



# **BVPS**

**Blog da Biblioteca Virtual do Pensamento Social**

## **SYMPOSIUM**

### **SOCIAL WORLD AND PANDEMIC**

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#### **1. Sociologists and social scientists in general seem mobilized to interpret the social and political impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Is sociological theory up to the challenge of understanding and explaining the phenomenon?**

Among the social sciences, sociology maybe uniquely prepared to deal with the Covid-19 crisis for three reasons. First, sociology takes a broad perspective, a holistic view of society that other specialized disciplines may leave out.

Granted Covid-19 is a Public Health crisis. In Public Health, health is clearly a scientific issue, a subject for the scientists to deal with and they deal with data, evidence and experimentation. The “Public” in Public Health is in the realms of sociology. A broader perspective that sociology offers is likely to capture the public aspect of Covid-19 response.

Second, sociology has a sub-field, namely Disaster Sociology, which is dedicated to deal with examining disasters and crises. The accumulated knowledge in that field, which has traditionally examined single event disasters, may be used in exploring the multi-level crisis such as the Covid-19 crisis. Even the sub-field of medical sociology maybe put to service.



Third, social theorists such as Ulrich Beck decades ago devoted attention to crisis as an aspect of modern or advanced modern society. Such a theoretical framework can be pressed into service in understanding covid-19, especially in understanding its longer-term consequences.

## **2. How can your research area contribute to examining different dimensions of the phenomenon?**

My current research area is globalization and global studies. Covid-19 is clearly a global crisis which cries out for a global approach for its understanding and its solution is likely to come from research and information sharing based on global cooperation and understanding. Here my knowledge of global processes will be useful in understanding the spread and various consequences of the Covid-19 crisis.

Previously I did research on disaster sociology. My research area, famine can be seen as a prolonged crisis with separate stages. Pandemics can be addressed from a sociology of disaster perspective. Many of the concepts of disaster sociology can be used in the study of this pandemic. I also have a continued interest in comparative sociology. I am currently involved in a comparative study of covid-19 crisis response involving a number of Asian countries.

## **3. Is the pandemic provoking deep social, political and cultural changes? Or is it speeding up trends of change already underway? If so, is it possible to glimpse the contours of post-pandemic societies?**

The present pandemic is going to be a watershed event. At one level it is creating new situations setting off new trends and practices, at another level it is exacerbating the existing social and economic problems. The pandemic calls for a new social contract as it has revealed deep fissures in society in both class and ethnic lines, In USA (especially, in New York and other large cities) a disproportionately high number of victims are from the Latino and African American communities. These economically disadvantaged communities were also the bulk of the frontline workers – bus drivers, transport, police, health workers who bore the brunt of the crisis evident in the higher mortality.

The economically disadvantaged groups were also outside of health insurance coverage, their economic conditions were roadblocks to their



access to good nutrition and healthy lifestyle. While at one level, a new social contract between the rulers and the ruled is necessary, at another level a new and meaningful definition of a good society based on social justice is needed. Extreme inequality is an impediment for creating a just and stable society.

#### **4. What work(s) of Sociology or Social Sciences can help us to comprehend and dialogue about the challenges underway?**

Sociologists need to join the fray by arguing that sociology is no longer a bystander of the crisis. Kai Erikson's *Everything in its Path* (1978) which discusses the effects of a flash flood in upstate New York provides a template for researching on community social capital and trust. How the pandemic affected the community and how society can be rebuilt on the basis of a new social contract. It is important to regenerate trust.

Trust is key to explaining differential governmental response and performances. Social capital, a sense of fellow feeling, a spirit of cooperation, interdependence and mutuality is of great value and needs to be included in the dialogue and discussions. The idea of public responsibility is crucial. In many countries the leadership failed to rise up to the occasion.

Discussion of a new political economy has to be built on a new definition of economic development. Here, the works of Amartya Sen will be of great value in redefining economic development. Recent works of Mariana Mazzucato such as *Rethinking Capitalism: Economics and Policy for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth* (2016) will shed useful light to these conversations. In a recent article, she identified three crises: the environmental, the economic, and the public health. All these three crises are interlinked and needs to be dealt with in a holistic manner.

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