



Article

Power, violence, and justice: Reflections, responses and responsibilities: Presidential Address – XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology, July 15, 2018

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Introduction

The theme of the XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology revolves around the multiple forms of intersection that can arise between power and violence, and the implications this has for justice. We are at a critical juncture in our human journey, where the policies and actions of a powerful few have engendered inequality, conflict, harm, injustice, and suffering on a stunning scale around the world. We sociologists need to step up now, with purpose, and draw upon our theories, research, and practice in the best interests of humanity.

The ISA Congress brought together the knowledge, talent, and resources of sociologists from across the world to address the gamut of issues relating to these dynamics. The Congress theme was so immeasurably vast, complex, and multifaceted that it was probably discussed and debated in all of the 1200 sessions that were organized. For my part, I shared a few pertinent issues in my Address that I consider relevant and of critical importance to some of the deliberations that would take place during the Congress. Hopefully, our sociological enquiries, reflections, and responses will have helped to build a better understanding of the problems that beset our societies, and will contribute to framing policies and actions that will make for a less violent and more just and enduring world.

Power, defined as the capacity to influence or control the behavior and conduct of others, has largely determined the historical trajectory that leads us to where we stand today. Power is a critical component in all human interactions. It can be creative, and it

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can be destructive. As the character in George Orwell's *1984* says: 'We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end. ... The object of power is power' (Orwell, 1949) In our world today, this is too often the case.

History tells us many stories, of contestations for power in the multiple arenas of human interaction. It tells us of its uses and also of its corruption. In the context of nation states, we have seen the use of power that is coercive and uses military might or economic advantage to force and manipulate compliance. We have seen power through intimidation and persuasion on display on the world stage. We have witnessed how coercive power and violence go hand in hand, as force is consistently the preferred instrument of the powerful against the weak or vulnerable. One can find this in the interventions in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia's annexation of Crimea, the nixed nuclear deal, the travel bans from certain Muslim-majority nations, and the imprisonment of immigrants in Texas, as just some recent examples. History has repeatedly shown that such exercises of power and control sow the seeds for future conflict.

Violence, in all of its various forms, threatens social cohesion, even at the level of micro aggressions and invisible biases. Decrying violence as being an unmitigated evil, however, is also problematic. Mahatma Gandhi, a proponent of non-violence, understood this dilemma when he observed: 'Though violence is not lawful, when it is offered in self-defense or for the defense of the defenseless, it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission' (in Prabhu and Rao, 1967). His reference point was colonialism – arguably the most formidable exposition of power in the last two centuries. It was a system that we can now recognize as being a persistent narrative of genocide, violence, suffering, and injustice. Similarly, Frantz Fanon viewed violence in this context as being a necessary tool for the emancipation of the oppressed (Fanon, 1963). The contexts, connections, and intersections that inform our understanding of power, violence, and justice matter.

Weber (1946) described the State as having a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence or force, as a means of maintaining social order and cohesion. Bestowing such power to the State, however, has been challenged by aggrieved agencies within and outside the system, primarily on the grounds that the established order has been unjust to certain groups, and especially to those already disempowered. Imbued with such power, States have taken advantage of this monopoly to oppress and repress certain groups who then have no substantive recourse to justice. The discordance in interests and views of the State in relation to such groups has been a trigger for violence, irrespective of the form of the State apparatus in place. As Martin Luther King pointed out, 'there can be no peace without justice and without justice, there can be no peace'.

A particularly worrying feature of our present times is the way violence is being used against vulnerable sections of the population who have been identified by the State, in one way or another, as being 'the Other'. This has become a relentless tool of politicians and certain media outlets. It has become a form of targeting and controlling difficult or marginalized groups in many countries, often through some form of State collusion. The plight of the Rohingyas in Myanmar, ethnic Tamils in Sri Lanka, Muslims in India, Christian Copts in Egypt, Kurds in Iraq and Syria, Kurds and Armenians in Turkey, and immigrants and people of color in Europe and America are only a few examples (cf. Abdul Bari, 2018; Arena, 2006; Baxter, 2017; Murray, 2017).

We live in an age of cataclysmic social change, economic misgivings, and global tensions. The traditional bastions of liberal democracy have become pillars of uncertainty about the shape of things to come. The ‘liberal’ smugness implicit in theories like Francis Fukuyama’s (1992) ‘end of history’, or Tony Blair’s observation that the ‘grand ideological battles of the twentieth century are over’, now sound particularly hollow and naïve, as was their optimism about the permanence of liberal democracy. What we are witnessing today is a countermovement that is interrogating the structures and institutions celebrated as a bequest of Western liberal democracy and capitalism to the world. This is a movement that is deeply distrustful of the most basic liberal values of tolerance, inclusion, and even human rights. It is challenging us to look at how these principles have been used to enable complacency and complicity in various forms of systemic exclusion and injustice. There is widespread frustration and anger at the mounting inequality and economic uncertainty that have created great cleavages within society; at the fragmentation and uprooting of lives caused by marketization and globalization; and at the vast numbers of migrants who have been displaced as a result of endless conflict and persecution.

Some of these frustrations have led to activism, some to despair, and some have morphed into a shrill nationalism that is populist, xenophobic, ethnocentric, and hostile to minorities and immigrants.

Illiberal democracies

In 2014 Viktor Orban, Prime Minister of Hungary, captured the world’s attention with what is known as his ‘illiberal democracy’ speech. To quote him: ‘There is a race underway to find the method of community organization, the State, which is most capable of making a nation and a community internationally competitive. . . . The most popular topic in thinking today is trying to understand how systems that are not western, not liberal, not liberal democracies, and perhaps not even democracies, can nevertheless make their nations successful.’¹

Orban implies that behind the veneer of democracy, a nation state can be a winner by rejecting liberal values and democratic norms – where only the end goal matters and not the methods deployed. Orban has given voice to a worldview that seems to be shared by an increasing number of populist leaders across the world. A recent issue of *TIME* magazine (3 May 2018) had a cover story titled ‘Rise of the Strongman’. It describes the emergence of powerful populist leaders in countries across the world, those who care little for civil liberties or the rule of law.

A further devastation to the democratic dream is the tragic unraveling of the hope that had been engendered by the ‘Arab Spring’. Egypt, which was at the heart of the upheavals toward democracy in 2011, is now in the thrall of a dictator – Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Likewise, it is significant that in a number of countries, including America, governments are encouraging and fostering schisms within society by playing on the fears and insecurities of ordinary citizens and targeting ethnic, religious, and racial minorities, migrants, and dissidents – effectively constructing ‘the Other’ to use as a target for discrimination, violence, and repression.

The reality of economic and social setbacks have created a sense of loss and have instilled fear. For many groups in society, there is a pervasive sense that we are facing a

bleak future. Society's fear, frustration, disenchantment, and rage have all been manipulated and twisted by politicians for their own interests and power. What matters today is no longer the truth, but rather the ability to appeal to people's emotions, to align statements to correspond with, or even to develop, group anxieties.

The fear generated by the 2008 financial crisis devastated many economies, with consequences particularly for the common person and civil society. This was further exacerbated by the arrival of immigrants who had been displaced due to persecution, ongoing wars and conflicts, from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Myanmar. Terrorist attacks linked to Islamic fundamentalism then added to the fears and resentments that were growing against immigrants and 'outsiders'. This resulted in a turn toward nationalist, xenophobic, far-right, populist political positioning. Those who took up these positions in both the media and governance appealed to people's emotionality and perceived grievances, to their sense of insecurity and loss. The populist rhetoric resonated! Those who hold more liberal values have watched with dismay as populist leaders manipulate public sentiment in the direction of racism, and hyper-nationalism. However, there is also a growing response to counter the promotion of anti-plurality and the erosion of democratic institutions. Proponents of social justice and social activism push against this tide of hate, and every day they are making ground for greater humanity, acceptance, inclusion, and understanding.

Ironically, sections of the underprivileged, many of whom should be practical allies of liberal social policies, are now increasingly supporting right-wing and xenophobic policies and forces. We may not be seeing the actual end of liberal democracy, but the dangers facing it are palpable. Across the world, authoritarian and autocratic populists have been gaining ground, consolidating and centralizing power and control. We are seeing the resurgence of the authoritarian personality, and the popular belief in the Strong State. Most recently, we saw this in Turkey, with President Erdogan's victory, through democratic elections, which have allowed him to continue to consolidate his power and extend his authority over the legislature and judiciary. Indeed, we are seeing this story play out multiple times all over the world.

A deeply disturbing feature of our times is the majoritarian impulse gaining momentum even in acclaimed democracies like the USA and India. In both of these countries, leaders with an unmistakable majoritarian agenda have come to power, democratically, through the will of the people. These leaders have then undermined their countries' hard-won freedoms and have eroded democratic institutions and values. They have sought to buttress power by dividing their people and targeting those whom they see as either a threat, or as an opportunity to victimize for political interests and gain. The problem with the majoritarian worldview is that it invariably excludes certain groups of civil society on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender identity. Such exclusions, in turn, give rise to deeply polarized societies, which then perpetuate these tendencies.

At its core, social justice is premised on the principle that every human being matters, that every person has the right to equality and fundamental liberties, to security and dignity (Abraham, 2019). This is the essence of an egalitarian society. Although, in reality, equality has never been totally achieved. Today, this basic postulate of democracy is under serious threat from a growing band of authoritarian and ethically compromised

leaders, and those who enable them. On his campaign trail for the US Presidency, Donald Trump violated the norms of civility and decency, indulged in blatant falsehoods and false equivalences, incited hatred, violence, and distrust of minorities, including Blacks, Latinos, Muslims, and immigrants. He exhibited misogyny and sexism, boasted on tape about sexual assault and yet he won enough of the Electoral College votes to gain the US Presidency.

His victory is attributed, on the one hand, to this pandering to the prejudice of white nationalists, and on the other hand, to a deep suspicion of and dissatisfaction with the liberal elite and the existing establishment. The fears and realities of lost jobs, and absent opportunities, all have fed into the burgeoning xenophobia in America. The power of populist rhetoric to resonate with these fears and frustrations in a period of both perceived and real uncertainty should be of great concern. The power of the Presidency has now eroded key institutions in America, and it has in no way restrained Trump and his administration from initiating and executing extremely regressive and harmful policies. Limiting funding for women's reproductive health; providing massive tax breaks for the rich; preventing victims of domestic violence and gang violence from seeking asylum in the US; and most recent and outrageous, the shocking, inhuman cruelty of separating illegal migrant parents from their children at the border.

Here is an example of power being used to inflict such careless suffering and misery on the vulnerable. We know from colonial histories in the US, Canada, and Australia, of the role the State played in rationalizing and enacting the forced separation of indigenous parents from their children. We also know the horrific consequences of this, and the long road through the process of truth and reconciliation. We are also witnessing the power that public pressure can have in fighting against such violence, by challenging unjust laws, policies, and practices, and especially highlighting those that devastate the lives of children, families, and communities.

Donald Trump has been admiring and wistful in expressing his views on North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong-un. He has publicly expressed appreciation for other dictators across the world, such as Vladimir Putin, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and Rodrigo Duterte. Trump's public assertions that he has the power to pardon himself, meaning that he considers himself to be above the law, have triggered talk of an 'Imperial Presidency' (Finkelstein and Skerker, 2018). His endless attacks on the liberal media and his creation of 'fake news' have also contributed to deep and dangerous divides. The first half of 2018 saw his approval ratings rise, and this is an important indication of the state of civil society. It is one that we need to contemplate and to engage with skillfully.

As all of this and more has been going on, there has not been much mention of what has been playing out in India in the past four years. India today – the world's largest democracy – is a striking example of an 'illiberal democracy', with a dangerous blend of power, violence, and injustice. The muted response of the Metropolitan States to the creeping fascism and blatant human rights violations occurring in India can be primarily linked to commerce. India is the largest importer of armaments in the world. It is also a huge market for a variety of imports from the developed countries. These countries that dominate and define the international discourse on freedom and human rights are strategically silent when it comes to policies or practices in a country where they have significant economic interests.

To those who dispute the capacity of political leaders to remold society in consonance with their worldview, the happenings in India in the last few years are an ominous example of the use of power and violence to undermine key democratic values. India has moved from plurality to a deeply polarized, majoritarian State very quickly. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, came to power in 2014 with a massive win through a free and fair election. Modi captured the public imagination by promising a more decisive, powerful polity, and an equitable social order. But within months of taking office, it became clear that he and his party planned to convert India into a homogeneous, supremacist Hindu State – the Hindu *Rashtra* of *Hindutva* – where Hindus could claim to be the privileged community of India, and where minorities, including Muslims and Christians, would live as second class citizens. There are many reports of lynching, gang rapes, vandalism, and acts of religious desecration all with near impunity. A group of social activists who visited the sites of lynching and hate crimes across eight states of India were horrified to find that the police had lodged charges against the victims and their kin in these instances, whereas the actual perpetrators were treated leniently, their bail not opposed.

What is most disturbing is that it is not just India and the US, but across the world we are seeing the complicity of State institutions in the persecution of marginalized groups. Even our justice systems, at times, succumb to the majoritarian pressures that victimize and oppress. Even when justice systems do hold strong, the populist rhetoric tenaciously erodes the legitimacy of institutions and processes that ensure justice.

One should not despair, however, for these atrocities and manipulations are stirring many who would otherwise remain complacent. In the present day it takes an effort to keep one's head in the sand and remain oblivious. There is great energy mounting, rallying against these oppressions. Many people are coming together to build networks and connections, to challenge all abuses of power, not just the most recent, but also those that have been present and systemic for a long time. Documenting harms, participating in protests, speaking at public rallies, working and reporting from conflict zones, providing facts and writing thought-provoking articles in the mainstream media are just some examples of what people are doing, and what we can do. There are so many who work to highlight the ongoing violence and injustice, who critique and analyze the structures of power and seek social justice. Through active involvement in dissent and resistance, through research and action, sociologists can, and need to, reflect on the positive impact our perspectives can have in grappling with the problems of the world.

Populism and human rights

There is a direct nexus between the rise of right-wing populist nationalism across the world and the international disregard for human rights violations. A significant aspect of such populism is its insular and divisive character. There is a shift from globalism to narrow narcissistic nationalism – a sense that only one's own nation matters, and that is where the lines must be drawn. For example, America first, Hungary First, and the Brexit syndrome. As society gets polarized between the narrow framing of citizenry and 'the Other', populist leaders play on the insecurities and fears of the people. They attribute all the blame for their perceived grievances on antagonistic forces, which are variously

defined as anti-national, elitist, corrupt, or terrorists. The populist constituency is portrayed as the long-suffering victims of domestic or foreign enemies, and the majority is seen as being more equal than the few, which then perpetuates their fear of becoming marginalized. In such a social milieu that scapegoats vulnerable sections of the population, the values of inclusivity, tolerance, and respect lose their salience in both interpersonal and larger social interactions.

As a consequence of this rise in populism, there is now an unwillingness on the part of the world's democracies to intervene, even in areas where there have been heinous human rights violations. The world today watches as the most horrendous atrocities occur, in countries such as Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Venezuela, to name just a few. The exercise of economic and political power, and the use of suffering as a tool for coercion and control, are increasingly justified by the perpetrators of these atrocities. Violence through forced displacement, starvation, rape, burning, chemical attacks and the spectrum of widespread injustices have not been met with an adequate global response. Perhaps facing precariousness at home, nations no longer feel it is their responsibility to intervene to ensure the safety of those considered 'foreigners', particularly the vulnerable and the violated.

The reluctance of the international community to effectively intervene even in the world's hotspots of genocidal conflict has resulted in widespread human suffering and death. One example, of an unremitting assault on human rights is the ethnic cleansing offensive against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Over the decades, the Rohingyas, an ethnic minority, have been victims of endemic discrimination and violence in a majority Buddhist nation. But in August 2017, following an attack by Rohingya insurgents using knives, and crude homemade bombs, in which 12 members of the security forces were killed, the full force of the State was mobilized in a targeted 'ethnic cleansing' strategy. This resulted in thousands of deaths, rampant rape and destruction of properties, and the exodus of around 700,000 Rohingya Muslims, primarily to Bangladesh. While the scale of violence has since reduced, there seems little hope of the refugees returning to their homes, and as such they join the 68.5 million displaced and dispossessed people across the world (Casali, 2018).

The structural and relational aspects of power, violence, and (in)justices, and the corresponding crises of displacement and dispossession are major areas for us sociologists to address.

Violence against women and gender, and intersectional violence

Gender equality and justice are fundamental to democracies and indeed must be to all societies. They are necessary for national and global stability, well-being, prosperity, and progress. We need to continue to address the position of women and girls in society's complex power matrix. There are numerous interconnections between gender, violence, and the State. Feminists, activists, and scholars have underscored how gender inequalities intersect with other inequalities such as race, class, citizenship, immigrant or minority status, unequal access to resources, exclusion from participation in decision making – all of which tend to exacerbate violence against women (Abraham and Purkayastha,

2012; Abraham and Tastsoglou, 2016; Abraham et al., 2010; Abraham T, 2002; Bhambra, 2007; Collins, 1990; Connell, 2011; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Garita, 2016; Mies, 1986; Minh-Ha, 1989; Mohanty, 2004; Purkayastha, 2012; Rege, 2006; Richie, 2012; Romero and Stewart, 1999; Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky, 2006; Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 1999). States are intimately connected to the structural violence that perpetuates these gendered oppressions. As an integral part of the power apparatuses in society, through the expression and reproduction of gendered power relations, the State plays a key role in normalizing gender-based and intersectional violence, which then often becomes socially invisible.

International forums like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and international tribunals have provided valuable insights on State complicity in violence against women. The systematic targeting of women for sexual violence is also characteristic of modern-day warfare and conflict (Abraham and Tastsoglou, 2016). Despite the laws and women's movements that have tried to criminalize violence against women, there has not been adequate progress made in ensuring women's safety. We all need to worry that the UN Report of 2015 on the status of Violence against Women has pointed to its persistence 'at alarmingly high levels' in the majority of countries.

The persistence, prevalence, and pervasiveness of gender-based and intersectional violence requires continued attention. Time and again, women continue to be denied control over their own bodies and are excluded from decision making. Millions of women experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner. Violence is used as a political tool and as part of the process of displacement. Violence and discrimination against LGBTQ have also been a part of the propaganda used by States and populist leaders. When those who trivialize, demean, and normalize violence against women are elected to the highest offices, we need to examine and illuminate both the subtle and overt causes, contexts, and structures that support and recreate the objectification, harm, and disregard for the voice and experience of all women. We must do this if we are to have any hope of ending such violence.

Although the term was first created by Tarana Burke in 1997, the recent attention gained through the 'MeToo' movement has been celebrated as a social revolution with millions of likeminded women from more than 85 countries bombarding cyberspace with the hashtag #MeToo, in solidarity with those who have suffered sexual assault and harassment. Although a critical watershed, this movement garnered international attention partly because of the high-profile individuals involved. When *The New York Times* first broke the story, there was surprise that even celebrities, who were powerful and perceived to have broken the glass ceiling, were vulnerable to sexual assault and violence like any ordinary woman. The movement offered a reflection on society's patriarchal structures, the forms of power and control, and its implications for the lives and life chances of survivors. It is a reminder of the formidable but important task we must continue to take on, to combat patriarchy, point out sexism, and seek justice.

The transformations and contributions that women's movements have made to our lives, our institutions, and our understanding of the world have been substantial, and they should not be underestimated. More and more we can see an increase in awareness of gender inequalities around the world, as well as the corresponding struggles that have

then been taken up to rectify these issues. Various theoretical frameworks and academic perspectives have contributed to anti-violence and liberation movements in different parts of the world, and have advocated for more grassroots movements, inclusivity, and participatory activism and research. We have made a lot of progress in addressing gender issues, yet this progress is uneven and there is still a long way to go, as we see the persistence of gender inequality intersecting with other forms of discrimination.

The growth of right-wing populism and attempts to set back some hard-won struggles for greater equality, and the increased polarization of civil society require a response. Women and social justice movements, I believe, are attempting to respond by drawing attention to intersecting identities, making women's rights as human rights and human rights as women's rights – this then has implications for gender justice and social justice for all. One of the ways that the women's movement attempts to counter right-wing populism has been to challenge patriarchal structures and relations within societies. They challenge those structures of power and institutions that create and maintain other forms of inequality and oppression, which maintain and exacerbate oppression.

On 21 January 2017, under the auspices of the Women's March on Washington, millions of people took to the streets within the US and across the globe to protest Trump's election. It was also one example indicative of the need to confront the persistence and prevalence of patriarchal power and its intersections with other axes of oppression, such as race/ethnicity, class, religion, sexual identity, citizenship, and more. The Women's March on Washington mobilized and brought to the mainstream the notion of 'intersectionality' to address issues of reproductive rights, gender and intersectional violence, migrant rights, labor rights, citizenship, racial justice, freedom of speech, right to science, environmental justice, and more.

The power of the media

Globalization, technology, and social media have facilitated a more connected world, but it is increasingly coming at the cost of truth. This has been called a post-truth era, and it is an extreme crisis that democracies are facing, as the credibility of the media is both questionable and being challenged. No discussion on power, violence, and justice today would be complete without factoring in the enormous influence of the knowledge and information that is disseminated, distorted, or dismissed by the media. The insurgency of social media in particular, with their boundless capacity for good, bad, and trite, creates a world of reaction and gullibility, where drama and division play out in seconds, often with little regard for human cost or reality. Social media have become the major instrument of political and cultural power, and their psychological and emotional effect is beginning to be looked at and understood. Today bigotry and falsehood can be manufactured and transmitted worldwide instantaneously.

In the 21st century, social media have, to some degree, replaced traditional forms of knowledge and information gathering. Social media have become the prime tool for dissemination of ideas, news, and opinions. Social media also carry the danger of misinformation, fake news, and false equivalences, but at the same time offer an opportunity to challenge and contest lies, and to foster global connections and collaborations. The press has a particularly important role and responsibility to report accurately and with rigor.

The fourth estate is vital to reporting on issues of power, violence, and justice, thus preserving and strengthening the pillars of democracy.

Protest movements

There are social scientists and political thinkers who believe that hope for the future lies in civil society. The difficulty is then the deep divides that polarize us all. In fact, the greatest threat is the burgeoning power of majoritarianism that is sweeping through many countries, using the momentum of polarization and fear. The mobilization of various fundamentalist majorities against ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, the LGBTQ and others, is the new terrorism that affects societies around the globe.

Protest movements have been an important part in addressing these issues. Globally, people are mobilizing and challenging oppressive social, political, and economic regimes (Bringel and Domingues, 2015; Porta et al., 2006). There are encouraging signs of a growing resistance to systems that have exacerbated inequality and injustice. Protest movements like those led by the ‘Indignados’ in Spain and Portugal, Indigenous movements around the world, the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, the Farmers Movement in India, the Landless People’s Movement in South Africa, Time’s Up, Say Her Name, and #MeToo movements, are all at the forefront of the resistance against entrenched exploitative systems. They offer us real hope for the future. What is required, however, is to understand how such movements can translate into structural and systemic change for a better world.

Sociology matters

Sociologists around the world have a long history of research related to the concepts and meanings embedded in power, violence, and justice. I firmly believe that we congregate at events like the World Congress to find ways of combating the growing inequality and injustice, the endless cycle of wars and violence in our world. It is not only the atrocity of war and armed conflict that is the problem, it is also the violence that runs deep in our homes, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. We are increasingly becoming cognizant of how inundated our world is by violence, around issues of gender, race, religion, class, and many others, even violence against the environment. The challenge for sociology is to find meaning and make sense of these complex and ever changing dynamics, through a greater understanding of structures and relationships.

In these troubled times, the ISA, as the global association of sociologists, has an important role to play. Founded in 1949 against the backdrop of the Second World War, the ISA mandate was not just to serve purely intellectual and cultural functions, but rather, it was ‘for promoting democracy and for serving broad social purposes’ (Platt, 1998: 3). Its aim has always been to both envisage and work toward a future in which the organization could grapple with the problems in our world and be proactive in pointing out new directions for progressive social change.

It is, in this same vein, toward the goal of increasing the public visibility, accessibility, and effectiveness of sociology and sociological knowledge, globally, that the ISA initiated the first comprehensive *Global Mapping of Sociologists for Social Inclusion* (GMSSI). Officially released in February 2018, we hope GMSSI will serve as a resource

to help identify, connect, and enable global collaborations, and particularly support sociologists who encounter barriers, either economic or political, which impede their participation in global exchanges.

Sociology, together with other disciplines, can help contour a better place and understanding, but this means that we must share our research with the main stakeholders – the public. At this critical time, we sociologists must share our research, reflect and respond to issues, provide clear frameworks for analysis, counter distortions and misrepresentations, and substantiate our perspectives on key concepts in terms that are accessible and straightforward. We must use our analysis to intervene and address injustice.

Of course, I am also aware that this can be personally perilous, with swift retribution for some. So many of us, however, have the advantage of freedom of expression as scholars and public intellectuals. We therefore also have the responsibility to mobilize through research and action for the greater good of society. We must make an impact, and challenge conventional impulses around how things have been done, because it is now time for change. For some of us this will mean climbing down from the tower of our academia and modifying our channels of communicating, clarifying our findings and insights in a manner that can be heard above the din and clamor.

We will have to harness the power of those very tools that are currently being used to distort and misinform. We will have to go beyond the traditional sources of knowledge dissemination, and communicate our sociological perspectives using a wide array of avenues and technologies. Let us hope that our sociological endeavors forge pathways towards a better present and a hopeful future. We have an intellectual, moral and social responsibility to generate and share knowledge and engage in collective action to build a better and more just world.

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1. Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp, July 2014: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/modern-authoritarianism-illiberal-democracies>

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