

RC 36 NEWSLETTER

February 20, 2026

Notes on this week's internet reading centred on Alienation as concept

I came across six recent articles mentioning alienation as a key concept for their analyses. It is interesting how diverse the approaches to alienation differ, and yet they all have certain fundamental similarities, such as a relational distancing from an expected point in either space, time, and structural, cultural, social, and financial environments. Herein, we find top-down alienating influence, either consciously strategized or structurally unaware, and also bottom-up build-ups of identity, either thought-out or unconscious. So I thought I'd exercise my synthesis in the attempt to grasp their differences, after all, we are, indeed, a Research Committee on Alienation, are we not?

Across these six articles, alienation is presented not as a leftover or metaphor, but as a core part of how today's society is organized. Despite their differences, the articles all show how modern institutions (economic, technological, educational, political, and legal) create people who are officially included but still feel disconnected from meaningful social life. Each article delivers its own view on alienation, but together they support critical theory's main idea: alienation has not vanished with the decline of industrial capitalism. Instead, it has changed form, become internalized, and spread throughout all areas of social life.

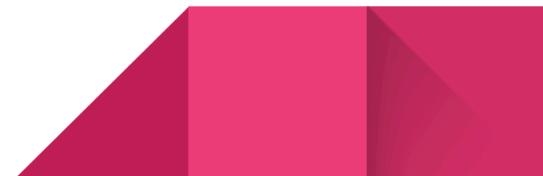
From a Marxist standpoint, Sadia Kasfia relates youth unemployment to alienation, thus the most direct expression of alienation as a structural effect of capitalist relations of production. Here, alienation does not arise merely from joblessness (if it were only that simple), but from the contradiction between socially produced qualifications and the absence of socially meaningful work. Especially if we take into account the mediatization of everyday life, exposure on social media, detachment from self-worth feelings and sensations, and the fragilization of social ties. According to the author, "*sociologists describe unemployment as a social cancer that*

devours merit and paves the way for extremism and anarchy. Economists repeatedly warn that if this vast youth population is not immediately transformed into a productive workforce, the nation's future will vanish into a blind alley." [1]

Education delivers integration, recognition, self-acknowledgement, and mobility, but often results in insecurity and exclusion. The article focuses on Bangladesh, though its points could apply to other countries, like Brazil. This contradiction reflects Marx's idea that capitalism undercuts the abilities it creates. The psychological pain described, such as shame, self-blame, withdrawal, for instance, is not just personal, but serves to make a social problem seem private. Here, alienation is real and material, based on how labor and value are organized, even though it is felt on a personal level.

Critical theory argues that alienation is not exclusively about work or production. The article on exhaustion and the "society of tiredness" shows a shift from outside control to self-imposed discipline, a change discussed by the Frankfurt School and Hartmut Rosa as well. Ferdinand Capicotto translates Byung-Chul Han's idea into the self-inflicted forms of precarious scarcity of social meaning. As he points out, *"burnout no longer affects only high-intensity professions but also affects students, precarious workers, digital workers, and parents. It's a chronic, silent, and often normalized condition. Being tired has become a habitual, almost identifying state."* [2] Now, alienation happens through pressure to always improve, adapt, and perform. People feel alienated not because they are left out, but because they are always busy. The ability to connect genuinely with the world, or resonance, is worn down by speed and competition. What looks like personal burnout is actually a social problem that makes the world feel unwelcoming.

Rahel Jaeggi's critique supports the idea that alienation is a problem in social relationships, especially around communicative efforts and the transmission of data within the informational economy, not just the inevitable loss of true self. The articles on digital virality and alienation from mathematics [3] show this kind of failure. In both cases, people are deeply involved in social systems, like online networks or schools, but cannot make them their own. People online create content and data, but do not control how meaning is shared. Students learn math, but see it as something distant from real life. Here, alienation means being forced to take part without having real ownership, which is widespread in today's society. In fact, I came



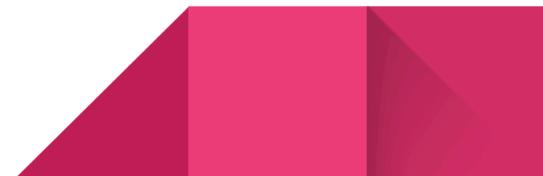
to understand that nowadays people do not *own* things (like records, movies, TV series, those DVD and CD boxes, and so on), but they *subscribe* to them, and when you no longer pay for something, you lose it, as if *ownership had been replaced by a temporary concession*.

The emergence of platforms such as TikTok shows how technology shapes alienation. The author states that “*viral spaces operate more through symbols, imagery, and representations that shape collective public perceptions.*” [4] Algorithms change how we see, value, and experience time, favoring speed and visibility over thought and continuity. Critical theory sees this as a new phase: social relations are not just turned into commodities, but are run by systems that seem neutral, though actually shape how we think. People become both creators and products, active but powerless, subjective objects or objectified subjects, connected but still alone. Seeman’s ideas about powerlessness and meaninglessness have never served us so much as to explain this, and critical theory places it within larger systems of control.

The article about politically segregated schools shows alienation in how society and democracy work. Using Durkheim’s ideas, this segregation is seen as a modern form of anomie, where shared values and goals break down. John Buttrick explains that as the collective educational process was taken within the bubble of other think-alikes, “*each group began to perceive that the other was inhospitable. Each group had accumulated its own experiences, its own rules, and its misunderstanding of the other. There was no room left for anyone from the other group [...] these schools would graduate students comfortable with their experiences of a homogenous environment of thought and practice. Their learning would prepare them to perpetuate the stark political and social divisions in the already wounded country.*” [5]

He speaks of Republicans and Democrats in the U.S., but once again, it could be said about any other country that is polarizedly divided. Critical theory adds that this is not solely a moral issue, but a political one. Segregation locks in certain beliefs, blocks real discussion, and turns differences into dangers. Here, alienation means not just being apart from others, but being cut off from the chance to share a common world.

Even the legal debate about ending the idea of *alienation of affections*, though different in focus, shows a bigger change in how relationships are understood. The legalization of heartbreaks has genuinely caught this author’s attention. [6] The law’s move away from this idea suggests that people no longer see intimacy as something to own, but it also shows the mixed



feelings about modern independence. As Durkheim and later critical theorists pointed out, legal support for individual freedom often goes along with more social breakdown. When alienation disappears from legal terms, it does not mean the problem is solved, but that it has moved into less obvious and harder-to-challenge forms.

Kierkegaard's look at despair helps explain the personal side of these social changes. The tired, always-connected, and constantly adjusting person shows a kind of despair that looks normal on the surface. In this sense, alienation is not about feeling cut off from society, but about losing one's inner life because of pressure to always be available and productive. Critical theory sees this despair not as a private problem, but as something created by society.

Overall, these articles show that alienation today happens through being included and involved, not by being left out. People are not mainly alienated because they are outside social systems, but because their involvement takes away their independence, sense of meaning, individual unique traits, and shared life. Classic theories of alienation (like Marx on labor, Durkheim on anomie, Kierkegaard concerning despair, and newer ideas about resonance and appropriation) are still important because they show how control continues even when it is not obvious.

Humberto Fernandes, Ph.D.
RC36 Secretary

[1] *Eclipse of Youth: The Burn of Unemployment and the New Horizon of Potential*. Daily New Nation, February 6, 2026 in [<https://dailynewnation.com/news/801896/>]

[2] *The Society of Exhaustion: Exhaustion Becomes Normal*. Sociologicamente.it, February 5, 2026 in [<https://sociologicamente.it/en/the-society-of-tiredness-exhaustion-that-becomes-normality/>]

[3] *Alienation from Mathematics: A Silent Threat to Society*. Kashmir Convener, February 1, 2026 in [<https://kashmirconvener.com/alienation-from-mathematics-a-silent-threat-to-society/>]

[4] *TikTokification and Virality on Social Media: Algorithm-Driven Shifts in Digital Culture*. Universitas Gadjah Mada, February 4, 2026 in



[<https://ugm.ac.id/en/news/tiktokification-and-virality-on-social-media-algorithm-driven-shifts-in-digital-culture/>]

[5] *Opinion: Less alienation, more cooperation*. Concord Monitor, January 24, 2026 in

[<https://www.concordmonitor.com/2026/01/24/my-turn-politically-segregated-schools/>]

[6] *Alienation of Affections: The New Mexico Supreme Court Joins the Crowd and Abolishes the Cause of Action*. Verdict Justia, February 4, 2026 in

[<https://verdict.justia.com/2026/02/04/alienation-of-affections-the-new-mexico-supreme-court-joins-the-crowd-and-abolishes-the-cause-of-action>]

Talking Alienation Seminar

The **second session of the Talking Alienation Seminar** will take place on **February 28 at 5:00 p.m. (GMT)**. **If you have not yet received the Zoom link, please reply to this message and we will be happy to share it with you, or [contact us here](#) if you prefer.** You can consult the [calendar for the first quadrimester of 2026](#) on our updated web portal.

Want to present at a Talking Alienation session? Submit your abstract [here!](#)

Publications & Contributions

- If you have **recently published an article** or book chapter, please send us the link along with a short abstract so we can feature it on the RC36 website, in our [Publications](#) section.
 - We also welcome **research notes, reports, reflections, and early-stage ideas** for publication in our [Blog](#) section.
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Calls for Chapter

Understanding and challenging the digitalized world: Labyrinths of digital alienation

This volume examines digital alienation as a defining condition of contemporary society, in which technological mediation reshapes experiences of sociality, selfhood, temporality, and moral responsibility. Bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology, philosophy, media studies, and critical AI studies, the book analyses how algorithmic governance, platform capitalism, and data-centred modes of knowing language and culture reconfigure social relations while generating new forms of distance, dependency, and ethical adversity. Rather than treating alienation solely as loss or deprivation, the contributors explore its temporal, relational, and normative dimensions, asking how targeted estrangements may open possibilities for critique, care, and moral imaginations oriented towards alternatives. Through empirically grounded case studies and theoretically informed interventions across diverse cultural contexts, Digital Alienation advances global sociological debates on technology and human flourishing, offering conceptual tools for understanding—and potentially transforming—the moral conditions of life in an increasingly digital world.

Keywords: alienation, digitalization, Artificial Intelligence, algorithm, technology

We invite all authors to first submit chapter abstracts for the book by April 15, 2026, to the following email address: **digitalalienation.rc36@gmail.com**. After the selection of chapters by May 15, 2026, we plan to receive the full texts of the chapters by October 15, 2026.



Violence and Alienation in Contemporary Society: Agents, Social Structures, and Social Dynamics

This collective monograph explores the complex interplay between violence and alienation in late-modern societies. The contributing authors examine various social agents of violence and the mechanisms of social alienation that contribute to the emergence and reproduction of violent practices. Addressing individuals, groups, and power dynamics as agents of violence, the book highlights the influence of social stratification, inequality, cultural norms, and political mechanisms. The chapters integrate theoretical approaches with empirical cases, covering a wide range of contexts including gender-based violence, institutional spheres such as politics, law, education, and family, as well as media representations, collective trauma, digital environments, and forms of social resistance. By identifying the mechanisms that sustain contemporary violent phenomena, the book will be valuable to social science researchers, social policy practitioners, human rights advocates, and a broad readership interested in the causes and mechanisms of violence and pathways towards its sociological mitigation.

Keywords: alienation, violence practices, power relations, sociological mitigation

We invite all authors to first submit chapter abstracts for the book by April 15, 2026, to the following email addresses: **olgsimon@gmail.com** and **silvia.pezzoli@unifi.it**. After the selection of chapters by May 15, 2026, we plan to receive the full texts of the chapters by October 15, 2026.



RC36 General Meeting

Our **GENERAL MEETING** will be on **March 4, 2026 at 1 pm GMT**. The link will be sent to our active members, so please make sure your membership is in good standing until February 28, 2026.

Agenda items:

- RC36 Finance statement
- 2026 RC36 Event
- Book publications and other opportunities
- 2027 ISA Forum - deadlines, sessions - What could we learn from Rabat about sessions management?
- RC36 Marketing strategies, membership increase

We accept **proposals for agenda** items for the **RC36 General Meeting**. Please [write to us](#) with the points you would like to see included on the agenda.

Readings

A new measure of issue polarization using k-means clustering: US trends 1988–2024 and predictors of polarization across the world. David Jack Young, James Ackland, Andreas Kapounek, Jens Koed Madsen, Lara Jane Greening, Lee de-Wit, 2026. In:
<https://royalsocietypublishing.org/rsos/article/13/2/251428/479919/A-new-measure-of-issue-polarization-using-k-means>

The significance of youth clubs in relation to young people's capacity for action. Christoffer Schultz*, Dirk Michel-Schertges, 2025. In:

<https://pure.au.dk/portal/en/publications/the-significance-of-youth-clubs-in-relation-to-young-peoples-cap/>

Right-Wing Populism: Morbid Symptoms of Global Capitalism. Lauren Langman, 2025. In: https://brill.com/view/journals/pgdt/24/1-2/article-p95_7.xml#top

Opportunities

- [PhD Position: Groups, Social Influence, and the Spread of Attitudes & Behaviors, at MASARYK UNIVERSITY, Brno, Czech Republic](#) - Deadline: 15 March 2026
- [Assistant or Associate Professor of Sociology, at Texas A&M International University, Laredo, Texas](#) - Deadline: open until position is filled
- [Fully Funded PhD Positions in Social Sciences, Humanities & Cultural Studies, University of Vienna, Doctoral Recruitment Call 2026](#) - Deadline March 2, 2026 at 14:00 GMT
- [Social Cohesion Coordinator - International Rescue Committee, Greece](#) - Deadline: 2 Mar 2026

Research Committee RC36 Alienation Theory and Research
International Sociological Association