



# Economy and Society

## RC02 2022 QUARTER 2 NEWSLETTER

### PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear RC02 Members,

Since the last newsletter, I am pleased to report a relatively tranquil hum of activity. We are currently organizing the [XX ISA World Congress of Sociology](#) in Melbourne, Australia from June 25 to July 1, 2023. Please mark your calendars! This will be a hybrid conference, but the precise form that this will take, and how much of the conference will be hybrid, remains an open decision by the Congress' [Program Committee](#). As soon as I learn of their decision, I will let you know.

In RC02, we are currently planning three primary venues in which you could participate in the World Congress. First, would you like to organize a session? Each session is 110 minutes and can accommodate five papers and time for collective discussion. I am most interested in proposals for research topics that involve an open call for papers that can potentially attract scholars from across the globe. The hard deadline is May 31, 2022, 24:00 GMT. You can find details on [how to propose a session here](#). Please submit your best ideas!

Secondly, you can submit your own research paper in response to your colleagues' calls for papers. This June there will be hundreds of calls for papers that

you can submit in July-September 2022. RC02 will host at least twenty, and these will be posted widely, including in our weekly RC02 broadcasts.

Thirdly, RC02 is organizing a major event immediately prior to the World Congress, a Junior Scholar Laboratory to advance the research and careers of doctoral students, postdoctoral scholars, and potentially junior professors. If you have attended successful laboratories and mentoring events in the past and have ideas that you would like to share, please reach out to me. If you are interested in participating in or helping to organize this Laboratory, please email me at the contact information below.

Lastly, if you would like to organize a social or academic event prior to, at, or after the World Congress, or if you have an idea for an RC02 activity anywhere in the world, please reach out to me with your ideas.

In aloha and solidarity,

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## ARTICLE

Please send essays to the Secretary and Newsletter Editor, Dustin Stoltz (dss219 [at] lehigh [dot] edu).

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### The Unintended Persistence of Recycling in India

BY Dana Kornberg

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Self-driving cars and manufacturing automation are widely discussed as challenges for the contemporary workforce. Less visible, however, are labor questions at the other end of the commodity chain: is household garbage collected by hand or lifted by giant compactors? Does sorting for recycling take place on conveyer belts or in the back of informal workers' carts? How are these decisions made?

These questions became especially urgent in countries across the Global South over the last few decades, when people increasingly concentrated in cities and became reliant on the packaged goods that are predestined to become trash.

While administrators feverishly cooked up policies under the guidance of international organizations, informal recyclers continued to plie streets, knocking on doors and mining dumpsites in search of waste they sell into recycling markets. Without the support of formal policies or programs, and often in spite of them, informal workers have sustained recycling globally.

I examined the tensions between such informal recyclers and newly mechanized formal public-private partnership (PPP) garbage programs

in Delhi, India. For nearly two years, I worked alongside informal door-to-door collectors who collected garbage and harvested scrap to sell for recycling. While this earns their families a living, it also provides environmental benefits and constitutes the city's only recycling program. However, their activities have been actively threatened by PPP collection trucks, compacters, and incinerators.

Despite these threats, my research found that Delhi's informal recyclers were not displaced, though indeed they lost some of their territory. Meanwhile, the PPP program was not expanded as planned.

#### Why informal recyclers have prevailed

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In a recent article, I explain that the persistence of informal recyclers in Delhi did not result from organized efforts, as in some Latin American cities, but rather from their ability to secure what I call practical legitimacy.

Practical legitimacy refers to a group's ability to gain recognition as the rightful providers of a good or service through everyday actions, rather than formal advocacy or public campaigns. Without explicit rules or publicity, practical action tends to rely on deeper social structures like class, gender, race, or caste relations, which shape everyday decision-making.

Even where formalized collection services were introduced, I found that middle-class residents, who

are overwhelmingly upper-caste, tended to continue using informal recyclers because of the more personalized services they offered—practices that were embedded in social status differences, especially those based on caste.

Delhi residents do not tend to recycle because of environmental benefits, civic requirements, or moral pressure, as in wealthier countries. Although recycling rates are remarkably high in the city, middle-class residents tended to understand recycling as something that is done in wealthier countries like the United States or Singapore, not India. Informal recyclers also did not see themselves as fitting this image. Rather, for them, recycling is a source of cash.

Dalit and Muslim workers who serve the city's middle classes remove everything that can be sold: plastics, papers, metals, glass, and even human hair and stale bread. Recycling is based entirely on markets for trash, such as the going rate for plastics, which depend on global oil prices, and local demand for stale bread, which is used to feed cows and buffaloes.

As for the new collection trucks, residents in the neighborhoods where they were introduced were generally sympathetic to the idea of using the trucks. The concept of a modern garbage collection system appealed to them. But, in practice, they tended to use the services of informal collection to which they were accustomed. Residents saw the informal services as better, even though they had to pay a small monthly fee for it, and the collection trucks were free.

## The social context of informal recycling

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For one, the informal recyclers tended to be more reliable. While the trucks drove at a regular speed down the street, leaving it to residents to hear them and bring down their trash, informal recyclers came at the same time each day.

Informal recyclers were also willing to come right to the door, even climbing multiple flights of stairs, or they would catch buckets that residents lowered by string. The trucks required residents to bring their garbage out onto the street.

The preference for informal recyclers was not only a matter of convenience or of being able to pay for more service. Unlike the collection trucks, informal recyclers were willing to do other tasks beyond recycling.

For example, informal recyclers would frequently clear building stairways of the infamous dust coating the city daily. They also willingly performed odd jobs such as cleaning up after events like weddings or helping people move.

In turn, residents' relationships with recyclers took on the character of patronage, with upper-caste, middle-class households providing for lower-caste Dalit and Muslim workers. Recyclers provided pliable labor, while residents offered variable remuneration, along with tea, snacks, leftover food, and used clothing.

These relationships are embedded in deeper social systems of hierarchy and dependence based on caste, which engenders practical legitimacy. By recognizing informal recyclers as the rightful providers of trash

disposal services, residents, (rather than laws or advertisements), legitimated their services.

Residents I spoke with explained that they continued to use informal recyclers instead of the formal trucks because of their longstanding relationships and familiarity. As one resident put it: “We know them.” Others used the possessive form, referring to informal recyclers as “ours,” which referred to longer-standing kinds of caste-based labor arrangements.

These personalized interactions, I found, indicated deeper relations of dependence that operated to affirm residents’ higher social status. Residents positioned themselves as the quasi patrons of lower-caste Dalit and Muslim informal recyclers, who in turn catered to their upper-caste clients’ specific and variable expectations, allowing residents to avoid the stigma of bringing out their own trash.

### **The unintended environmental contributions of informal recycling**

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What can we learn from the persistence of informal recycling despite the introduction of formalized trash collection services?

In Delhi, the technologies used to formalize and rationalize recycling actually exacerbate environmental problems through modes of waste disposal that are inferior in ecological terms to the work of informal recyclers. Yet the preference for informal recyclers is not based on ecological considerations; rather, informalized and personalized collection accords with middle-class, upper-caste expectations of service work and untouchability

practices.

Put differently, social inequality has inadvertently created environmentally preferable outcomes because one group’s livelihoods depend on another’s trash. The environmental benefits that result are the product not of environmental values – as would be the case for most recycling programs in wealthy countries – but rather a by-product of the desire for convenience, status maintenance, and outsourcing the labor of menial tasks.

The case of informal recyclers suggests that formal services and rational technologies do not necessarily match the services of informal trash collection. This may be the case for other personal service work provided by informal labor in the Global South. Where stark economic inequalities and marginalization have created informalized work sectors like the one for recycling in Delhi, technologies intended to improve public services can have potentially devastating environmental and social effects.

Dr. Dana Kornberg is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at UC-Santa Barbara who studies urban environmental politics in India and the United States. Her research has been published in *Social Forces*, the *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, and the *Economic & Political Weekly*. She is currently working on a book project tentatively titled *The Garbage Economy*, which examines threats to and the persistence of informal recycling in Delhi.

## Futures of Gender Regimes

BY Sylvia Walby and Karen Shire

Gender matters at a global level. This set of papers addresses new thinking about gender relations at the macro level needed to analyze the global. They debate the best way to theorize varieties of gender regime. They add an intersectional lens to the analysis of class that has, so far, been the main focus of macro-level analysis of the global in sociology. They add a macro level to the analysis of gender that has, so far, been predominantly analyzed at the micro and meso levels.

The papers develop from a debate held in [Social Politics](#) in 2020 as to how theories of varieties of gender regime are to be developed to address the current crisis and to more rigorously include the Global South as well as the Global North. How is the impact of crises, especially the COVID crisis, on gender relations to be theorized? Are varieties of public gender regime different in the Global South as compared with the North?

How is modernity, or rather, multiple entangled modernities, gendered? How is the great transformation to modernity, a core issue in contestations in sociological theory, gendered? Are domestic forms of social relations inherently or

contingently modern or premodern? Is the most important distinction in varieties of gender regime the one between domestic and public forms of gender regime? Is the distinction between neoliberal and social democratic varieties of gender regime found in the Global North generally applicable, or are there different distinctions between varieties of the public form of gender regime in the Global South?

The concept of gender regime challenges the traditional reduction of gender to the family. The gender regime is constituted by multiple institutional domains across society. The range of domains is debated: sometimes including economy, polity, civil society, and violence; while others include additional domains.

How is violence, widely recognized as important to gender relations empirically but rarely integrated into core sociological theory, to be addressed? Is violence a fourth institutional domain alongside economy, polity, and civil society? Theorizing gender at a macro level requires an answer to this question. Too often, the macro level has been theorized as an ungendered political economy. The papers here take different positions on this debate about the theorization of violence: some argue for the recognition of the significance of violence for macro-level thinking about the gendered global by

treating violence as a major institutional domain, others for dispersing violence across other domains.

New developments in the organization of care challenge social theory that traditionally narrowed the economy to marketized forms of labor. Care work is part of the economy, whether paid or unpaid. The social relations of the economy include the domestic relations as well as those between capital and labor.

There are often multiple differently gendered polities co-existing (and competing) in the same territory: “national” state, EU (or other hegemon), organized religion (e.g. Catholic Church). They have different depths of gendered democracy, so variations in the balance of power between them are gendered.

Gender relations are being rescaled. Global gendered care chains require the analysis of the macro level as well as meso and micro. They require analysis of the intersection of capitalism and varieties of gender regime; of migration; and of specifically gendered challenges to methodological nationalism. There is no bounded nation-state society in which all social domains are aligned. The rescaling of gender relations also involves the local (new forms of care provision, new forms of political project), and (would be) hegemons (the EU and China, as well as US). The papers offer different ways of thinking about trajectories of gender regimes over time and space, as differently gendered forms of combined and uneven development.

One of the substantive challenges this set of papers addresses is that of whether the COVID crisis is

driving changes in the gender regime. On the one hand, there are sickness, unnecessary deaths, and processes of de-democratization. On the other, there are new forms of solidarity and progressive projects.

The papers address these themes. Sylvia Walby sets out how violence can be theorized as a fourth institutional domain, and how different varieties of gender regime deploy and regulate violence. Karen Shire addresses how family policies characteristic of conservative gender regimes fail to fundamentally change the gendered division of care labor, in what is neither a liberal nor a social-democratic transformation. Mieke Verloo argues for specifying what we mean by family, arguing instead for a concept of how society organizes bodies, sexuality, and kinship. She views the “anti-gender” turn to the right as countering the de-traditionalization of intimate relations as seen in the attacks on reproductive rights and sexual autonomy in Hungary and Poland. Heidi Gottfried and Karen Shire address the rescaling of gender relations in a comparative regional analysis of trajectories of change in Japan and Germany. Valentine M. Moghadam argues that reversals of several feminist gains in Iran and Tunisia can only be understood if, drawing on world systems theory, we account for how countries in the interstices of economic peripheries and semi-peripheries are affected by economic crises and hegemonic powers. Reversals in women rights in Tunisia are attributed to the over-exposure of semi-peripheries to world economic crises, while the US-led sanctions on Iran are to blame for the reversal of gender gains in that

country. Ece Kocabiçak analyses changes in the nature of the patriarchal state in the Turkish gender regime. The analysis of Italy and Spain by Alba Alonso, Rossella Ciccia, and Emanuela Lombardo shows that Southern Europe is not a unified region, with large differences in the two countries' gender regimes emerging from the interplay of politics and civil societies. Roberta Guerrina, Heather MacRae, and Annick Masselot theorize the EU as a distinctive gender regime, which has failed to address the gendered and racialized inequalities generated by the single market project, and exacerbated by multiple crises, the latest of which is Covid.

[Originally published in Global Dialogue](#), on February 25th, 2022

Sylvia Walby is Professor of Sociology at City, University of London, UK, co-coordinator of ISA Thematic Group on Violence and Society (TG11), and member (and former President) of ISA Research Committee on Economy and Society (RC02), and Women, Gender and Society (RC32).

Karen Shire is Professor of Sociology with a focus on Comparative Sociology and Japanese Society at the University of Duisburg-Essen, and Vice-President of ISA RC02.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

*Reshaping Social Relations in Educational Theory and Practice: A Global Teaching and Decolonizing Collaboration* by Dr. Melanie E. L. Bush and Dr. Nokuthula Hlabangane

In fall 2018, students from Adelphi University in Garden City, New York and from the University of South Africa in Pretoria embarked on a pilot collaboration to engage conversation and cross-experience exchange. The initiative was rooted in the Adelphi course entitled, “The Reshaping of Social Relations in the Modern World” and through a network of students connected with the University of South Africa (UNISA) Department of Anthropology and Archaeology and decolonizing studies and projects in South Africa. This article provides a theoretical framing for this collaboration and why it holds tremendous potential for engagement, heightened global awareness and developing kinship cross-borders as well as a discussion of the process and the content of this engagement and experience through the lens of student participants' reflections.

<https://www.isaportal.org/resources/resource/reshaping-social-relations-in-educational-theory-and-practice-a-global-teaching-and-decolonizing-collaboration/>

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*Care and Capitalism (Polity)*, by Kathleen Lynch

A powerful defence of the value of care as an alternative to capitalism. The logics and ethics of neoliberal capitalism dominate public discourses and politics in the early twenty-first century. They morally endorse and institutionalize forms of competitive self-interest that jettison social justice values, and are deeply antithetical to love, care and solidarity.

But capitalism is neither invincible nor inevitable. While people are self-interested, they are not purely self-interested: they are bound affectively and morally to others, even to unknown others. The cares, loves and solidarity relationships within which people are engaged give them direction and purpose in their daily lives. They constitute cultural residuals of hope that stand ready to move humanity beyond a narrow capitalism-centric set of values.

In this instructive and inspiring book, Kathleen Lynch sets out to reclaim the language of love, care and solidarity both intellectually and politically and to place it at the heart of contemporary discourse. Her goal is to help unseat capital at the gravitational centre of meaning making and value, thereby helping to create care, love and solidarity-led logics and ethical priorities for politics.

[https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail?book\\_slug=care-and-capitalism--9781509543830](https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail?book_slug=care-and-capitalism--9781509543830)

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*Marx Matters (Brill) Edited by David Fasenfest*

*The Making of Modern Japan (Brill) by Myles Carroll*

*Marx Matters*, 2022, David Fasenfest (ed), Leiden: Brill with contributions by Jose Bell Lara, Ashley J. Bohrer, Tom Brass, Rose M. Brewer, William K. Carroll, Penelope Ciancanelli, Raju J. Das, Ricardo A. Dello Buono, David Fasenfest, Ben Fine, Lauren Langman, Alfredo Saad-Filho, Vishwas Satgar, and William K. Tabb.

In *Marx Matters* noted scholars explore the way a Marxian political economy addresses contemporary social problems, demonstrating the relevance of Marx today and outlining how his work can frame progressive programs for social change.

*Marx Matters* is an examination of how Marx remains more relevant than ever in dealing with contemporary crises. This volume explores how technical dimensions of a Marxian analytic frame remains relevant to our understanding of inequality, of exploitation and oppression, and of financialization in the age of global capitalism. Contributors track Marx in promoting emancipatory practices in Latin America, tackle how Marx informs issues of race and gender, explore current social movements and the populist turn, and demonstrate how Marx can guide strategies to deal with the existential environmental crises of the day. Marx matters because Marx still provides the best analysis of the capitalism as a system, and his ideas still point to how society can organize for a better world.

<https://brill.com/view/title/61465>

In *The Making of Modern Japan*, Myles Carroll offers a sweeping account of post-war Japanese political economy, exploring the transition from the post-war boom to the crisis of today and the connections between these seemingly discrete periods.

Carroll explores the multifarious international and domestic political, economic, social and cultural conditions that fortified Japan's post-war hegemonic order and enabled decades of prosperity and stability. Yet since the 1990s, a host of political, economic, social and cultural changes has left this same hegemonic order out of step with the realities of the contemporary world, a contradiction that has led to three decades of crisis in Japanese society. Can Japan make the bold changes required to reverse its decline?

<https://brill.com/view/title/34543>

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*Fractured Militancy: Precarious Resistance after Racial Inclusion* (Cornell) By Marcel Paret

Drawing on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with activists, *Fractured Militancy* tells the story of postapartheid South Africa from the perspective of Johannesburg's impoverished urban Black neighborhoods.

Nearly three decades after South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, widespread protests and xenophobic attacks suggest that not all is well in the once-celebrated "rainbow nation." Marcel Paret traces rising protests back to the process of democratization and racial inclusion. This process dangled the possibility of change but preserved racial inequality and economic insecurity, prompting residents to use militant protests to express their

deep sense of betrayal and to demand recognition and community development. Underscoring remarkable parallels to movements such as Black Lives Matter in the United States, this account attests to an ongoing struggle for Black liberation in the wake of formal racial inclusion.

<https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9781501761799/fractured-militancy>