress how classification systems such as ratings, rankings, or performance reviews—even when they are meant to evaluate and reward individuals fairly and transparently—often continue to disadvantage underprivileged groups and thereby legitimize race-, gender-, or class-based disparities. This session will take stock of recent scholarship in this tradition. It will also feature new research highlighting a key tension at the heart of classification practices: to try to reduce bias against certain groups, classification systems often rely on standardized metrics, yet these metrics have a tendency to reify hierarchies of worth and thus entrench social stratification.

Mon, Aug. 10
2:30-4:10 p.m. PDT (5:30-7:10 p.m. EDT)
https://lse.zoom.us/j/99315590421?pwd=QkxnQlUzeklSQkMrRlpLU25SWnZpQT09
Password: 194814

PRE-RECORDED

Grad Student Professionalization Panel: Teaching Culture in Today's Political Climate

This panel will explore best practices for teaching cultural sociology in a political climate of heightened divisiveness and distrust of social science. As educators, cultural sociologists can prepare their students with the critical skills vital to understanding and addressing the social issues facing our society today. Panelists will discuss their experiences, innovations, and concerns with teaching culture, attending to variation across different institutions and student populations.

Articulations of Globalizing Knowledge Cultures in Sociology

To what extent are the global and transnational styles of reasoning, types of questions, and forms of evidence organizing different knowledge cultures of sociology convergent? With ASA sections as one way to operationalize these knowledge cultures, we invite proposals from members of various sections to elaborate the principal concepts, contests, regional references and transnational connections organizing a scholarly field's globalizing knowledge culture. Through discussion, we hope to identify the extent to which GATSociology might aspire to both greater breadth and coherence as an intellectual field or, alternatively, embrace a sense that only references to scale are the principal object of the #GATSociology distinction.

Culture Section Council

ASA Paper Summaries

Session: Resurrecting the Macro in the Sociology of Culture

The Cultural Logic of Capitalist Realism: Towards a Social Theory of 'Okay Boomer'

Jason C. Mueller and John McCollum

2019 will go down as the year of 'Okay Boomer!' The Okay Boomer (henceforth OKb) meme gained traction in response to a short video made by an older American man, in which he demanded young people 'grow up' and achieve personal success through hard work, frugality, and other lifestyle choices (see linzrinzz 2019). For some, this phrase represents an ongoing battle of generations wherein [older] *Baby Boomers* are fed up with the utopian demands of [younger] *Gen-Z* and *Millennials*. However, many saw the rising cost of college tuition and the difficulty of

accumulating personal savings under the conditions of 21st century capitalism as a reason why Gen-Z/Millennials were frustrated with Boomers. Thus, in response to the generational-warfare pundits grew a coterie of writers demanding we see society for what it 'really was'—one wracked by class-warfare.

There is some truth to the demographic-warfare argument, and significant insight from the class struggle perspective, but both popular opinions still have shortcomings. Generally, they eschew asking what politico-ideological conditions created a population for which OKb would/could become a stand-in for a larger social struggle. To answer this we draw upon Fredric Jameson's concept of *cognitive mapping*, along with insights on ideology-critique and postmodernity from Mark Fisher, Franco Berardi, and Slavoj Žižek.

Cognitive mapping entails contemplating the current functioning of capitalism and the politico-economic coordinates in which we operate (Jameson 1988). In other words, a robust ability to understand how capitalism simultaneously impacts globalized exploitation and *our own lives* is required *prior* to our engagement in collective action. In the 21st century, dense webs of techno-capital coupled with the dominant ontology of 'there is no alternative to capitalism' creates populations unable to adequately cognitively map (Berardi 2011; Fisher 2009; Žižek 2006). Per Jameson (1988: 353), "the incapacity to map socially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience."

For younger generations, 'the boomer' embodies many social ills afflicting the US, exemplified by someone who simultaneously possesses undeserved access to enjoyments in life that remain inaccessible to Gen-Z/Millennials. The OKb meme likely acts as a [reified] politico-ideological stand-in for the class-based antagonisms that wrack US society; antagonisms obfuscated by the dominant political ideologies of contemporary capitalism. Thus, rather than formulating a political agenda due to frustrations with 'capitalists,' we saw something different: Youth taking their frustrations out on 'Boomers' who 'stole their future.'

This has important implications for current events, as one cannot take concrete steps to address social problems unless an adequate degree of cognitive mapping is achieved by generations battered—ideologically, politically, and economically—by 21st century racialized capitalism. Current protest movements give us hope that youth are engaging in more comprehensive acts of cognitive mapping, successfully connecting the dots between issues of racialized, gendered, and class-based inequities that demand swift and decisive policy responses.

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Revisiting Ideational Embeddedness: How the Cultural Revolution Shaped China and Its Relationship with Global Capitalism

Xiaohong Xu, University of Michigan

The notion of ideational embeddedness that Margaret Somers and Fred Block (2005) develop from Karl Polanyi's oeuvre captures the inherent power of ideas that underlie consequential political and legal decisions. This paper revisits this notion by analyzing the historical variability and change of ideational embeddedness. Specifically, how do powerful ideas come into

being and, once whipped into shape, shape macro-historical dynamics in the long durée? I advance a performative theory of how powerful ideas are crystalized in contingent historical events and become historical unconscious that profoundly determine later social and political developments.

The paper excavates an uncanny origin of contemporary global capitalism beyond the rise of neoliberalism in Western capitalist democracies but in a failed democratic experiment in the heydays of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Arguing that the separation of the economic from the political in laissez-faire capitalism and neoliberal capitalism is only a subtype of the modern separation of politics and economy, I trace the interplay between socialist politics and socialist economy in China in the 1950s and 1960s and show how the Cultural Revolution mass mobilization emerged as a political disarticulation of internal contradictions in the wake of disastrous efforts to revolutionize the socialist economy in the Great Leap Forward. Amidst workers' uprisings, however, the Maoists made the pivotal separation of the political from the economic. by rejecting workers' economic demands, paining party officials as saboteurs who stoke up the "economistic wind" and workers who raised economic demands as politically unprogressive and vulnerable to the "economistic" scheme of reactionary sabotage. This separation appeared to clarify the chaotic situation, yet resulted in a form of politics that only focused on seizing power from incumbent party officials at the expense of addressing systemic injustice.

This pivot scored a victory in Shanghai, thanks to a unique network of political entrepreneurs who were able to navigate a complex landscape of meanings and pulled off the performative breakthrough. Yet, in trying to replicate the Shanghai model to the rest of the country where such a network of political entrepreneurs was lacking, Mao found that his revolutionary politics led increasingly to factional struggle and eventually mass disillusionment as the goal of mass organizations became degenerated into conflict over getting their leaders into the new political organs. As mass politics became delegitimated and in the end neutralized by Mao himself in July 1968, the separation of politics and economy persisted in the form of recuperation of economism, which eventually set the ideological foundation of market reform. This is a form of economism that, thanks to the Maoists' Shanghai pivot, is predicated on a mutual exclusive relationship with mass transformative politics. This is the historical origin of the depoliticization hegemony in contemporary China, its rejection of popular protests, and its acquiescence of restriction of freedom of speech. Moreover, this post-Mao depoliticized economism, while distinctly Chinese, also emerged as an unlikely partner with neoliberal separation of the economic from the political, by both denying democratic participation in the economic sphere, an alliance that remains to be unraveled.

The Culture and Cognition of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster: On the Role of the Developmental State

Hiro Saito, School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University

I originally wrote this paper as part of my effort to practice public sociology. Now in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I see a greater opening for sociologists to grapple with urgent matters of concern among citizens. However, such advancement of public sociology will be possible only if sociologists around the world join their efforts to break down the barriers between universities and publics and between theory and practice – and I dedicate this paper to the worldwide movement.

This paper approaches the Fukushima nuclear disaster as an organizational failure involving advanced technologies, as the National Diet investigative report singled out "regulatory capture" as responsible for Japan's failed nuclear safety. The existing research has traced this organizational failure mainly to the "nuclear energy village," an extensive network of actors in national and municipal governments, construction and manufacturing, electricity generation and

transmission, and mass media. However, I argue that the political economy of nuclear energy – the force of power and money – alone cannot explain why regulatory capture emerged and persisted.

Instead, I propose to examine the culture and cognition of Japan's nuclear safety as coterminous with the developmental state that institutionalized the epistemic authority of the state bureaucracy to make policy decisions on behalf of citizens. Integral to such epistemic authority was the education system, which inculcated cognitive schemas and distributed academic credentials in such a way that the state came to virtually monopolize legitimate policy expertise. This epistemic authority of the developmental state allowed members of the nuclear energy village to promote nuclear power generation without adequate safety measures while largely shielding this regulatory failure from public scrutiny.

Thus foregrounding the indirect but powerful institutional effects of education on policymaking, this paper suggests a new line of inquiry – a synthesis of cultural sociology, educational research, and science and technology studies. Such a synthesis can help illuminate the dynamic of science and technology policymaking by mapping how the education system produces different groups of experts and align them with the government, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, and other relevant actors.

Equally important, this paper offers a policy implication for Japan's nuclear safety. After the nuclear disaster, the government reformed the organizational framework of nuclear safety to provide the newly established Nuclear Regulation Authority with greater authority to enforce safety standards than its predecessor. But such an organizational reform may be insufficient in the long run because it did not address the larger problem of significant epistemic asymmetry between the state and the civil society that had been maintained by the education system.

Merit as Race Talk: Excavating the Architecture of Racial Ignorance on Faculty Worth

prabhdeep singh kehal**,** Brown University

In explaining the persistent demographic overrepresentation among faculty, researchers focus on what faculty define as merit and often position merit against what faculty define as diversity. Though researchers argue that this approach provides fairer evaluations by minimizing evaluative biases, a second camp of researchers contend that there are not enough scholars of various backgrounds from which to choose qualified faculty. Yet in framing the problem of demographic overrepresentation as unique to the post-Civil Rights period, both approaches have limitedly explored how cultural processes enable institutions to create knowledge for institutional purposes. Specifically, what racial knowledge have faculty evaluation processes produced and how does this knowledge contribute to racism's persistence? Combining Du Bois's theory of double consciousness with the cultural framework of commensuration, I define a knowledge cultural analysis approach and excavate merit as race talk. Through a Du Boisian knowledge cultural analysis, I argue that the criteria guiding faculty hiring evaluations are historic and structured in distributing benefits of academic labor on the basis of presumed white identity. As historic, the criteria and their rationale developed alongside desegregating the professoriate, and uses three discursive principles to perpetuate an investment to racial ignorance. This discourse, merit as race talk, emerged as the ruling class reconstituted the racial order between 1890 and the present. In explaining the persistent demographic overrepresentation of the faculty, this analysis identifies how present-day criteria that explain the ongoing overrepresentation – institutional affiliation, research-topic homophily, and faculty networks – maintain a historic persistence to racial ignorance. In this perspective, the analysis moves for future research on faculty evaluations to consider how commitment to existing processes of evaluations, even with the inclusion of new criteria, is itself a commitment to racial ignorance.

Session: Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity: Understanding the Good in a World Gone Bad

A Little Help from my Friends? Using "Situational Boundaries" to Resolve the Tension between Meritocracy and Help in the Job Search

Laura Adler,* Elena Ayala-Hurtado,* Julia Weiss
*First two co-authors have equal authorship and are listed alphabetically

A vast literature on social networks demonstrates the benefits of finding a job through social relations. At the same time, however, a widely accepted cultural script of meritocracy requires that one earn one's own position. How do job-seekers resolve this tension? We answer this question using the case of young Spanish workers, who face particular difficulty finding jobs. Based on 56 interviews, we first identify the subjective tension between meritocracy and the benefits of help in the job search. We then demonstrate how the tension is resolved through the use of "situational boundaries": boundaries between legitimate situations where helping behavior is appropriate—specifically assistance for applicants perceived as hard-working—and illegitimate situations where helping behavior is inappropriate, which are condemned as nepotism. We use survey data on young European job-seekers to extend our finding to a broader population, finding that having a self-perception as hard-working is positively associated with asking for help with finding a job. The concept of situational boundaries extends cultural theories of symbolic boundaries, while the empirical case contributes to the understanding of social capital activation in the job search by revealing the process to be infused with cultural meaning.

Session: Culture and Inequality

Cultural Matching in the Academic Workplace

Anna Hidalgo, Columbia University

Institutions of higher education pride themselves on being vehicles for social and economic mobility. Likewise, academia touts itself as a meritocratic space, where the quality of one's work and one's productivity are the means for advancement and success. But in the face of persistent inequalities in the experiences and outcomes of those with marginalized identities in the academy, one is left to ask: How is it that institutions and a profession so dedicated to the ideas of equality, merit, and affirmative action, have failed so considerably in enacting these principles? This paper brings together the literature on educational institutions as sites for cultural reproduction and stratification, and the literature on cultural processes of inequality in the workplace, to look at how stratification and inequality occur in an arena that is both an educational space and a workplace: Academia. Drawing from interviews with thirty-nine faculty members from a public and a private university, this paper shows how "cultural matching" occurs in academia and produces inequalities of experiences and outcomes. Three examples of this cultural process are discussed. First, I explore how academics mastered a "hidden curriculum" to successfully navigate academia. Second, I demonstrate how academics used institutions and individuals as gatekeepers and brokers to facilitate legibility and legitimacy in academia. Finally, by examining how people cited the "inability to take advice," as an explanation for why some people experienced failure in the academic workplace, I provide an opportunity to examine the consequences of when cultural matching fails. Taken together, these findings help us to gain a deeper understanding of the persistence of inequality in academia.

Session: Sociology of Consumers and Consumption Roundtables. Table 1. Reproductive Bodies, Medical Technologies

Body Boundaries: Creating a Moral Body Framework to Navigate Stigmatization

Caty Taborda, University of Minnesota

The act of selling blood plasma is stigmatized, associated both with financial desperation and with using one's body for economic self-interest. Using 38 in-depth interviews, I examine how low-income plasma sellers engage in boundary-making processes to mitigate their experience of stigma. I demonstrate how cultural beliefs about the body play an integral role in these boundary-making processes. Specifically, I identify three strategies that plasma sellers use to distinguish their bodies from other low-income people *and* from other plasma sellers. In the first two strategies – *ethical bodily practices* and *health/cleanliness* – plasma sellers differentiate their bodies from those of other poor people outside of the plasma center. They construct their bodies as doing morally superior work compared to other bodily practices like sex work and panhandling, and they also use selling plasma to affirm their health and 'cleanliness' compared to others who may not qualify to sell plasma. These two strategies allow plasma sellers to distance themselves from the stigma of poverty by elevating their bodily actions and bodily worth. In the third strategy - *bad motivation* – plasma sellers differentiate themselves from other plasma sellers they encounter at donation centers based on assumptions about how those other plasma sellers will use their earnings, most likely for drugs and alcohol. This third strategy allows plasma sellers to acknowledge one of the most common negative stereotypes of plasma sellers while distancing themselves from it. Together, these three strategies construct what I call a *moral body framework* that acts as a critical boundary for low-income plasma sellers managing multiple stigmatizations. However, in drawing these boundaries, plasma sellers also reify the cultural framing of bodies of the poor as unhealthy, unclean, and undisciplined, a moral failure. These findings elevate the field's understanding of the central role that the body plays in moral boundary-making and the management of stigma.

Session: Section on Inequality, Poverty, and Mobility. Open Session for Section on Inequality, Poverty, and Mobility I

Learning about Inequality in Unequal America: How College Shapes the Development of Students' Belief in Meritocracy and Racial Discrimination

Jonathan J.B. Mijs, Harvard University

As the U.S. becomes increasingly separated by socioeconomic and racial fault lines, how do people learn about the lives of others? Scholarship has produced a long list of correlates of inequality beliefs but lacks an organizing theoretical framework. In this paper I develop an "institutional inference" model of belief formation: citizens learn about inequality in institutional contexts that can be homogeneous or heterogeneous; the latter expose people to information on the structural sources of inequality that is not readily available in the former. I test theoretical expectations on ten national panels of college students, 1998—2010. I find that: (1) inequality beliefs change substantially over the college years; (2) the direction of change is shaped by the socioeconomic and racial heterogeneity of the college setting and by students' same-race or different race roommates; (3) belief in meritocracy strengthens in homogeneous contexts and weakens with exposure to and experiences with heterogeneity. The inferential process that links institutions to beliefs helps explain why Americans have not rallied against inequality: the joint growth of inequality and segregation means that, paradoxically, the more unequal America becomes, the less likely people are to experience its full extent.

Race and Culture Resource List

Thank you to our section members who helped compile this list of academic readings on cultural sociology and race. This living reference will be posted to the culture section website and periodically updated. Our hope is that these resources will help deepen our collective knowledge and critical reflexivity as a sociological community. If you'd like to add references to the list, please email your contributions to the Culture Newsletter editors at asaculturenews@gmail.com.

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> Young people are told that college is a place where they will “find themselves” by engaging with diversity and making friendships that will last a lifetime. This vision of an inclusive, diverse social experience is a fundamental part of the image colleges sell potential students. But what really happens when students arrive on campus and enter this new social world? The Cost of Inclusion delves into this rich moment to explore the ways students seek out a sense of belonging and the sacrifices they make to fit in.
>
> Blake R. Silver spent a year immersed in student life at a large public university. He trained with the Cardio Club, hung out with the Learning Community, and hosted service events with the Volunteer Collective. Through these day-to-day interactions, he witnessed how students sought belonging and built their social worlds on campus. Over time, Silver realized that these students only achieved inclusion at significant cost. To fit in among new peers, they clung to or were pushed into raced and gendered cultural assumptions about behavior, becoming “the cool guy,” “the nice girl,” “the funny one,” “the leader,” “the intellectual,” or “the mom of the group.” Instead of developing dynamic identities, they crafted and adhered to a cookie-cutter self, one that was rigid and two-dimensional. Silver found that these students were ill-prepared for the challenges of a diverse college campus, and that they had little guidance from their university on how to navigate the trials of social engagement or the pressures to conform. While colleges are focused on increasing the diversity of their enrolled student body, Silver’s findings show that they need to take a hard look at how they are failing to support inclusion once students arrive on campus.

Stephan, Rita and Mounira M. Charrad, Eds. 2020. *Women Rising: In and Beyond the Arab Spring*. New York: New York University Press.

> *Women Rising* brings together groundbreaking essays by female activists and scholars documenting women’s resistance before, during, and after the Arab Spring. In this timely volume, Stephan and Charrad paint a picture of women’s first-hand experiences in sixteen countries. Contributors provide insight into a diverse range of perspectives across the entire movement, focusing on often marginalized voices, including rural women, housewives, students, and artists. Women Rising offers an in-depth understanding of an important twenty-first century movement, telling the story of Arab women’s activism.

Yukich, Grace and Penny Edgell, Eds. 2020. *Religion is Raced: Understanding American Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: New York University Press.

When White people of faith act in a particular way, their motivations are almost always attributed to their religious orientation. Yet when religious people of color act in a particular way, their motivations are usually attributed to their racial positioning.

Religion Is Raced makes the case that religion in America has generally been understood in ways that center White Christian experiences of religion, and argues that all religion must be acknowledged as a raced phenomenon. When we overlook the role race plays in religious belief and action, and how religion in turn spurs public and political action, we lose sight of a key way in which race influences religiously-based claims-making in the public sphere.

With contributions exploring a variety of religious traditions, from Buddhism and Islam to Judaism and Protestantism, as well as pieces on atheists and humanists, Religion Is Raced brings discussions about the racialized nature of religion from the margins of scholarly and religious debate to the center. The volume offers a new model for thinking about religion that emphasizes how racial dynamics interact with religious identity, and how we can in turn better understand the roles religion—and Whiteness—play in politics and public life, especially in the United States. It includes clear recommendations for researchers, including pollsters, on how to better recognize moving forward that religion is a raced phenomenon.

With contributions by Joseph O. Baker, Kelsy Burke, James Clark Davidson, Janine Giordano Drake, Ashley Garner, Edward Orozco Flores, Sikivu Hutchinson, Sarah Imhoff, Russell Jeung, John Jimenez, Jaime Kucinskas, Eric Mar, Gerardo Martí, Omar M. McRoberts, Besheer Mohamed, Dawne Moon, Jerry Z. Park, Z. Fareen Parvez, Theresa W. Tobin, and Rhys H. Williams.

Announcements: Call for Papers and Panels

8th Biennial Conference on the Afroeuropeans Network

Brussels, 7 – 10 July 2021

Keynote speakers: Philomena Essed - Cécile Kyenge - Kehinde Andrews

The 8th Biennial Afroeuropeans Network Conference “Intersectional Challenges in Afroeuropean Communities” will take place from 7 – 10 July 2021 in Brussels, the capital of Europe. Hosted by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), this conference is the result of a long collaboration between academics, writers, artists and activists that gave rise to the International Afroeuropeans Network.

The conference aims to consider how Afroeuropean communities are shaped by the intersections of ‘race’ and ethnicity with other markers of identification such as gender, class, sexuality, ability, age, citizenship status, language... Informed by intersectional thinking (Combahee River Collective, 1979; hooks, 1981; Crenshaw 1989) and its rejection of unidimensional perspectives in activism, policy and research, the conference explores how diverse processes of privileging and discrimination interact, making for complex and dynamic experiences of what it means to be Afroeuropean. It acknowledges that the racial and ethnic alterity of Afroeuropeans intersects with other identities (e.g. male, female, queer, working class, religious, disabled, aged...) and specifically seeks to examine to what extent these intersections create new alignments and opportunities.

Of particular interest are the multiple ways in which Afroeuropeans challenge dominant modes of representation and knowledge production, for instance by claiming space and citizenship, altering taken-for-granted modes of knowing and organizing, and presenting their experiences and perspectives as part and parcel of European society and identity. The conference engages with the dynamism emerging from the growing decolonisation movements and their calls for rethinking dominant modes of knowledge production and representation. We invite reflection on the various layers of intersectional existence, activism, and scholarship with a special focus on the lives of Black Europeans with ancestry in Africa and African diasporic geographical locations such as the Americas and the Caribbean. Building on the notion of 'subjugated knowledge', the conference explores how marginalized positions may also give rise to innovative epistemological positions, resistance to and revision of the status quo, and inspire activism and reforms of institutions and policies in Europe and beyond.

Panels for the following conference streams are invited by **1 September 2020**:

1 - Stream "Intersectionality as theory, practice and movement: re-centring Black feminist legacies"
2 - Stream "Religion and spirituality in Afro-Europe"
3 - Stream "Structural racism, racialization and exploitation"
4 - Stream "Policy, activism, and political representation"
5 - Stream "Afroeuropean arts: aesthetics & politics"
6 - Stream "Health and racial inequalities"
7 - Stream "Family, 'mixity' and identity"
8 - Stream "Media, digital technologies and connectivity"
9 - Stream "Decolonising knowledge, spaces and institutions: from activism to transformative change"
10 - Stream "Pan-Africanism, global justice and human rights in Europe"

For more information: www.afroeuropeans2021.com

Call for Papers in *Frontiers in Sociology*

Emerging Solidarities on the Ground in the Management and Approach of the COVID emergency

Guest editors: Dr. Emilia Aiello (Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, US) & Prof. Elias Nazareno (Universidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, Brazil)

The global COVID-19 crisis has put the health of millions of people under stake, and the capacity of healthcare systems under extreme pressure, revealing the lack of preparedness and coordination of international and national democratic institutions to stand out together against it.

The pandemic has clearly reveled at least two societal trends that deserve to be analyzed from Social Sciences and especially from Sociology. First, the leadership failure of national and international governmental institutions, evidenced in their uncoordinated, dithering, and lagged reactions to cope with the COVID-19 at the very initial moment (Dec 2019, January 2020). Second, the still weak relation between science-society-politics, and even though major efforts invested in closing the gap between them, the uneven permeability of the policy spheres to seriously consider scientific evidence, something that would have potentially cushioned the effects of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, these trends are already having a profound damage at the structural level, eroding civic trust in public institutions -and in democracy-, severely exacerbating the human costs of COVID, and unleashing a never seen economic downturn, the reality of how the crisis is being managed and organized at the very grassroots is somehow different. Where governments and those in charge showed to be

missing, networks of diverse societal actors operating at the local level are coordinating efforts worldwide and organizing to alleviate the impact, especially on those most at risk communities.

Framed within this context, this Research Topic is aimed at exploring and discussing cases in which diverse actors are self-organizing across different societal areas (from employment, education, health, social and political participation, prevention of violence, housing, or others), re-emerging from the grassroots levels to articulate and provide responses to this health emergency with agendas that demand for a major transparency, accountability, and social justice of public institutional bodies. In parallel with this, it will pay particular attention on cases in which science and society is collaborating, in some cases reacting and stop-gapping responses in those sites where institutional leaders are absents, or in others actively responding to illuminate durable solutions needed to be implemented by public institutions. Being this the main theme on which this Issue focuses, we strongly suggest potential pieces to tackle how the following aspects have also paid a role in the cases brought to analysis:

- The capacity of actions and strategies emerged at the grassroots to go beyond national borders and generate a major sense of international solidarity.
- Cases in which ethnic and cultural communities (e.g.: from the Roma communities in Europe, to Indigenous peoples and communities of African descent (maroons) in Latin-America and other parts of the world) are organizing to contest the challenges posed by the COVID19, unveiling ways of practicing leadership which can act and reach quickly the needs of those on the ground.
- The ways in which these emerged solidarities on the ground might impact on shaping societal and cultural relations after the end of the health emergency.
- The extent to which such solidarities can potentially strengthen democratic institutions, and the contrary, the potential perils in accelerating the breakdown of democracies that were already fragile.
- The challenges and opportunities to advance towards a tighter relation between science and society at different governance levels, and reflected in existing examples.
- Other relevant topics tackling upon the ones mentioned above.

For more information or to submit a paper:
https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/14535/emerging-solidarities-on-the-ground-in-the-management-and-approach-of-the-covid-emergency.

Grad students and recent graduates: will you be on the job market this fall? Want to be featured in the fall newsletter? Send your name, email, photo, and a brief summary of your work and the type of positions you are seeking (300 words or less) to asaculturenews@gmail.com

Contact us at asaculturenews@gmail.com.