

Social Problems and Global Issues

SSSP Global Division Newsletter Summer 2020

Dear Global Division Members,

It has been an eventful time between the last and current newsletter. The COVID-19 pandemic showed us more than anything else of the truly global nature of our connections. The effects demonstrated the failures and flaws, of our governments, our health care systems, our political structures, and our basic values as human beings. The marginalized fell through the cracks, and the minorities disproportionately bore the burden of the pandemic. In India, invisible populations like the migrant workers became suddenly visible to the public eye through their torturous journeys home during the lockdown. Even in the all-seeing state of Singapore, the virus challenged the containment of guest workers in crammed dormitories. Along with the pandemic came the largest uprising in the USA demanding racial justice following the killing of George Floyd. If anything could be said positive about these developments, it is that the systematic marginality of people and their suppression of basic social rights have been thrown into sharp relief, resulting in an outrage that hopefully will sustain beyond the pandemic.

In this newsletter, we have four short pieces on the pandemic. Howard Lune writes about the culpability of the neoliberal system in creating this crisis, Bradley W Williams, about the corona virus' impact on disability rights, Ernesto Castañeda et al. about the racialization of the pandemic, and George Ygarza on the politics of solidarity. I express my gratefulness to these authors in submitting their short essays.

We had to cancel our annual meeting in San Francisco and move to a small virtual event. Hopefully, this will lead to a more invigorating meeting at the next SSSP at Chicago! I urge you to keep SSSP alive by maintaining your membership and keep participating in the meanwhile.

Wish you all a good and safe summer!

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MEMBER NEWS

John G. Dale, a 2019-2020 Science and Technology Innovation Program Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, co-authored (with Ashley Mehra) a blogpost, "[How Humanitarian Blockchain Can Deliver Fair Labor to Global Supply Chains](#)," featured at the University of Cambridge, Centre for the Study of Global Human Movement's Transdisciplinary Blog Series on Human Rights and Technology.

MEMBER PUBLICATIONS

Castañeda, Ernesto, and **Amber Shemesh**. 2020. "Overselling Globalization: The Misleading Conflation of Economic Globalization and Immigration, and the Subsequent Backlash." *Social Sciences*. Volume 9, Number 5, 32 pp. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/9/5/61>

Deb, Nikhil. 2020. "Law and Corporate Malfeasance in Neoliberal India." *Critical Sociology*. Online First (April 2020). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520907122>

Deb, Nikhil. 2020. "Corporate Capitalism, Environmental Damage, and the Rule of Law: The Magurchara Gas Explosion in Bangladesh." In the Routledge International Handbook of Green Criminology, edited by Nigel South and Avi Brisman. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207094>

2020 DIVISION AWARD WINNERS

GLOBAL DIVISION OUTSTANDING BOOK AWARD

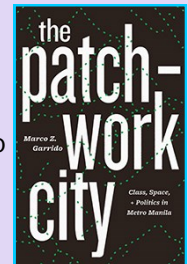
Marco Z. Garrido
University of Chicago

[The Patchwork City: Class, Space, and Politics in Metro Manila](#) (University of Chicago Press).

The book was featured in our fall newsletter

Here is what the Award committee chaired by Ching Kwan Lee wrote about this book:

Garrido's ethnography considers the impact of neoliberal globalization on the slums and upper- and middle-class enclaves of Manila, tracing the profound consequences of closely juxtaposed housing inequalities on class relations and democracy. Written in an engaging style, this excellent analysis offers a new voice to the dialogue on class boundaries, spatial, moral, and political differences. A timely text with global relevance for the current political moment.



GLOBAL DIVISION GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER AWARD

Danielle Falzon
Brown University

"The Ideal Delegation: How Institutional Privilege Silences 'Developing' Nations in the UN Climate Negotiations"

GLOBAL DIVISION GRADUATE PAPER AWARD HONORABLE MENTION

Phung N. Su
University of California, Berkeley
"Marrying into Overseas Labor Markets, Laboring into Local Marriageability: Gendered Migration Strategies in Global Vietnam,"

THANKS TO OUR AWARD COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Outstanding book award
Ching Kwan Lee (Chair)
Elizabeth Bertstein
Beth Williford
Alycia Wright

Graduate student paper
award

Martin Jacinto (Chair)
O Grace Ngulle

SSSP GLOBAL SUBMISSIONS

Latinos, Health Disparities, and COVID-19*

Authors: Ernesto Castaneda, Abby Ferdinando, Carina Cione, Jhmaiel Prince, Deziree Jackson, Emma Vetter, and Sarah McCarthy

The coronavirus pandemic has been racialized since its emergence in the United States, with some news outlets referring to it as the “Chinese virus”. Media attention has primarily focused on emergent health disparities in both rates of infection and mortality. While the conversation on racial inequities has focus on [African Americans](#), the impact of COVID-19 on Latin people has received less attention.

We believe that the increased exposure of minorities and the racial disparities regarding COVID-19 mortality rates are due to the disproportionate rates of minorities working in essential positions and because they have preexisting medical conditions.

Discussion about health disparities is important, but it runs the risk of further racializing the impacts of the current public health rises. How to measure and discuss racial disparities in public health has been debated for some time. Accurate data on racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 are vital, but there is also a need to contextualize cautionary information from public health authorities about which populations are the most vulnerable.

We must be cautious because race is often used as a justification for unequal outcomes. Uncontextualized claims about racial health disparities can be misinterpreted as evidence of genetic differences among categorical groups. As Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, Director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, explains people hearing of these differences can unfairly [blame](#) minorities. Dr. Kendi poses the question: why are black Americans to blame for their increased exposure to the virus and their higher death rates when inequalities such as racism, exploitation, and lack of resources all contribute to their health disparities? We need to account for all the factors that lead to health disparities instead of assigning blame to vulnerable and excluded groups.

In New York, the [Bureau of Communicable Disease Surveillance System](#) reported that as of April 16, 92.3 of every 100,000 deaths occur among Blacks, and 74.3 of every 100,000 deaths are among Latinos. In comparison, the White and Asian death rates are 45.2 and 34.5 per 100,000 people, respectively. These numbers are understood to be low estimates since this data only covers an estimated 88% of lab-confirmed cases, effectively leaving out asymptomatic and non-lab confirmed cases.

Coronavirus Deaths per 100,000 People by Race/Ethnicity in New York City

Black	Hispanic	White	Asian	Total Deaths
92.3	74.3	45.2	34.5	24.63

Source: Bureau of Communicable Disease Surveillance System, 2020

For hundreds of years, institutions have maintained racial hierarchies that are responsible for the vast majority of health disparities in the United States. Therefore, it is possible that Black and Latin communities are exposed to the virus more often as a result of institutionalized racism that places less value on minority lives. Perhaps they contracted the virus before other racial groups and experienced its impacts in its incipient stage.

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*Article has been summarized for the purpose of this publication. Please click [here](#) to read article in its entirety.

Initially, some believed that [African Americans](#) and the [white and “patriotic”](#) were immune to the coronavirus. While neither of these ideas ring true, Blacks and Hispanics appear more susceptible to the virus, as indicated in the table above. Why is this? One reason is because communities of color face many structural inequalities, racism, poverty, residential segregation, and access to quality health care that affect the propensity to infection. This, alongside the United States’ history of inadequately addressing the needs of underserved communities during times of crisis, we can expect that communities of color will have an especially difficult time recovering from this pandemic.

Several parts of the U.S., such as counties in [Illinois](#) and [Virginia](#), are reporting that COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting Latin communities. This represents a significant issue that has so far been excluded from the larger conversation. Notably, the Latin community is an integral part of the labor force. In 2018, 17% of the national labor force was comprised of documented Latin workers; this doesn’t include the 5% Latin American undocumented workforce. Furthermore, the CDC reports that in 2020, at least 25% of the Latin population in the U.S. is employed within the service industry, including hospitality, transportation/travel, delivery, food, healthcare, and education services. Many of these sectors require continued work throughout the public health crisis and put workers at increased risk of exposure to the coronavirus.

We [analyzed](#) health disparities among Hispanics in El Paso, Texas and found that Latin People, accounting for roughly 83% of the population, have comorbidities that make them more vulnerable to complications from COVID-19, as indicated in the figure below. Additionally, there are high poverty levels and low levels of healthcare coverage for Latin people in El Paso.

Disease Prevalence among Hispanics in El Paso, TX in 2010-11

Cancer	High Blood Pressure	High Cholesterol	Asthma	Diabetes	Severe Obesity	Heart Attack / Stroke	Kidney Disease	Hepatitis or Cirrhosis	Emphysema	Tuberculosis	HIV
16.8%	16.1%	13%	7.4%	7.3%	3.4%	2.6%	2.3%	2.2%	1.3%	0.2%	<0.1%

Source: Original data

Structural factors, underlying medical conditions, and increased exposure to COVID-19 disproportionately put Black and Latin people in precarious positions during times of “normalcy” and more so during the pandemic. Universal policies can work to reduce health disparities during the next pandemic. By increasing labor protections, recognizing the undocumented as people, and reducing the costs of healthcare, we can help the working, and middle class increase their income. That would not only improve their health and reduce health disparities but also increase community health, making us all more resilient. For these reasons, we must build more equitable and sustainable economic and health systems while acknowledging our interconnectedness.

COVID Has a Strong Neo-Liberal Bias

Author: Howard Lune, Hunter College, CUNY

In the years following the Irish potato famine, Irish nationalist John Mitchel wrote that “the Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine.” Whether a threat becomes a crisis or a catastrophe has more to do with how we respond to it than the underlying cause.

I do not know what caused the development or mutation of COVID-19, but much of the blame for the pandemic belongs to neoliberalism. It is not the rapid mobility of people from everywhere to everywhere that makes the most difference. It is health-related policies and their subservience to economic interests that have defined and continue to define the condition of the world under the COVID threat.

In the United States, arguably the world center of neoliberalism, we live by a number of myths. We refer to the root of our interests at home and around the globe as “democracy” when we actually mean “capitalism.” And, from that, we treat reports of a strong economy as if they meant a strong democracy and civil society, though the opposite is usually true. The more we hold wages down, for example, the higher corporate profits go and with it the DOW industrial average, and with that our claims to be doing well even as the majority of Americans have negative wealth. And from all of this comes the widespread demand that we “reopen” the economy despite the medical advice of everyone involved in pandemic control. Even so, this is just a predictable symptom of a nation ruled by neoliberal assumptions. To understand how we got here, we need to unpack a larger myth.

People in the U.S. enjoy binaries. We have two political parties (that have any influence) and we often refer to people being on one side of the aisle or the other. We hear every day about how divided we are as a nation, with the terms liberal vs conservative, democrat vs republican, and right vs left regularly used as though those contrasts all mean the same thing and cover every case worth mentioning. We teach that “there are two sides to every story” even though there are rarely fewer than 6-10 versions of any event or debate. And so, we regularly frame issues as government on one side and the people on the other. This helps explain why so many Americans think that voting for candidates with no experience at all is the best politics, and why billionaires tar each other with the epithet “elitist” for their involvement with any previous policy processes. If they don’t work for government then they can claim to be “of the people.” This false binary allows that government is the enemy of the people and the less governance is possible the more free people will be. Of course, when they talk of less governance and freedom, few commentators intend to include reductions in policing, punishments, or mechanisms of social control, nor any weakening of military spending, tech investments, or corporate tax subsidies. Mostly it comes down to dismantling the remaining social welfare safety nets and deregulating corporations. That is to say, neoliberalism.

And this is where the binaries really hurt us. If we could divide the social-political-economic world into three sectors – public interest (including government), private corporations, and individuals – then it would become perfectly visible that by drowning our own governance capacity we are turning most of our leadership authority over to the for-profit corporate sector. People demand an end to government oversight and vote instead for corporate control of our private lives. Health care becomes the health insurance options offered by your employer. Freedom is consumer choice. Tyranny is anything that keeps you from going shopping. Libraries are socialism.

The natural and predicted end-point of this deluge of disinformation is that office holders from the President on down can brag to consumers (voters) that they have fired the experts (elitists), disbanded the advisory and oversight panels including the White House Global Health Security and Biodefense unit, and defunded the scientists who are “interfering” with our economy. The absolute dedication to having no plan, no resources, and no one in charge is offered as a selling point.

One might imagine that in the absence of an actual crisis, crisis preparedness could seem like an abstraction at least or an extravagance at worst. The nature of abstract ideas and positive asymmetry in our thinking would be enough to explain that. But in order to understand the seemingly increasing popularity of the call to lift health restrictions in the midst of a crisis from which 100,000 Americans have already died, we need a greater context. That context is a government that is anti-government. Forty years of free-market propaganda has left us unprepared to think about preparation, unwilling to plan, and against the very idea of social responsibility.

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We often warn our students against explanations that rely on the “over-socialization” of people. We are not “cultural dupes” swayed as a mass by whatever idea has recently entered the public discourse. Yet, on occasion, we are. By selling the American people a series of false promises about economic freedom we have sold ourselves short. Or sold out. At any rate, a lot more people are going to die and millions of the survivors are going to elect to do more of the same.

Protecting Disability Rights and Supporting People with Disabilities during COVID-19

Author: Bradley W Williams, George Mason University

The Coronavirus has revealed the limits of disability rights in America. While the CDC advises disabled Americans to take greater precautions during the pandemic, people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in numerous ways that make staying safer more difficult than ever.

One problem is economic inequality. Disabled Americans experience higher rates of unemployment, lower wages for working individuals. In 2019, The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that only about 19.3 percent of disabled Americans were employed and that 32 percent of workers with a disability were employed part time, compared with 17 percent for those with no disability. ¹ Disabled Americans also face discrimination in the healthcare system due to the perception that their disability makes them too costly to treat even under normal circumstances. Under supplied themselves, hospitals and healthcare providers are turning away disabled Americans to keep up with the demands of the nation. On April 4, 2020, Author and disability rights activist Alice Wong stated in an interview with Vox:

disability rights groups have filed complaints that some states, such as Alabama and Washington, are making triage recommendations that discriminate against people with disabilities. While the federal health department’s Office of Civil Rights released a bulletin on non-discrimination during the pandemic, I’m still worried. ²

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates existing economic inequalities and health disparities affecting people with disabilities. The government is largely responsible for leading hospitals and the healthcare industry to discriminate against people with disabilities by applying a utilitarian and cost-based rather than rights-based standard for healthcare, housing, and employment. This utilitarian logic has been used to discriminate against people with disabilities before the pandemic, as this is an element of austerity policies that were set years, if not decades, before the pandemic emerged.

A comprehensive long-term solution to the problem of is progressing the CRPD agenda locally by integrating civil rights with elements of CRPD. The normative and legal complex of international human rights and national civil rights establish baseline protections for people with disabilities against government-led disenfranchisement not just during the COVID-19 pandemic and future pandemics, but always. By treating rights as the norm rather than an element of crisis mitigation, CRPD provides guidelines states must follow to fully support the rights of people with disabilities, much, if not all of the precedent for which is already stated in U.S. civil rights laws.

Another problem is lack of clear information. Like all Americans, disabled Americans must also navigate conflicting information about the effects of COVID-19. The International Disability Alliance notes that “Persons with disabilities are unable to access vital information about COVID-19 on equal basis with others. Daily briefings by World health Organization, and the United Nations (such as those delivered by the Secretary-General) are not accessible. International sign interpretation, closed captioning, written or audio description of graphs and videos, and documentation in plain language (easy-to-read) are not included in the daily briefings by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations.” ³

People with disabilities and the general public may obtain information about how to protect themselves during the pandemic through national and international news, activist networks, and some government agencies. While the U.S. Attorney General and other officials have state guidelines for treating people with disabilities with due deference during the pandemic, the response and statements by the federal government including the White House undermine this message with confusing counter-framing of the pandemic and its consequences.

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The most helpful information comes from state and national disability rights organizations contextualizing the CDC's recommendations specifically for people with disabilities. This makes the most use out of the CDC's recommendations as the government and CDC merely highlight highly vulnerable populations. Disability rights organizations speak directly to people with disabilities, orient new information about COVID-19 to continuing issues with disability rights, and provide access to networks of support. As avid defenders of disability rights and mediators between the government response to COVID-19 and citizens, disability rights organizations attempt to supplement the government's utilitarian national response by emphasizing the effect on disability rights and present accessible solutions for organizations and informal networks of disabled people. Information sharing and advocacy also comes from key international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, which has been monitoring the global impact of the pandemic.

Disability rights organizations mitigate the crisis affects and lack of government response by recontextualizing information about COVID-19 to provide clear answers to disabled Americans and providing access to rapid response support services. Information is presented on local disability rights organizations' websites. Organizations provide services including hotlines for one on one information sharing, advice for dealing with the pandemic, and directions to networked (those already within the national and local disability rights networks) and non-networked institutions such as the CDC.

While a long-term solution to incomplete and inaccurate or conflicting information is still forthcoming, disability rights organizations are creating lasting networks of support that will exist long after the pandemics.

Sources:

1. International Disability Alliance. <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/accessibility-campaign>
2. Interview with Alice Wong. <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/4/4/21204261/coronavirus-covid-19-disabled-people-disabilities-triage>
3. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics – 2019." <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>.

Pandemics, Protests and Politics of Solidarity

Author: George Ygarza, University of California UC Irvine

Pandemics are political. From where they manifest to their geographies, to their impact and response, the speed and spread of viruses is contingent upon set politics of order. The virus has exacerbated social disparities, not only in terms of health but in the ways that different governments have responded to the virus. New controls on movement and sophisticated policing has had the most significant impacts on the historically vulnerable communities of different states. Precarious peoples, the displaced, minorities, informal workers and houseless peoples specifically have maintained their susceptible position if not been pushed into further despair with the new measures that have been put in place. Under the pretext of containing the spread and flattening the curve, the lives of the aforementioned groups have been further criminalized. Many governments exploited the crisis in two major ways: developing new cultures of security and determining the essential elements of the economy. The emergent post-pandemic security culture is one defined by emergency decree, the remaking of permissible spaces and the articulation of new parameters in civil society. These new security cultures have expanded the use of new technologies, surveillance techniques, and detention among other ways of curtailing movement. While some measure of social control was initially seen as necessary in order to subdue the spread of the virus, the absence of localized efforts and attention to the special positions of people fueled resentment. Moratoriums on civil liberties and habeas corpus across the globe in particular were seen as overextending the reach of government. Covid-19 has enabled a permanent state of crisis that is much less interested in containing infections than it is with cementing precarity and austerity. In this period, the economy has been redefined itself, particularly in the US.

The most significant shift in narrative has not been the austerity measures themselves but in obscuring the epoch in which they were implemented. Prior to the rise of the novel coronavirus, 2019 culminated in worldwide protests against austerity measures. In Latin America, as well as other parts of the globe, including Lebanon, Haiti, and others, late 2019 played witness to anti-austerity uprisings not seen in at least a generation. Most of these protests, while initially triggered by neoliberal reforms, were a manifestation of systemic inequality and exploitation. In Lebanon, protests started over a tax on internet services that unified the notoriously sectarian state; in Ecuador, an increase in gas prices kicked off large mobilizations led by the country's indigenous communities; in Chile, seemingly innocuous fare hikes brought out the underlying class struggles permeating in civil society for the last 30 years. Before the universal slogans of solidarity against the pandemic spread across the world, protests against neoliberal cultures were unifying people all over. The failed responses to the crisis merely reaffirmed what people had already understood: crisis can not be mitigated by those in power protecting the very institutions that put that there. Experiencing new security cultures and inaction, communities turned inward, leaving behind their pleas to the state and turning to one another for support. Whether it is communal kitchens in the outskirts of Lima, Peru, or ride shares and housing networks in Calcutta, India, the popular responses to the pandemic have shown the shortcomings of state security while providing other alternatives.

Indian writer and scholar, Arundhati Roy deploys the vivid imagery of the portal to think about pandemics. Throughout history, pandemics have led societies through transformative changes; Justinian's Plague in the 8th century led to the dissolution of the Roman Empire, Europe's provincialization and the rise of the moorish empire, Al-Andalus; the Black plaque preceded the age of conquest and western modernity. Today, Covid-19 provides another portal. Coinciding with the new decade, traversing the covid-19 portal, beyond the current crisis, lie autonomous futures, self-reliant communities, and other possibilities. Global resistance movements are learning from this crisis and creating other futures. Forced into isolation, many spaces of resistance have quarantined their movements, incubating resistance in autonomy. Moving outside of civil society, rebellion has shifted to thinking alternatives more so than resistance. The pandemic has exposed the state for what it is: an inadequate apparatus for the sole protection of capital at the expense of its most vulnerable population.

Following folks like Arunhdhati Roy through this new portal, global movements will emerge more resilient, robust, and transformative in the coming years. If autonomy is not the ultimate goal, the possibilities seen in the emergency decree will look to be cemented as permanent realities. The movements of 2019 were not left behind, on the contrary they are being carried forward by critical social imaginaries. The struggle under the pandemic is over permanence: the permanence of a security state or the permanence of another world, one grounded in mutual aid, social care, and support. The global uprisings sparked by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis brought together the issues of anti-black racism and austerity. The vandalization of colonial statues, occupations and the proliferation of autonomous enclosures in the west are a reflection of a prospective epistemic turn. That protests continue, at times emboldened, during a global pandemic speaks to their transformative impulse. In the global north, the consolidation and rise of what Tariq Ali refers to as the extreme center, looks to incorporate critiques of the state into its multicultural project. Particularly in the United States, the systemic erasure of class consciousness has made the #blacklivesmatter movement susceptible to co-optation, commercialization and dilution. In other parts of the global south, BLM has come to empower historically silenced voices specifically in places like Latin America. At the same time, underlying colonialities have surfaced with the confluence of racial and economic politics. Above all, it is these conjunctural factors which seem to be the most significant in the coming months and years. The autonomous turn is being stymied by the discourse of multiculturalism in the west, while emergency decrees have only fueled protests in the global south for the time being. A new epoch beckons. Breaking from previous ones, the formative struggles leave behind ideology to focus on new imaginaries and possibilities. Global movements continue to dream even as the nightmare that is Covid-19 remains.

2020 GLOBAL DIVISION SESSIONS

The following message regarding the SSSP 2020 annual meeting was taken directly from the SSSP website:

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 SSSP Annual Meeting in San Francisco has been cancelled. Our primary concern is the health and safety of our members. We appreciate the feedback and support that we have received from several members and our Board of Directors.

We sincerely appreciate the hard work and dedication of our Program Committee, under the leadership of Co-chairs Tsedale M. Melaku and Barbara Katz Rothman; our Division Chairs; our session organizers; and the Administrative Office staff. They have worked tirelessly to plan the program schedule. Meanwhile, the Board has been meeting regularly via Zoom during this difficult period to ensure the safety of our members.

[Read the full letter from the SSSP President and Executive Officer.](#)