



BVPS

Blog da Biblioteca Virtual do Pensamento Social

SYMPOSIUM

SOCIAL WORLD AND PANDEMIC

Edited by

Andre Bittencourt (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Maurício Hoelz (Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Mokong Simon Mapadimeng (Human Science Research Council, South Africa)

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?

I am inclined to believe that sociology is the mother of all social sciences and that it is a discipline that has a wide-ranging reach and diversity of specialisations. This as we know, include the sub-discipline of Sociology of Health and Illness backed up by the general theories of sociology (derived from the Global South and Global North). These theories and the attendant methodologies, are well developed and positioned to help us as sociologists to make sense of what is presently going on with the pandemic that has engulfed most parts of the globe if not the entire globe.

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

Lately, most of my research is focused on unearthing, showcasing and contributing to the development and expansion of African indigenous knowledges, which cover all aspects of human societal life including but not limited to African origin of philosophy and knowledge of governance, medicine, environmental management, economy, agriculture, architecture,



and education and training. Currently, I am working on an edited book volume that examines state policies and legislations in South Africa on African Indigenous Knowledges with the view to determining whether or not they enable or disable African Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and implications for future interventions. One chapter in this book that has relevance to issues related of illnesses and healing similar to the Covid-19 pandemic is titled *Hidden Treasure of the Ocean Life to African Indigenous Medicinal Development – Taking Cue from Terrestrial Medicines*. I believe that the rich insights and wisdoms that underlie *African Indigenous Knowledge Systems* would if creatively harnessed, go a long way in fulfilling the aspiration of *Africans finding authentically African solutions to African problems*. This might sound like utopian but it is a necessary utopia.

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?

This pandemic has no doubt imposed new ways of life on societies and has especially disrupted the socio-economic and political order of neo-liberal capitalism and its institutions. Already, the concept of social distancing has disrupted the norm of how work is organised through physical workplaces, which required that employees converge in one workplace to execute their respective yet interlinked and interconnected activities. This in a way reinforces the trend of new technologies of communication and information, with however some cautionary signs and especially in view of concerns that the 5G innovations might be part contributors to climate changes and attendant air-borne diseases outbreaks such as Covid-19. This might be a typical internal contradiction that Marx once said defines the economic order of capitalism. It might just imply that this economic order would never be the same i.e. we might just witness major changes towards a slightly or significantly modified economic order. Alternatively, the present social order that has prevailed since post-war period might as it has proven itself in the past, reconfigure itself to survive the current disruptions of the Covid-19. As things stand, it is not clear what exactly the emerging order would be like. For those of us in the Global South and who have little or no faith in the present hegemonic order of neoliberal capitalism, developments such as Covid-19 present an opportunity for our nations to re-evaluate our economies and social systems in a way that would ensure relevance and substance our ways(cultural, religious, political and economic). It is an opportunity to design our own autonomous destinies without further dependence on economies of the so-called



developed nations. China has shown us how this could be done. I believe our nations, especially in Africa, can do even better without replicating China's models. In Africa, we have now an opportunity to re-examine our relationships with the Western European and North American societies (especially USA); and forge mutually beneficial relations (e.g. prioritise inter-Africa trade before trading with the outside world where second priority might have to be the Global South nations). We have an opportunity to review and find new ways of strengthening our political governance systems for greater accountability to citizens. This would also help in ending natural resources curse by promoting local industrialisation and self-sufficiency. There is no better opportunity than this.

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

I believe that the present rich literature on environmental sociology and sociology of health and illness, as well as the rich and not yet well exploited indigenous knowledge systems (here in Africa we call the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems), would should go a long way in helping us to make sense of what is presently happening and how to get ourselves out of this challenge for our own survival and that of future generations.

Mokong Simon Mapadimeng is the Director of Research in the Inclusive Economic Development Division of the Human Science Research Council, South Africa. Is one of the authors of *Handbook Of The Sociology Of Youth In Brics Countries* and co-edited the volume *Contemporary Social Issues in Africa*, among others.



sociologia & antropologia

