

# XX ISA World Congress of Sociology



**Resurgent Authoritarianism:**  
*Sociology of New Entanglements of  
Religions, Politics, and Economies*

Melbourne, Australia | June 25-July 1, 2023  
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre  
[www.isa-sociology.org](http://www.isa-sociology.org)



## Plenary Sessions

Plenary Sessions are organised by the Program Committee. Two sessions will be held parallel at 14:00-15:20 Melbourne, Australia, local time from June 26 through June 29, 2023

### Plenary session I: Post-secularity

#### Session I.1. Postsecularity or Multiple Secularities?

Coordinators: Armando Salvatore, Bandana Purkayastha, Geoffrey Pleyers, Eloisa Martin

In the wake of the erosion of the explanatory capacity of secularization theory, the sociological notion of secularity has overlaid the political and constitutional idea of secularism. It has also dovetailed with the more anthropological (and philosophical) idea of 'the secular.' In analogy with secularity and as a way of extending critical studies of it, the idea of postsecularity is generally associated with a plurality of views and practices resulting not from the negation of secularity but rather from the rise of a comprehensive reflexivity on the various shades of secularity (and the 'secularization process' of old). As a result, the untenable essentialized idea of compact 'religions' is dissolved into recurrently returning waves of self-differentiation of 'religious' forms of action and organization. Postsecularity allows to appreciate such protean manifestations of religion through ever new organizational guises and ways of mobilization, in a variety of social settings and within different cultural traditions. In a more recent turn, the idea of postsecularity has been integrated (or critiqued) through a focus on 'multiple secularities,' a notion coined in the wake of the success of 'multiple modernities.' The appearance of multiple secularities in a variety of societies all over the world creates a tension with the idea of postsecularity while it contributes to expose the malleability of the nexus between religion and secularity. It has also the advantage of encouraging comparative investigations and more focused methodologies than postsecularity allows.

Panelists will discuss the pros and cons of such shifts from time-honored paradigms of secularization and their impact on broader sociological themes like social justice and critique of authoritarianism.

## **Session I.1. Toward Boarder Horizons of Secularims**

Coordinators: Armando Salvatore, Bandana Purkayastha, Geoffrey Pleyers, Eloisa Martin

The dominant debates around secularism and post secularism continue to be grounded in Western understandings of religion and states, even though there are many scholarly conversations about the different structures of state-religion relationships, including discussions of different types of secularism. This plenary will explore the broader horizons of secularism, broadly understood as conversations on state/religion nexus, untied from its Christianity-democracy roots. It will look at critical analyses of power terrains in the dynamic relationship between states, politics, multiple religions, and transnational spheres today. It will include conversations on state co-optation of religions (or religious symbols and identities) to enact state policies, as well as resistances to states. This session will present different streams of conversation amidst the background of multiple modernities.

## **Plenary session II: Auhtoritarianism**

### **Session II.1. Brutalizing Authoritarianism**

Coordinators: Celi Scalon, Elina Oinas

Authoritarianism is more than the tendency of states to act undemocratically by deploying bureaucratic and police compulsion in social life. In this more descriptive rendering, all states are to some degree authoritarian. Also, authoritarianism is not simply where the sovereign deploys state of exception. It is known that all states contain ‘moments’ or tendencies of exception and authoritarian practice. Authoritarianism is rather the systematic removal of popular accountability or participation in the decisions of the state and a substantial centralization of executive power in a bureaucracy.

### **Session II.2. Knowledge, Authority and Post-factual Era**

Coordinators: Celi Scalon, Elina Oinas

The pandemic challenged all familiar notions of individual freedoms and collective responsibility. Arguments about facts, trustworthiness of scholars and decision makers alike are contested anew. Similarly, the climate change has pushed social scientists to reconsider our debates on authority and facticity. Do we need new ways of speaking about knowledge, reliability and authority? The sociological debates over positivism, truth, knowledge/power and politics of knowledge production already gained urgency – and a need to revise some more skeptical accounts regarding reason and evidence – due to the popularity of post-factual authoritarian regimes across the world. Simultaneously, the student movements demanding decolonizing of the university system including a revision of sociological curricula, present a powerful challenge to universalizing yet biased tendencies in social sciences. With the increasing anxiety regarding trust in informed decision making be it public health policies, environment or other exercise of state power, it is apparent that authority regarding knowledge is not a matter for

academics only but a concern that citizens in vastly different societies need to take seriously. Themes within the theme authority and knowledge, comprise social inequalities, social justice, whose concerns matter, what is matter, post-human concerns, subaltern debates, spirituality and indigenous epistemologies to name but a few.

## **Plenary session III: Populism**

### **Session III.1. Local Forms of a Global Phenomenon**

Coordinators: Filomin Gutierrez, Sawako Shirahase, Nazanin Shahrokni

This panel is a cross-regional dialogue that addresses the varieties of populist surge in different parts of the globe. Scholars from various regions will discuss the ways in which populism unfolds in specific nations or regions. It provides an occasion to reevaluate populism by comparing its empirical manifestations in one region— its similarities, peculiarities, differences and contradictions— with that of others in different geographical, cultural and historical contexts. In the global rise of populism, why does one form rise in one nation while another form, with its own distinctive features, grip another? The populist hold on power and discourse in Latin America is said to be anchored on state control and economic redistribution, in Southeast Asian on issues of corruption and criminality, while in the U.S. and Europe on immigrations and protection of domestic economic opportunities. On the other hand, there are nations and regions that did not seem to follow the populist trajectory. This panel further interrogates the concept of populism and provide analysis and critique of existing definitions in social scientific discourse as well as normative positions that have formed around it.

### **Session III.2. Populism and its “Others”: An Intersectional Approach to the Construction of the “People”**

Coordinators: Filomin Gutierrez, Sawako Shirahase, Nazanin Shahrokni

Despite the saturation of social science discourse with references to ‘populism’, the latter still remains a notoriously hard to define term. Having said that, there seems to be some consensus on populism setting in motion processes of construction of ‘the people’ that entail the division of the political into two antagonistic camps, ‘us’ - the people, the downtrodden and disenfranchised on the one hand, and ‘them’ – political and social elites, out of touch with the grassroots, not interested in listening to the former. Populism – right wing or left, is premised on notions of social and political injustice and appeals to address societal differentials. As such, it is always emerging at the intersections of ethnic, racial and gendered differences within society; it is inflected with such notions of difference and embedded in practices of ‘othering’ and exclusion related to them. This panel seeks to foster discussion and debates on the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality and other social categories of difference work together in the construction of the people as exemplified in the cases of white working class, ‘feminist’ and ‘libertarian’ populism, or, of its others as manifested in processes of ‘othering’ in femonationalist, Islamophobic and xenophobic discrimination.

## **Plenary session IV: Retreat, Reform, or Reassertion of Neoliberalism?**

### **Session IV.1. Inequalities Created in Neoliberal Economies**

Coordinators: Alison Loconto, Dan Woodman, Hiroshi Ishida, Susan McDaniel

In this semi-plenary, we will invite speakers who will address some of the inequitable effects of neoliberalism as a form of political economy. We will explore the tensions that have arisen when specific policies have been put into place, resulting in assetization and debt as risk, modern slavery, ‘Super Capitalism’, and socio-economic inequalities.

### **Session IV.2. *Individual vs. Collective Rights to Life under Neoliberalism***

Coordinators: Alison Loconto, Dan Woodman, Hiroshi Ishida, Susan McDaniel

The 2010s have seen the emergence of a number of grand societal challenges that reveal the fissures in neoliberal ideologies and policies. The semi-plenary will include speakers who can address a selection of these challenges - such as global pandemics, climate change, necropolitics or illiberal death, and femicide (e.g., Las Tesis movement) - that speak to the limits that neoliberalism has put on both individual and collective rights to life.