

# SECTORS

Newsletter of the American Sociological Association's Sociology of Development Section

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# Message from the Chair

**Brian Dill**

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign



Dear Colleagues,

It has been a disorienting year for those of us committed to the study of development. In the span of nine months, USAID has been hollowed out, and with it much of what passed for American “leadership” in the field. Federal priorities have turned inward, cloaked in the rhetoric of “security” and “growth” even as they dismantle global commitments. What we are witnessing is not just institutional retrenchment, but a reckoning with the long-standing assumption that development could—or should—be imagined from Washington.

For those of us engaged in the sociology of development, this moment brings both uncertainty and opportunity. The questions we have long asked—about power, inequality, and transformation—are now central to reimagining what development might mean as its familiar scaffolding comes undone. This means taking local histories and institutions on their own terms, reckoning with the harms already done, and exploring how repair and care might complement critique. If the old project was about exporting blueprints, perhaps the next one is about cultivating the grounds for many futures.

Two initiatives speak directly to this moment.

First, our past chair Monica Prasad has organized The Future of Foreign Aid Speaker Series, hosted by the Center on Global Poverty at Johns Hopkins (details [here](#)). This ongoing series

brings together scholars and practitioners to reflect on where the aid agenda goes from here—a timely conversation that bridges intellectual debate and policy relevance.

Second, our section’s upcoming mini-conference, [Rethinking Development in a Post-Western World](#) (February 13–15, 2026, Princeton University) invites scholars from across the field to consider how development is being reshaped amid shifting global power and the retreat of Western institutions. This is a moment that calls for rethinking—not only the geographies of development but the terms on which it is pursued. We hope you will join us in Princeton to share ideas, reconnect with colleagues, and help chart the future of our field.

I encourage you to join these conversations; together they highlight both the rupture of the present and the possibilities that follow.

Finally, I want to thank the many members who keep this section vibrant—those serving on Council, organizing panels, chairing committees, mentoring students, and supporting one another’s work. A core strength of our section has always been its people, and your efforts make it possible for us to keep building—even when the ground beneath us shifts.

Warm regards,  
Brian Dill

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### Essay Prompt

## U.S. Foreign Aid in Crisis: Causes, Consequences, and the Road Ahead

Before President Trump's executive order pausing all U.S. foreign development assistance on Jan 20 and the subsequent gutting of USAID a week later, it is likely that the existence and activities of USAID were not on most Americans' radar. After several weeks populating headlines in mainstream media outlets, that is no longer the case. The merits and demerits of foreign aid, its humanitarian and instrumental purposes, the way "soft power" is wielded by the US around the world were once discussed in relatively small academic and policy spaces. Currently – and probably temporarily – these topics have a larger audience.

The effects of this foreign aid overhaul have been far reaching. Thousands of USAID employees have been dismissed. Countless programs at

nonprofits, research institutes, and philanthropic organizations that rely on federal funding are under threat. Millions of dollars' worth of food, purchased for international aid, sits in warehouses, while the farmers who supply it face a sharp decline in demand. Long-standing health and nutrition programs that have made hard-won progress are already losing ground.

We invite essays to reflect on the changing landscape of U.S. foreign aid - its causes and its implications. Are these shifts the whim of one man or do they reflect deeper political and social currents? What do the events of the last few weeks mean for how "development" is practiced? What impact could they have on the field of international development?

### Rebuilding From Refusal: Feminist Futures After Collapse

Sarai Richter, Arizona State University

Chandy Eng, [Gender and Development for Cambodia](#)

The fallout was swift when Trump issued the executive order halting U.S. foreign aid on January 20th and gutted USAID a week later. Food aid piled in warehouses. NGOs laid off staff in masse. Clinics shut down across the global South. Suddenly, foreign aid wasn't just a policy issue—it was front-page news. But for many grassroots feminist NGOs, this wasn't shocking. It was a public revelation of what they already knew: U.S. aid is soft power, not solidarity. It has always reinforced geopolitical influence more than meeting local needs (Sassen, 2006).

I began working with Khmer feminist organizations during Trump's first term, just as he reinstated the Global Gag Rule, blocking funding to any organization that mentioned abortion. In Cambodia, where abortion is legal and culturally accepted, this move was devastating. Outreach froze. Reproductive justice initiatives crumbled. But a new clarity emerged. These NGOs began to question what had always lingered under the surface: that accepting U.S. aid often meant aligning with a neocolonial state willing to trade womxn's lives for political leverage (Mohanty, 2003). They began asking: What does this money cost? Whose values does it protect? What does it mean to build outside an empire's budget cycle? How do we unravel the depoliticization of the NGO-ization of feminism?

### **Feminist Refusal and Reconstruction**

Over the last decade, Khmer feminist organizations have done something radical: they began decoupling from U.S. aid. It was a quiet, deliberate process. They sought European grants, feminist philanthropy, and transnational collectives that respected local knowledge and collective care over institutional prestige.

This mirrors Simpson's (2014) idea of "refusal"—not retreat, but a political act. Refusing USAID wasn't just rejecting funds—it was reclaiming the right to define priorities. These feminists rejected the nonprofit industrial complex, which INCITE! (2007) and Roy (2004) argue coopts radical movements absorbing radical energy to maintain the status quo.

Khmer organizations saw how donor reports and "capacity building" diluted their visions. As Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us, "decolonization is not a metaphor." These groups weren't scaling back to survive, they were reimagining everything. They replaced "empowerment" with collective organizing and built infrastructure rooted in community rather than colonial logic.

This made them outliers. Male-led NGOs mocked them for "leaving money on the table," calling their care ethic naïve. However, these critics ignored history. While others scrambled to please funders, these feminists read the signs—and prepared for collapse. When Trump's cuts hit, one group had already reduced its USAID reliance to just 10%. What once looked foolish became survival. Heynen (2010) describes this as "insurgent planning": creating systems of care and governance outside dominant structures. These Khmer feminists didn't just survive, they did so with their politics intact.

### **Beyond Collapse: Rethinking "Development"**

The USAID implosion left many in crisis but also created space for reflection. If a president can erase aid with a pen, what kind of stability was it ever? The volatility is structural. Sassen (2006) argues that global institutions often extend state power through flexible transnational tools. USAID is not neutral—it's strategy.

This is not a crisis to fix but a chance to ask: What could "development" look like when not dictated by the global north? What if aid recipients were seen not as beneficiaries but organizers and strategists? Mohanty (2003) writes that transnational feminism centers solidarity, not saviorism. Building upon this, Keahey (2023) calls for "emancipatory praxis," development defined by horizontal relationships, contextual knowledge, and collective liberation.

These Khmer feminists are living that shift. They redefined sustainability not as financial growth but as political alignment and mutual care. Their work offers a roadmap for others. Insurgent care practices aren't responses to crisis, they are resistance to capitalism, white supremacy, and state abandonment (Heynen, 2010). These women weren't bracing for collapse. They were practicing what it means to be in relationship when institutions fail.

### **Insurgent Futures**

This is a moment of collapse—and possibility. The end of USAID isn't a failure of development; it's a failure of empire. For too long, aid has masked extractive relationships, letting the global north script the future of the global South under the guise of generosity. Nevertheless, some have seen the strings, and they're cutting them, one by one.

Their example invites us to redefine "development" through transnational feminism (Keahey, 2023) by building relationships based on trust, not transaction, by shifting the centering from donor capital to grassroots organizing, metrics to mutuality, compliance to care.

"Another world is not only possible," Roy (2004) writes. "She is on her way." The question is whether we're brave enough to let go of systems to follow those already building what comes next.

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## Book Spotlight

### **Markets with Bureaucratic Characteristics**

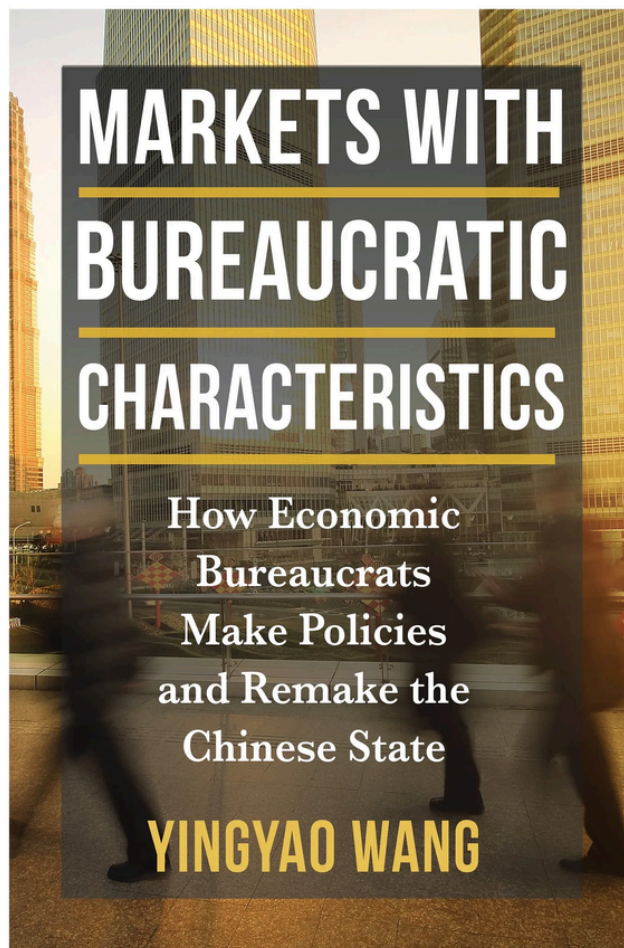
**How Economic Bureaucrats  
Make Policies and Remake the  
Chinese State**

**Yingyao Wang**

Associate Professor of Sociology  
at the University of Virginia

Columbia University Press 2024

Winner of ASA Sociology of  
Development section 2025 book  
award



## Interview with Yingyao Wang

To begin, could you briefly share your intellectual journey? What initially sparked your interest in the sociology of development, and how did you come to focus specifically on the role of state bureaucracy in economic development?

Thank you for having me. I was trained as a historical-comparative and economic sociologist in graduate school. The theories and analytical tools I learned from these subfields—such as those related to state formation and building, the embeddedness of economic decisions in society, and the social construction of markets—were both applied to and challenged by China's breathtaking development since the early 1980s. Having witnessed the scale of change as I grew up, the question of development has always been on my mind.

In the sociology of development, theories of development and explanations of developmental outcomes are deeply intertwined and mutually generative. That has always struck me as core—and somewhat unique—to this field. My postdoctoral years at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University exposed me to experts on various developing regions, allowing me to frame China's problems and promises—distinctive in size and history—as comparable to those of other developing nations.

Around the same time at ASA, there was an exciting cross-fertilization between development sociology and other sections. It drew both established and younger scholars who were thinking and rethinking the implications of their research to development. The sociology of development section became a “cool” section at ASA, providing an energizing and cohesive space, especially as other subfields appeared to grow increasingly fragmented.

Teaching has also been instrumental in shaping my intellectual identity. I teach sociology of development at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in my department, and I now feel perfectly content—and flattered—to be characterized as a scholar of development sociology. It goes without saying that the Chinese state has played an outsized role in economic development. Surprisingly, however, scholarly attention to the central bureaucracy has been scarce. This is a major omission because economic policies and strategies are formulated in the central bureaucracy by seemingly faceless technocrats and bureaucrats who operate behind seemingly a wall of neutrality and depoliticization.



While the developmental state literature provides motivation for studying the bureaucratic state, its treatment of state cohesion as a given is analytically unsatisfying. My research shows that the bureaucratic state can be incoherent and developmental at the same time.

In your award-winning monograph, *Markets with Bureaucratic Characteristics*, a central concept is “policy paradigms.” Could you explain this concept further? What are your key findings regarding how China's economic policy paradigms have evolved since the end of the planned economy era in 1978?

Policy paradigms are overarching frameworks, principles, and ideas used to define economic realities and characterize economic problems. They do not merely influence incremental outcomes or determine what policy tools are used—they shape how the economy is seen and understood. New paradigms redefine what counts as economic success and competitiveness, determine who gets to make economic policy, and establish what kinds of expertise are considered authoritative.

I argue that China's economic reform was not merely gradualist, incremental, or experimental, as the popular metaphor “crossing the river by feeling for the stones” suggests. Instead, China's reform has been pragmatic and strategic, marked by the rise and contestation of multiple policy paradigms that have defined its approach to development. A key contribution of the book is to identify these paradigms and to show the social and political forces—within and outside the state—that drove their emergence, transformation, and competition.

Your research underscores the significant role Chinese bureaucratic groups play in creating and guiding economic policy paradigms. You argue that China's economic policies are not simply dictated by capitalist drives, political structures, authoritarian leadership, or globalization tendency. Instead, bureaucratic competition for career advancement endogenously shapes the pace and direction of China's economic development. Could you elaborate more on how this mechanism operates? How does it interact with other structural factors?

Partly due to its political system, the Chinese state enjoys unrivaled authority over society, including private business, labor, and rural sectors. It is also staffed by career bureaucrats who are invested not only in the organizations they serve but also in their careers as a whole. These conditions give bureaucrats a powerful role in policymaking—and when they make policies, they often tie their policy products to their career prospects. In other words, they are motivated to craft policies in ways that will enhance their long-term career advancement. The most entrepreneurial way to do so, as many of my protagonists demonstrate, is to define problems in ways that only they are equipped—by the right kind of expertise, tools, and career experiences—to solve.

I argue in the book that policy authority—the recognized ability to speak authoritatively about a policy issue—is an underexplored dimension of Chinese politics. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on corruption or elite power struggles, but bureaucrats' authority to define and interpret policy problems is equally consequential. This agency-based perspective does not deny the importance of economic, political, or global forces, but it shows that these forces are filtered through the lens of bureaucrats to be registered. Bureaucrats decide which global ideas are relevant, which economic challenges count as crises, and which political tensions are actionable. And they often made sense of the reality in collective terms, teaming up with bureaucrats who shared career experiences to make collective bidding for authority and organizational resources. Over time, the collective expression of career ambition scale up into policy entrepreneurship, and when successful, coalesce into full-fledged policy paradigms that affect many other policy domains and shape national development trajectories.

Today, the world faces increasing turbulence marked by deglobalization, climate change, and technological disruptions such as artificial intelligence. Has China begun developing new economic paradigms to address these contemporary challenges and seek new

opportunities? From your perspective, what are the critical questions or directions researchers should focus on to better understand China's future development trajectory?

Many paradigms developed in past decades continue to shape China's development today. The state has not reverted to decentralization but instead intensified its centralization—fiscally, administratively, and politically. Centralization enables coordination during large-scale or interconnected crises, yet it may also stifle local creativity. Geopolitical and technological competition has reinforced China's long-standing techno-industrial policy paradigm, which first emerged in the mid-2000s. What is novel in recent years is that the financialization paradigm, once perceived to have crowded out manufacturing, is now converging with the industrial paradigm. Financial tools of investment and risk-taking/sharing are being liberally employed by the Chinese state to leverage both public and private investment in manufacturing, most visibly through the massive use of *industrial guidance funds*.

What has not changed, as far as the book's approach to future researchers is concerned, is the explanatory power of career patterns in accounting for policy outcomes in China. Individual bureaucrats may bend under political pressure or bide their time, leaving their ideas unexpressed when the political winds blow in another direction. Yet their career patterns still contain considerable information about their experiences, exposure, social networks, and political identities. Even when familiar career grids appear scrambled under a new administration, the emergence of rewired career patterns and new sequences at the margins continues to provide formative grounds for collective action and coalition building, as well as indications of new sites of learning and interest formation.

Finally, as China becomes more globally involved, it is worth watching the globalization of the Chinese bureaucratic state itself. By keeping the Chinese state homegrown, with a persistent distrust of parachuting officials from outside, China maintains a premium on the extent to which it can draw on internal expertise to govern. In other words, China's global policy will continue to have an endogenous, bureaucratic origin. The question then becomes which parts of the Chinese state it will draw its career bureaucrats from to negotiate trade deals, manage overseas investments, interact with international organizations, or oversee its expanding area studies programs—a question that promises to be immensely interesting for research.

Your theoretical framework differs notably from institutionalist and structuralist bureaucracy theories by emphasizing the agency of bureaucrats. What broader implications does this perspective have for development studies and comparative historical sociology?

States committed to development can be both incoherent and autonomous at the same time. Incoherence can be a source of paralysis, but it can also foster innovation, versatility, adaptation, and competition. One could argue that the size of the Chinese state provides room for multiple paths of interest and ideas to emerge. Many developing states, however, may also be characterized as incoherent and autonomous, especially when certain state agencies rely on their own sources of support and expertise and lack coordination with others. These “islands of excellence” can be potent sources of bureaucratic effectiveness and public trust in government.

Reliance on the state to deliver development, however, has somewhat fallen out of fashion in development practice. This book shows that bureaucracy can be neither a cold, machine-like entity nor completely corrupt and predatory. It can strike a middle road that combines entrepreneurship with public spirit. As states face renewed challenges today, interest among young people in joining public service is also declining. This book raises questions about the social conditions necessary to revive a public commitment to service, including the availability of respectable and emulatable careers, autonomy, prestige and reputation, and a sense of making an impact. These lessons extend beyond Chinese exceptionalism.

The book builds on a young tradition in historical and comparative sociology that theorizes and analyzes the heterogeneity of the state. It draws on institutional, organizational, and network analysis tools to unpack the dynamics and group-making patterns within the state. In this way, it examines “little societies” within the state and even borrows tools from social movement literature—such as framing and entrepreneurship—to analyze what might otherwise be perceived as slow-moving and dull bureaucracy. The book also addresses how state builders imprint the state-building process with their social characteristics, an understudied theme in historical and comparative sociology.

Could you share a bit about your current research projects? What new areas or questions are you planning to explore next?

I have multiple ongoing projects, which can be broadly grouped into two areas of research. The first focuses on the relationship between finance

and corruption. I am interested in exploring the role of finance in enabling modern-day corruption and how financial mechanisms—such as mediation, incorporation, and offshoring—change the concepts and practices of coordination and collusion. The second group of projects relates to the rise of global China. I have long been interested in the social determinants of China’s outward foreign direct investment. Beyond uncovering the processes of transferring goods, skills, and people across borders, I am also interested in understanding how China’s knowledge about other countries is produced and circulated through these processes.

Lastly, what advice would you offer to early-career scholars interested in development studies, particularly those seeking to incorporate sociological insights and epistemological approaches into political-economic analysis?

Development studies is an exciting field that speaks to rapidly changing norms, resource redistributions, and inter-state power dynamics. It is urgent for scholars to recommit to the importance of global development, even when governmental or private support may be unraveling, because the question of development will not disappear simply because existing support networks are in disarray. Intellectually, development is an inclusive field in which tools from other disciplines can be repurposed and applied. In this sense, it is never too late to enter the sociology of development, especially if you find renewed purpose in your research or intend to recast your work in light of real-world urgencies. As sociology more broadly reflects on the assumptions underlying its theories, development studies provide a vantage point—from the experiences of the Global South—to reframe concepts such as progress, dignity, justice, ingenuity, and modernity, thereby enriching sociological theory.

# Dissertation Spotlights

## Shaquilla Harrigan



Shaquilla Harrigan, Ph.D., is currently a Visiting Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania and a Limited-Term Instructor of Sociology at the University of West Georgia. Broadly, her research examines how organizations—NGOs and for-profit corporations—primarily from the global north manufacture African people into globalized workers for the digital economy. Her research goals are to disrupt narratives of Western hegemony and incorporate concepts of coloniality and decoloniality into sociological perspectives. She does this work by integrating multiple research methods, mainly qualitative interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography. Her research agenda has three lines of inquiry: 1) How are African young people being trained for the global digital workforce? 2) How does elastic transnational stratification shape the distribution of decision-making power across international organizations? 3) How do African organizations curate their workers' experiences in response to DEI initiatives? These questions drive her broader aim of understanding how labor markets, institutions, and power relations evolve under globalization and technological transformation.

### Young, Gifted, and African: How Kenyan Young People Navigate Finding Work in the Digital Economy

In recent years, there has been an immense preoccupation with Africa's growing youth population. Despite the many concerns about this high youth population leading to high unemployment and under-employment, governments and tech firms see a large opportunity to absorb this young labor force into the ever-expanding digital economy. Large investments from philanthropic organizations like the Mastercard Foundation are going towards upskilling and training initiatives to prepare young African people for the tech-enabled future of work. However, more research is needed to understand the actual process of training young people. Using Kenya as the site of inquiry, this qualitative three-article dissertation examines interrelated aspects of training Kenyan young people to become Young, Gifted Africans who are prepared to work in the digital economy. The first chapter uses systems thinking to draw a theoretical and empirical bridge between the sociology of organizations and the process whereby training and upskilling organizations produce Young, Gifted, Africans. The second chapter examines how Kenyan young people use digital platforms to present themselves as employable within the global workforce. The third chapter elucidates Kenyan young people's relationship to entrepreneurship and draws distinctions between being an entrepreneur versus being entrepreneurial. This dissertation draws upon in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography to assess the degree to which training and upskilling can really make tech-enabled jobs within the reach of Kenyan young people. This dissertation also provides insights on the stability and durability of an emerging Kenyan middle class. Lastly, this dissertation challenges assumptions that the increasingly digitalized future of work means Africa will be more equitably integrated into the global economy. Digitalization has a lot of potential for good, but truly understanding the needs and desires of African young people is the only way to prevent the reproduction of an extractive relationship between the Global North and Africa.



## Guolin Gu

Guolin Gu is a PhD candidate in sociology at Boston College. Her research focuses on the politics of rural development and climate governance in China. Her master's project on the village politics and livelihood consequences of land expropriation in southwestern China was published in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* and *Journal of Agrarian Change*. For the dissertation, she is tracing the evolution of China's climate policy (and how it became integrated with development policy) over the past two decades using archival documents and interviews. Since beginning her doctoral studies at BC, she has also worked as a research assistant analyzing survey data on global four-day workweek trials.

### The solar industry and a vision for “green growth” in China, 2003-2022

China's position on climate change mitigation shifted dramatically in the early 2010s. As the world's largest emitter since 2007 and the largest emerging economy, China initially resisted capping emissions in defense of its “right to development”. By 2014, however, it had pledged to peak emissions around 2030 through an “energy revolution”, hoping to use this target to force industrial upgrading and a “low-carbon development” pathway. Entering the 2020s, China has become the world's largest manufacturer and deployer of clean energy, such as wind, solar, and electric vehicles. It is also on track to peak emissions early while pledging to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

With strong vested interests in coal, how did an authoritarian, growth-oriented state like China come to embrace decarbonization? How did decarbonization become aligned with and incorporated into the reframed development project of the Chinese state? This project draws from public documents and interviews with key informants, tracing the policy change through a few key episodes between 2003 and 2022, with a focus on the solar industry. I argue that China's green transition was not predetermined by “authoritarian environmentalism”, comparative advantages in mass manufacturing, or developmentalist ambitions of elite policymakers. Instead, it emerged through the dynamic bargaining among various central bureaus concerned about energy security, environmental pollution, and industrial upgrading, as well as local governments advocating on behalf of semi-private industries under their patronage. Specifically, I examine how new ideas of “green growth” travelled and evolved from energy and economic think tanks into national policy and eventually gained traction among local governments. In doing so, this research contributes to theories of policy paradigm shifts, central-local relations in China's political economy, and debates on the tension between economic growth and climate change mitigation in environmental sociology.



## Devin Collins

Devin Collins is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he studies urban governance, homelessness, and extreme inequality in U.S. cities. His work has appeared in *City & Community*, the *Annual Review of Sociology*, and the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*.

### Who (Poverty) Governs?: Homelessness Policymaking in the Bureaucratic Field

Blue cities at the heart of the contemporary knowledge economy have emerged as engines of capital accumulation and as epicenters of widespread, visible homelessness. How do local leaders navigate contradictory demands to promote economic development while managing its attendant social dislocations? Existing sociological scholarship on homelessness tends to center how police officers, medical professionals, and other street-level bureaucrats intervene in the lives of those living unhoused. Yet we know little about the formal decision-making processes that structure institutional responses. As such, gaps remain in our understanding of how new public strategies to address homelessness are produced and enacted, especially in progressive contexts where overt criminalization may be untenable.

My dissertation addresses these gaps by examining how the local state organizes official responses to extreme poverty amid competing imperatives, intense public scrutiny, and fiscal austerity. This project traces the emergence and implementation of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority, a novel agency charged with ending homelessness in Seattle and King County, Washington. Drawing on hundreds of hours of public meeting recordings and thirty-five in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, I situate homelessness policymaking within a fragmented space of struggle, where elected officials, civil servants, business coalitions, service providers, and advocates vie for authority and problem definition in ways that carry important downstream consequences for resource allocation and street-level enforcement.

In the face of conflicting pressures to alleviate homelessness and maintain a business-friendly environment, I find state agents gravitating toward symbolically bold but materially constrained reforms that function less as solutions to homelessness than as tools to contain the political conflicts it generates. When such efforts falter, cities revert to punitive, short-term responses targeting the most visible symptoms of homelessness rather than its structural drivers. This project offers new insights into how punitive and ineffective responses to extreme urban poverty are reproduced and rationalized, even under the guise of progressive reform.



## Margarita Maria Rodriguez Morales

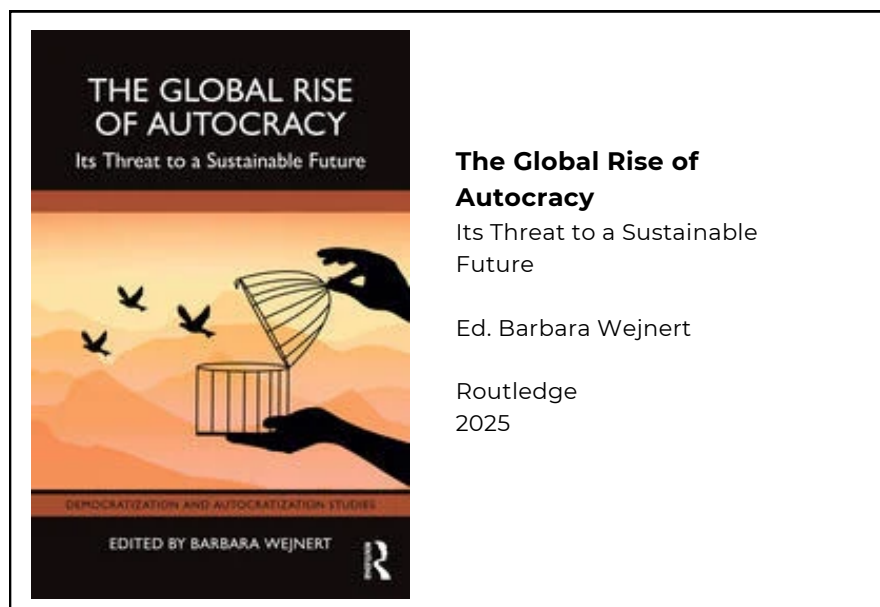
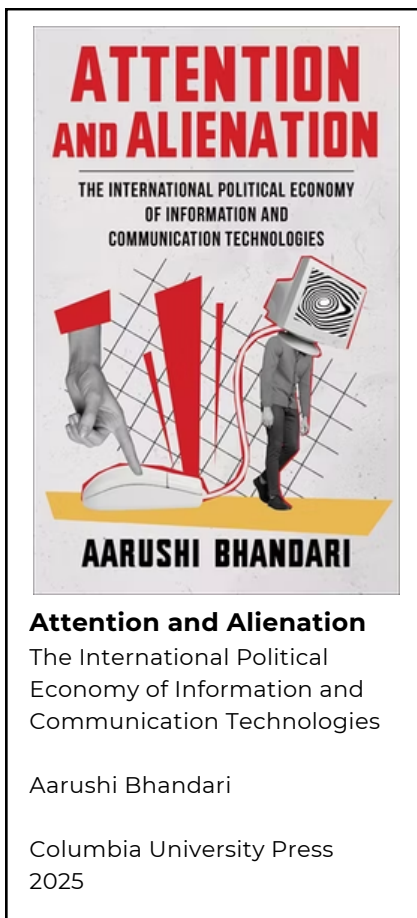
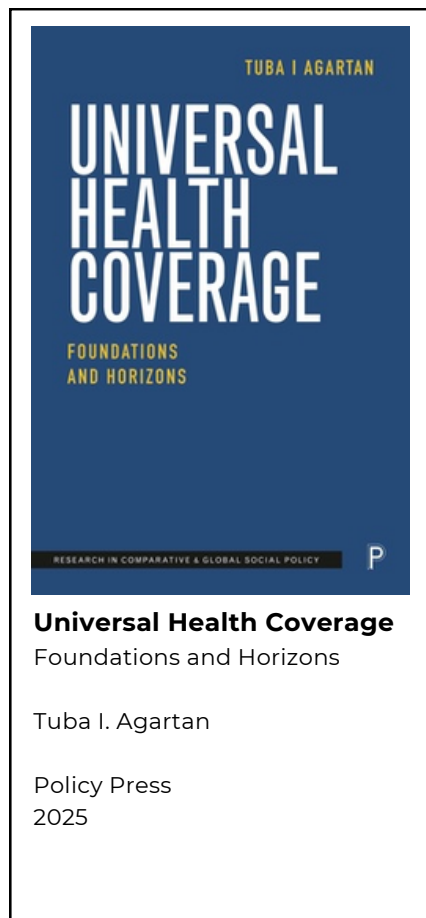
Margarita Rodriguez is a PhD candidate in the Sociology and Public Policy Program at the University of Michigan. She holds a BA in Social Work and an MA in Social Studies of Science, both from Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and an MA in Sociology from the University of Michigan. Her research interests lie at the intersection of Political Sociology and Science and Technology Studies. Through these lenses, she is exploring how Latin American states have incorporated technology in their delivery of social services and how that configures state-society relations. Before graduate school, she worked as a public servant in the national Colombian government.

### The Algorithmic Pandora's Box: Technologies for Poverty Targeting in Colombia

At the core of poverty alleviation policies lies a complex task: defining the profiles of their beneficiaries. Who to prioritize? Which socio-economic variables do we consider when defining beneficiaries, and how do we weigh them? Where to set cut-off points or thresholds? Who is in more need than others? Governments, scholars, and policy experts have extensively worked to refine targeting strategies for poverty governance purposes. In recent decades, they started implementing Algorithmic Scoring Technologies (AST), technological systems designed to automate decision-making processes using households' socioeconomic data to predict poverty. While these actors claim that ASTs improve bureaucratic decision-making and alleviate poverty, a growing number of scholars have demonstrated their flaws. My research employs an ethnographic approach to focus on the Colombian Identification System for Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programs (Sisbén). Through this case, I aim to understand how states' designs of ASTs in social welfare settings materialize in the dynamics of state-making and poverty knowledge-making, while they simultaneously shape how citizens relate to their state. Lying at the intersection of science and technology studies (STS) and political sociology, my project focuses on Sisbén's internal dynamics, not centering on what ASTs produce but how they manage to make it. To achieve this, I will analyze how these institutional structures and procedures operate in specific ways to make the Colombian state a distinct one that responds to its social, political, and cultural contexts. By arguing that ASTs are not pristine artifacts created in a vacuum, but are socially constructed, this study of Sisbén examines the diverse range of social actors involved and the contextual factors to which they respond.

# New and Forthcoming Publications

## Books



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## Articles and Forthcoming Books

Agarwala, Rina and Chris Tilly. 2025. "Experiments in Power-Building: An Intellectual History and Comparative Framework for Informal Workers' Organizing." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*. 66: pp. 691-712. (<https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/COS/current>)

Agarwala, Rina, Chris Tilly, and Aabid Firdausi. 2025. "Explaining informal workers' organizing experiments: A cross-country study of Brazil, China, and India." *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*. Vol 66: pp. 713-733. (<https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/COS/current>)

Agarwala, Rina and Poulami Roychowdhury. 2025. "The Perils and Promises of Unequal Democracy: Insights from the Sociology of India." *Annual Review of Sociology*. Vol. 51  
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# Awards

We are pleased to announce the recipients of the 2025 ASA Sociology of Development section awards.

## Book Award

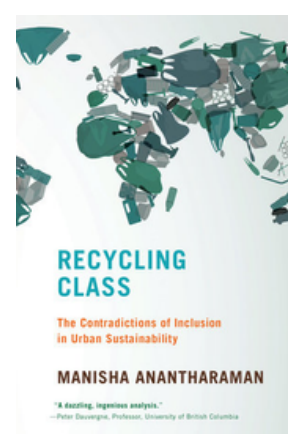
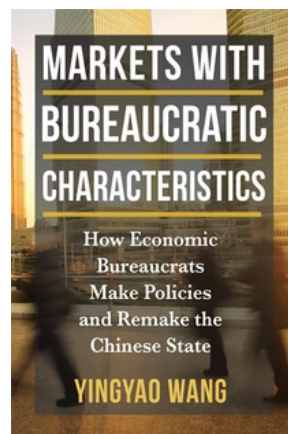
Winner:

Wang, Yingyao. 2024. *Markets with Bureaucratic Characteristics: How Economic Bureaucrats Make Policies and Remake the Chinese State*. Columbia University Press.

Honorable Mentions:

Anantharaman, Manisha. 2023. *Recycling Class: The Contradictions of Inclusion in Urban Sustainability*. The MIT Press.

Bradlow, Benjamin H. 2024. *Urban Power: Democracy and Inequality in São Paulo and Johannesburg*. Princeton University Press.



## Faculty Article Award

Winner:

Pandian, Roshan K. 2024. "The Decline of Global Inequality in the 21st Century: Reconsidering the Industrial Transformation Thesis." *American Journal of Sociology* 129(5):1493–1534. doi:10.1086/729810.

Honorable Mentions:

Bradlow, Benjamin H. 2024. "Urban Social Movements and Local State Capacity." *World Development* 173:106415. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106415.

Cheong, Amanda R. 2023. "Theorizing Omission: State Strategies for Withholding Official Recognition of Personhood." *Sociological Theory* 41(4):377–402. doi:10.1177/07352751231206838.

## Graduate Student Paper Award

Co-Winners:

Blanton, Matthew. "A Legacy of Displacement: Latent Historical Pathways of Guatemalan Migration." Unpublished.

Kalb, Zep. 2024. "Mobilized Resilience and Development under Sanctions in Iran." *Development and Change* 55(5):933–64. doi:10.1111/dech.12859.

# Announcements

## Sociology of Development Conference 2026

February 13-15, 2026

Princeton University, New Jersey

**Apply by Oct 25, 2025**

*Topic:* Rethinking Development in a Post-Western World

The U.S. has enacted sweeping reductions in foreign aid, effectively ending decades of American leadership in global development. Europe, facing internal crises and fiscal austerity due to increased military expenditure, has also scaled back its commitments, deepening the vacuum. At this crossroads, one option is for actors across the Global South to reimagine and propose alternative development frameworks. Another—perhaps the baseline for the former—is to understand the political economies and institutions of the Global South on their own terms. As traditional models recede, the imperative grows to center local contexts, histories, and institutional logics.

The section invites abstracts (max 250 words) for papers for a conference hosted by the American Sociological Association Sociology of Development section. While we hope to reflect upon the current moment of development, we invite contributions from any topic relevant to the Sociology of Development.

To submit an abstract, please fill out the following google form below before 25th of October. You can also fill out the form to act as a discussant/presider or simply join without a role. Acceptance e-mails will be sent by the end of November. If you are coming from overseas and need a visa, we are happy to expedite the process and provide you with a letter of invitation sooner.

[APPLY HERE](#)

Please direct any questions to the organizers (Yunhan & Livio):  
socdevconference@gmail.com

## Invitation to join the Global South Interest Group

The Global South Interest Group (GSIG) is a small group of scholars who are members of the ASA and the Sociology of Development section. GSIG aims to engage with scholars from regions outside the western world to learn about and to understand the current thinking on development issues including climate change, social inequality, human rights, democracy, education, health, and migration. Our goal is to contribute to critical discussions on development as well as to explore the shifting dynamics of global North-global South relations while placing the global South at the center of these discussions. We wish to understand the theoretical frameworks that have emerged and are emerging from the global South and have animated or are animating development discussions. We believe this exchange of ideas enriches the intellectual field of development sociology and development studies in general.

Members of the American Sociological Association who wish to join the Global South Interest Group are requested to send an email to the GSIG Convener Dr. Devparna Roy at [droy9@naz.edu](mailto:droy9@naz.edu).

## Call for Book Proposals: ASA Rose Series in Sociology

The ASA Rose Series in Sociology, a joint publication of the Russell Sage Foundation and the American Sociological Association, invites seasoned scholars to submit proposals for books that offer fresh perspectives on enduring controversies, challenge prevailing paradigms, and provide synthetic analyses of contemporary public issues. The series focuses on critical areas of research, including the Future of Work, Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration, and Social, Political, and Economic Inequality. We also welcome interdisciplinary work that intersects with these themes. Rose Series books are designed to be accessible to both academic and general audiences, ensuring broad impact and relevance across multiple fields.

### Benefits of Publishing with the Rose Series:

- **Quick and Professional Review Process:** Russell Sage compensates expert reviewers to ensure timely and high-quality evaluations of proposals.
- **Seminar with Established Scholars:** Authors are invited to present drafts of their manuscripts to leading experts, strengthening the final product and generating excitement for the forthcoming book.
- **Extensive Marketing Support:** The Rose Editors, Russell Sage Foundation, and ASA collaborate on a comprehensive marketing effort to maximize the visibility and impact of Rose Series books.
- **Author Meets Critic Session at ASA Annual Meeting:** Each year, one new Rose Series book is selected for a special Author Meets Critic panel discussion at the ASA Annual Meeting.
- **Rose Book Speaker Series:** Hosted by the University at Albany Rose Editors, this lecture series offers authors a platform to present their work to diverse audiences and emphasize the policy relevance of their research.

Interested authors are encouraged to submit their proposals. **Proposals are reviewed on a rolling basis.** For more information, please contact us at [roseseries@albany.edu](mailto:roseseries@albany.edu) or reach out to a member of our editorial team: Joanna Dreby ([jdreby@albany.edu](mailto:jdreby@albany.edu)), Aaron Major ([amajor@albany.edu](mailto:amajor@albany.edu)), Katherine Trent ([ktrent@albany.edu](mailto:ktrent@albany.edu)), and Steve Messner ([smessner@albany.edu](mailto:smessner@albany.edu)).

## Globalizing Political Economy: Launching the Global Political Economy Network

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

July 21 – July 23, 2026

With financial support from the World Society Foundation (Zurich, Switzerland) and the Climate & Society Lab at the University of British Columbia (UBC), the newly formed Global Political Economy Network (GPEN) is pleased to announce a conference to be held at UBC, from July 21 to July 23, 2026. The conference theme is Globalizing Political Economy: Launching the Global Political Economy Network, and we invite paper submissions that address this theme from various methodological and theoretical approaches. The goal of this conference is to highlight the Global Political Economy perspective on topics of current interest and study by sociologists and other social scientists.

### What is Global Political Economy?

Political Economy (PE) is the study of interrelationships between the economy and polity. International Political Economy (IPE) shifts the focus to the interrelations between national economies and polities. Global Political Economy (GPE) encompasses both. Like PE, it concerns itself with both economic and political outcomes and assumes these are mutually constitutive and interact in space and time. Like IPE, it frequently shifts its focus to macro-level phenomenon. What makes GPE distinctive is that its unit of analysis is, first and foremost, the global economy and polity as it varies structurally and historically. That is, if citizen's economic and political preferences are functions of their position in an economic system (PE) and if states aggregate these interests (IPE), then historically and structurally varying characteristics of the global economy and polity impact these lower-level processes. Theoretically, GPE scholars are agnostic, or at least heterogeneous, and draw flexibly from theories that originated in industrial transformations in Europe and elsewhere. Methodologically, GPE scholars are committed to the scientific method and draw broadly from both quantitative and qualitative approaches that encompass various units of observation, periods of time, and bases of comparison. Because almost any social phenomenon is shaped at least in part by the global economy and polity, GPE scholars are substantively diverse but converge around common questions regarding such topics as development, inequality, the climate crisis, population health, labor, migration, and governance.

### Conference Topics

We welcome original research on all substantive topics that are examined within a Global Political Economy framework.

### Submissions

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words to the chair of the conference organizing committee ([andrew.jorgenson@ubc.ca](mailto:andrew.jorgenson@ubc.ca)) no later than November 1, 2025. We will send out acceptance email notifications for abstracts by December 15, 2025. Full drafts of papers should be submitted by March 15, 2026. Notification of acceptance of full papers for the conference will be announced via email no later than April 15, 2026.

### Conference Housing

Lodging will be available on campus in walking distance to the conference venue.

### Travel Support

Financial support to help cover travel and lodging costs will be available for presenters, with priority given to earlier career scholars and those traveling internationally. If you would like to be considered for financial support, please indicate this in your email when submitting your abstract.

### Publication Opportunities

The organizers anticipate editing a special issue of the journal *Sociology of Development* and publishing an edited volume with the World Society Foundation consisting of papers from the conference.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Sociology of Development Section of ASA promotes work in sociology on the causes and effects of development. We support work in all geographical regions including the United States, other advanced industrial nations and the Global South. We are open to work of all theoretical orientations and all methodological orientations. Both theoretical and applied work is welcome.

## Section Communication Platforms

**ASA Sociology of Development Page:**

<http://www.asanet.org/sections/development.cfm>

**Sociology of Development Website:**

<http://sociologyofdevelopment.com/>

**Sociology of Development Newsletter:**

Please send all your ideas, feedback, and submissions to [socdevsectors@gmail.com](mailto:socdevsectors@gmail.com).