

Biography and Society



**Biographical research *quo vadis*? New and recurring challenges in the study of life (hi)stories and social change
Budapest, 2024**



**Biography
and Society**

NEWSLETTER/DECEMBER 2023

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to present the second and final issue of the RC 38 Newsletter for 2023. We are excited to share some of the latest news.

In the past few months, we have diligently worked to organize a conference that will bring together all our members and other individuals interested in biographical research before the ISA Forum in 2025. As a result of collaborative efforts between Júlia Vajda and Juli Székely (ELTE University), the RC 38, and the CEU-Democracy Institute in cooperation with the Section for Biographical Research in the German Sociological Association (DGS), the conference title “Biographical research quo vadis? New and recurring challenges in the study of life (hi)stories and social change” has been decided on. It will be held at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, Hungary, from September 4th to September 6th, 2024.

The goal of this conference is to thoroughly examine the theme of social change, actively delving into established areas of interest as well as those beyond its conventional domains of inquiry. Our aim is to cultivate a forum for discussion that spans diverse interests, such as authoritarianism, populism and democracy; changing life stories after political transition; violence, conflict and reconciliation; transformations of labor under the “new spirit of capitalism”, or gender, for example. The overarching interest is to recognize and address contemporary and resurfacing challenges to social analysis from the vantage point of sociological biographical research. In this issue you will find the complete Call for Papers. The deadline for submissions is 1st of March 2024. We look forward to welcoming you in Budapest next year!

During the initial meeting of the new Research Council in October, the ISA Executive Committee revealed that the next ISA Forum is scheduled to take place in Rabat, Morocco, from July 7th to July 11th, 2025. Rabat, which serves as the political capital of Morocco, boasts a compelling history with numerous historical sites and monuments. Those interested in exploring Rabat can immerse themselves in a fusion of tradition and modernity, partake in cultural events, and gain an understanding of the city's central role in Morocco. For now, what we know is that the event will be conducted exclusively in an in-person format. The RC38 is preparing to play a substantial role in this event, and we look forward to your participation. Neither the theme of the conference nor the preparation timeline have yet been announced. We will keep you updated!

Finally, this edition presents a multitude of interesting activities that our colleagues have been developing within their respective universities/research institutions. We are thrilled to share them with you and hope you will enjoy reading the reports.

Priscila Susin, Martín Di Marco, Johannes Becker, Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Giorgos Tsiolis

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MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, 2023-2027

Johannes Becker (President)



I am currently a substitute professor of sociology at the University of Leipzig, Germany, after more than 10 years as a researcher at the Center for Methods in Social Sciences at the University of Göttingen, Germany. Both my doctoral and postdoctoral research are based on sociological biographical research. In my PhD, I combined biographical research with approaches from the sociology of space, and in my subsequent research I have used approaches from historical sociology and migration studies. As a biographical researcher committed to global exchange between qualitative sociologists and with an international research agenda, RC 38 has been a central reference point in my scholarly career.

Maria Pohn-Lauggas (Vice-President)



Maria Pohn-Lauggas is a sociologist and professor at the Institute for Methods and Methodological Principles in the Social Science at the University of Göttingen. She is doing research on the impact of the violent collective past of National Socialism. Within this topic, she asks for biographical processes constituted by narratives and photographs. She teaches interpretative methods and multi-method designs. Her main research fields are: intergenerational transmission, visual and verbal memory practices, collective memory, discourse analysis, biography research and image analysis. From 2014 to 2018 she was secretary/treasurer of the RC 38, since 2018 she is one of the vice-presidents of the RC 38.

Giorgos Tsiolis (Vice-President)



Giorgos Tsiolis is a Professor of "Research Methodology in Social Sciences – Qualitative Research Methods" at the Department of Sociology, University of Crete (Greece) and is currently Head of the Department. His academic interests include issues on social research methodology, qualitative methods, qualitative data analysis, and the biographical narrative approach. His research focuses mainly on issues in the sociology of work (de-industrialization, unemployment, precarious employment). He has published in international journals as well as in collective scientific volumes. G. Tsiolis has also written two books in Greek on the biographical narrative approach and on qualitative analysis methods and has edited volumes on related issues. He is also the author (in common with Michalis Christodoulou) of the monograph "Social Causation and Biographical Research. Philosophical, Theoretical and Methodological Arguments" London / New York, Routledge (Serie: Routledge Advances in Research Methods), 2021.



Priscila Susin (Secretary)

Priscila Susin is a research fellow at the Center for Research & Development in Human Factors and Resilience at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. She is co-coordinator of the Research Committee 29 "Biography and Society" of the Brazilian Society of Sociology (SBS). Her areas of interest include qualitative research methods, reconstructive biographical research, gender studies, inequalities and social stratification in urban contexts, and organizational and work studies.



Martín Hernán Di Marco (Treasurer)

Argentinean Sociologist, PhD in Social Sciences (Buenos Aires University). Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Oslo. His work focuses on biographical analysis of people who have committed homicide in Latin America.

CALL FOR PAPERS / PRIZES

Sektion
Biographieforschung
In der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie



RC38

Biography
and Society



ELTE
EÖTVÖS LORAND
UNIVERSITY



Democracy
Institute

Call for Papers

Biographical research quo vadis? New and recurring challenges in the study of life (hi)stories and social change

Budapest, 4-6 September 2024

In this conference we will approach the question of the current state of biographical research in relation to one of its central focal areas: researching social change. The issue of social change has always had special importance in biographical research and is especially visible in such diverse areas as migration, gender, work, violence and political transformation. Theoretical and methodological discussions in these fields have contributed fundamentally to the development of biographical research, for example regarding the relation between individual and society, the position of experiences, memories and self-presentations, issues of generalization, the relation between micro and macro levels of investigation, and the combination of different methods.

We will take up the central theme of "social change" in a broad way in this conference, with the aim of engaging in a discussion about future directions in biographical research. We mean this not only with reference to the above-mentioned "classic" areas of investigation, but also in the sense of tackling new thematic areas focused on social change, thus fostering a discussion forum that cross-cuts different interests. By creating a platform for biographical researchers to come together and jointly reflect on their craft, this conference seeks to identify and address current and re-emerging challenges to social analysis from the perspective of sociological biographical research.

Taking processes of social change as an overarching theme serves as a reminder that one of the quintessential features of sociological biographical research is its inherent processual nature, which enables us to capture societal transformations from the perspective of everyday actors. This processual approach also allows for a socio-historical orientation, a characteristic which distinguishes biographical research from other qualitative methods in the social sciences.

We invite papers which connect new, ongoing or reoccurring facets of social change with theoretical or methodological aspects of biographical research – ideally based on original empirical research. Contributions might also focus on the combination of different methods (such as visual or digital methods, observations, discourse analyses, etc.), issues of generalization on different levels, or questions of interdisciplinarity.

We suggest that the following areas are connected to the theme of this conference, but we also encourage interested participants to present papers from other fields.

- Authoritarianism, populism and democracy
- Changing life stories after political transition
- Violence, conflict and reconciliation
- Figurations of perpetrators, bystanders and helpers
- Global migration and flight
- Climate change and disasters
- Social movements and activism
- Transformations of labor under the “new spirit of capitalism”
- Gender
- Sexuality and health
- Care and aging in new capitalism
- (Collective) Memory
- Digitalization

The conference will take place at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) Budapest, Hungary, 4-6 Sep-tember 2024. It is organized by Júlia Vajda and Juli Székely (ELTE University), the RC 38 “Biog-raphy and Society” of the International Sociological Association (ISA) and the CEU-Democracy Institute in cooperation with the Section for Biographical Research in the German Sociological As-sociation (DGS).

Abstracts for papers (maximum 300 words) should be sent to biography-and-society@gmx.de by 1st March 2024. We intend to publish the conference procee-dings as a book. Travel and ac-commodation must be covered by the conference participants themselves. We will be able to pro-vide small travel grants to a limited number of presenters.

Tension, Trust and Transformation

16th Conference of the European Sociological Association
27-30 August Porto-Portugal

RN03 -Biographical Perspectives on European Societies

Coordinators: Lyudmila Nurse, Oxford XXI, UK, lyudmilanurse[at]oxford-xxi.org
Baiba Bela, University of Latvia, Latvia, Baiba.Bela[at]lu.lv

Call for papers

The theme of the ESA conference celebrates and asserts the transformative potential of biographical sociology to address key global challenges in recent times. These challenges include crises and global events, the COVID-19 pandemic, inequalities, violence, migration/forced migration. RN03 is interested in the ways biographical research, which draws upon storytelling as a medium of communication, can foster bridges and connections between people and societies to make sense of our experiences in turbulent times.

Biographical research can illuminate how connection and trust are built on a day-to-day basis, and how listening to other people's stories creates empathy for their experiences: it enables the process of exploring individual understandings of societal problems, while also paving ways towards solutions.

A clear focus on *remembering* has prevailed in academic debates, even though works on biography and narrative theory refer heavily to the significance of *forgetting* instead. We invite participants to consider representations of suffering and compassion in biographical empirical data, but also in methodological and ethical terms in the relationship between researchers and the research participants.

It is also important to consider and represent the diverse traditions and ways of studying biographies from different 'schools' of biographical research. A special session will be held on the mapping, advances and achievements of biographical research in Portugal.

Papers are invited to respond to the following themes, but are not limited to:

- Post-Covid societies
- Forgetting and remembering
- Compassion and suffering
- Migration and forced migration in Europe
- New advancements in biographical research
- Biographical research in Portugal

Joint session JS_RN02_RN03: "Interpreting lockdown societies through biographical, performative and arts-based methods, theories and inter-disciplinarity" (Joint session with RN02 Sociology of the Arts and RN03 Biographical Perspectives on European Societies)

Deadlines

15 January 2024 - Abstract submission deadline

Mid-March Notification of acceptance (sent to abstract submitters via ConfTool)

March/April Opening of Participant Registration in ConfTool

Useful Links:

ConfTool 2024: <https://www.conftool.com/esa2024/>

ESA website: A website: <https://www.europeansociology.org/>

Direct link to the ESA 2024 conference website:

<https://www.europeansociology.org/conference/2024>

PROJECTS

Training projects in biographical and autobiographical research: BIOGRAPHICAL AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

Project management: Prof. Adriana Friedmann

Research Centre: SescCPF in São Paulo

Project description:

In this cycle we proposed an introduction to the universe of biographies, autobiographies, and expressive languages. We flew over some areas of knowledge that we consider fundamental for those who work with people, to broaden their repertoires, including anthropology, sociology, philosophy, ethics and anthroposophy. These contents were interwoven, in a circular and organic way, with auto ethnographic research, with studies of life stories and narratives and biographies; with experiences with various expressive languages based on studio experiences; and with dialogued practices.

Online Cycle: BIOGRAPHICAL ITINERENCIES in education, art, culture and life

Project management: Prof. Adriana Friedmann

Duration of the project: March 2024

Project description:

These are meetings for training, in-depth study and biographical research, where we propose reflections and dialogues between different areas of knowledge about the human being, and the sharing of life stories and autobiographical narratives. We have invited specialists who will address a variety of themes from the fields of the arts, culture, philosophy, social sciences, politics and education. In addition, we will offer suggestions for reading, studies and biographies, bibliographies, videos, podcasts and other references for study and research.

NEW BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Jornadas autobiográficas: narrativas e memórias para a formação do educador ('Autobiographical journeys: narratives and memories for educator training')

Adriana Friedmann

Panda Educação, 2023



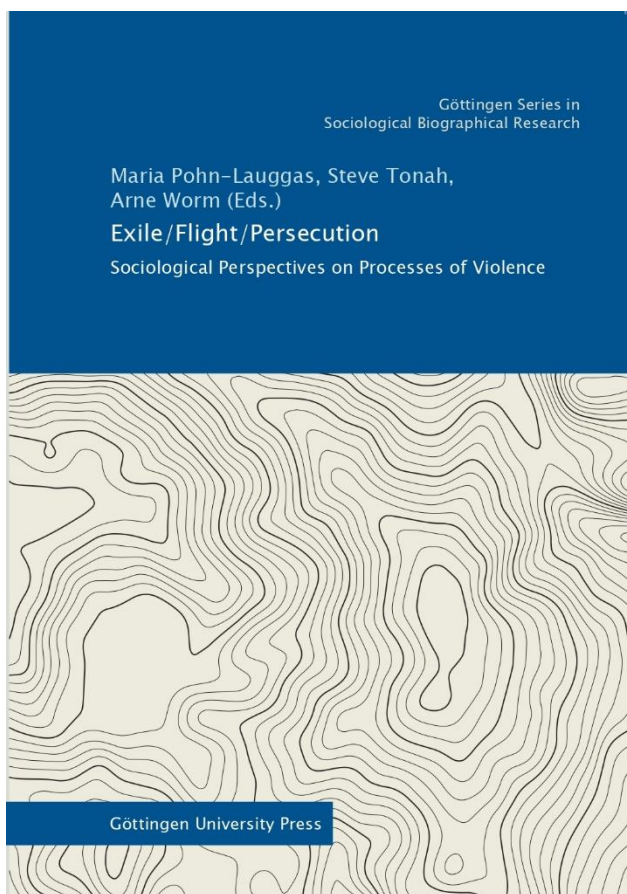
The book proposes and reflects on the importance of childhood memories in which there are already signs of the uniqueness, power and influences of each individual's multicultural roots, as well as the culture of the school, the territory and the socio-cultural contexts in which we grow up and live together. Based on a multidisciplinary approach in which thinkers from education, sociology, depth psychology and anthropology engage in dialogue, I invite you to get to know this new book and delve into your own life stories. Published by Editora Panda Educação, available on the publisher's website, on Amazon or in bookshops.

<https://www.pandabooks.com.br/panda-educacao/jornadas-autobiograficas-narrativas-e-memorias-para-a-formacao-do-educador>

Exile/Flight/Persecution. Sociological Perspectives on Processes of Violence

Maria Pohn-Lauggas, Steve Tonah, Arne Worm (Eds.)

Göttingen Series in Sociological Biographical Research: Göttingen University Press, 2024.



Experiences, processes and constellations of exile, flight, and persecution have deeply shaped global history and are still widespread aspects of human existence today. People are persecuted, incarcerated, tortured or deported on the basis of their political beliefs, gender, ethnic or ethno-national belonging, religious affiliation, and other socio-political categories. People flee or are displaced in the context of collective violence such as wars, rebellions, coups, environmental disasters or armed conflicts. After migrating, but not exclusively in this context, people find themselves suddenly isolated, cut off from their networks of belonging, their biographical projects and their collective histories. The articles in this volume are concerned with the challenges of navigating through multiple paradoxes and contradictions when it comes to grasping these phenomena sociologically, on the levels of self-reflection, theorizing, and especial-

ly doing empirical research.

The book will be available in 2024 (free open access) here: https://univerlag.uni-goettingen.de/handle/3/sociological_biography_research_series

Precarious biographies. Career Pathways and Identities in the Transforming Labour World

Giorgos Tsiolis

Athens: Gutenberg, 2023 (in Greek)



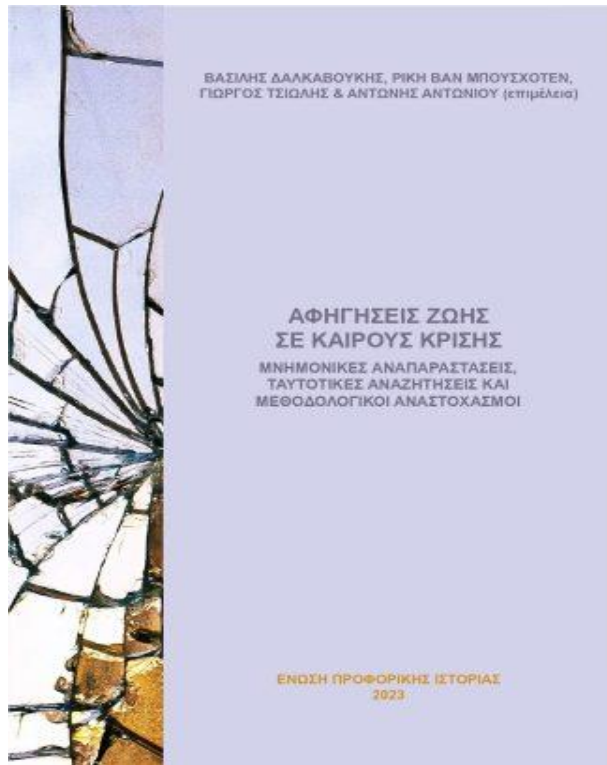
How are the life courses of contemporary precarious employees structured? How do employees experience their participation in flexible, informal and precarious forms of employment and how do they make sense of the labour world based on these experiences? How does work flexibility and precariousness affect the formation of professional identities? The research presented in the book attempts to answer these questions. The research was based on the multi-level analysis of contemporary employees' life (hi)stories produced in the context of narrative interviews. By focusing on the perspective, experiences and voice of the employees, the complexity of the ways of experiencing flexible and precarious forms of work as well as the multiplicity of strategies activated by the actors to cope with them were highlighted.

The dynamic and non-standard ways in which the life courses of modern employees are structured, as well as the diversity of the processes of constructing professional identities, were also highlighted. Empirical research draws theoretical frameworks from the rich debate taking place in the social sciences around the 'transformations' of work and changes in labor relations.

Life Stories in Times of Crisis. Memory, Identity and Methodology

Vasilis Dalkavoukis, Riki Van Boeschoten, Giorgos Tsiolis and Antonis Antoniou (eds.)

Greek Oral History Association, 2023 (in Greek)



This edited volume explores the contribution of oral history and biographical narrative research in highlighting different meanings of “crisis” in a variety of political and historical contexts: occupation, resistance and civil war of the 1940s, migratory movements in the second half of the 20th century, the economic crisis of the 2010s. In all these different contexts oral testimonies reveal the multiple ways in which “hidden” social or ethnic groups construct or reconstruct their identities during times of crisis. A special section of the book focuses on methodological issues concerning life history research. An Appendix presents contributions of the Social Workshop of Thessaloniki with a more activist approach on the social devastation brought about by the economic crisis in the second largest city of Greece.

Ebook: http://epi.uth.gr/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/afigiseis_zois.pdf

Special Issue: Doing Global Sociology: Qualitative Methods and Biographical Becoming after the Postcolonial Critique

Johannes Becker & Marian Burchardt (Eds)

Historical Social Research, 48, 2023



This HSR Special Issue takes a globally comparative perspective on processes of biographical becoming in order to illustrate ways of doing “global sociology” after the postcolonial critique. The critical interrogation of sociology’s standard assumptions, the postcolonial questioning of Western epistemologies more broadly, and of the conditions of sociological knowledge production, have produced a sense of crisis; a crisis with regard to the validity, usefulness and justifiability of theoretical paradigms, concepts and narratives. However, rarely have scholars extended these interrogations into the realm of sociology’s methods and methodologies. If sociology’s theories can be criticized in this regard because they are based on flawed understandings of agency, action, social relations and so on, what about the methods through which sociologists gather data, interpret these data, and theorize

them through practices of generalization and abstraction? Are all methods equally valid and justifiable in all cultural and geographical contexts? What does it mean for sociology on a global scale to account for the existence of divergent methodological approaches and different forms of concept-building that arise from them? What kinds of methods and procedures of comparison, context variation and so on, enable us to generalize findings and to produce hypotheses, arguments, and formulations that make research in one site or society relevant for research in other sites and societies in our globalized world? In this special issue, sociologists from diverse backgrounds tackle these questions through empirical case studies and theorizations ranging from the biographies of femicide convicts in Argentina and gig workers in Abidjan to the professional careers of Pentecostal pastors in Cape Town and life histories of former members of military groups in Cambodia.

Contributions:

Gérard Amougou: Subjectivization Analysed by the Biography of the Subject-Entrepreneur in a Precarious Environment

Drawing on the life story of the emerging subject-entrepreneur outside the dominant powers in Cameroon, this paper shows how the tool of biography helps to grasp a key aspect of the dynamics of subjectivization at work in African societies. Although they do not constitute a totally objective representation of present-day realities, the life stories of our interviewees show how the figure of the subject emerges by

evading the dual grip of ethnic and socially ascribed identities. Biographical backgrounds structure the understanding of subjectivization as the work of the self on the self, which leads to a logic of action that is opposed to the dominant social and political systems and holds out the hope of an alternative society emerging. In a precarious environment, the figure of the significant other sustains this utopia by reinforcing a sense of entrepreneurial commitment that is shaped by an imaginary that wants to be institutive, while placing the experience of the subject and biographical becoming in Africa within the Global Sociology perspective.

Martín Hernán Di Marco: “Stop it with Mommy and Daddy!” Analyzing How Accounts of People in Prison Change with Their Trajectory in Argentinean Penal Institutions

The relationship between adverse childhood experiences and criminality has been amply explored in criminology and the social sciences. A plethora of scholarly theories has focused on the impact of abandonment by one's parents, among other events, in the development of criminal careers. Originating in the Global North, where it has been much promoted, this hypothesis has turned into a doxa overriding the need to account for sociocultural contexts. Drawing upon narrative criminology, this paper analyses how the life stories of people in prison change with their institutional trajectories, being shaped by official penal discourses. Based on the analysis of 30 life stories with inmates in Argentinean prisons, this paper argues that prison narratives guide explanations of crime towards family dynamics and, consequently, decontextualize life histories. Nonetheless, interviewees contested mainstream expert theories – while skillfully using them to navigate the system – as a response to the attempted institutional alienation of their biographies. In contesting dominant theories, participants are resisting not just local prison culture but also transnational colonial networks of knowledge production. Revisiting dominant frameworks that mechanically take for granted the impact of childhood experiences constitutes a path of inquiry that contributes to an understanding of prison narratives.

Daniel Bultmann: A Global and Diachronic Approach to the Study of Social Fields

This article aims to strengthen and further theorize a global and diachronic reading of social fields. It maintains that, in order to understand social positions in a field – the Cambodian field of power in this case – one needs first to trace the diachronic ruptures between sociocultures. Secondly, it maintains that social fields need to be understood as global configurations. To support this, it argues that the theory of fields developed by Pierre Bourdieu needs to be provincialized, widened to the global on several levels, and freed from a narrow reading of fields as spaces of competitive struggle and investment. This neoliberal reading of Bourdieu's theory risks reducing multiple forms of knowledge and power to an ahistorical miniature struggle happening along the dimensions of symbolic power and symbolic violence. While Bourdieu provides a more complex theory of social inequality, his analysis regularly slips – usually not while studying but when theorizing fields – into a neoliberal explanation of the historical emergence of inequalities: Agents in fields occupy certain positions in society because they have previously been more successful than others in accumulating symbolic power. By contrast, this article makes an argument for reading social fields as diachronic pluriverses of power, knowledge, and potentially even ontologies, thereby strengthening a particular line of interpretation of Bourdieu's concepts. It proposes a stronger emphasis on asynchronous and biographical methods to study inequalities and their time- and space-specific configurations. This article supports its arguments by analyzing the biographies of two members of the Cambodian field of power: a princess and an oligarch.

Swetlana Torno: Life-Course Management and Social Security in Later Life: Women's Biographical Practices Spanning Generations and Historical Contexts in Tajikistan

The qualitative and quantitative study of life courses represents an important branch of sociological research and is an interesting case for Global Sociology. While characterized by thematic and methodological diversity, this wide research field has rarely looked beyond the countries of the Global North, and most of its key concepts were formulated based on studies in the Euro-American context. Taking an ethnographic research project on women's life courses in Tajikistan as its starting point, this paper examines how analytical concepts associated with the life-course paradigm can travel transnationally and asks what we can learn from transposing these concepts to a non-European setting. More specifically, it brings concepts such as linked lives and the intersection of individual, family, and historical time into conversation with empirical data collected through the genealogical method, biographical interviews, and participant observation. This paper focuses on women's life-course practices to secure care in later life in post-independence Tajikistan and advances the argument that women in advanced ages become central actors in safeguarding family livelihoods and old-age care by carefully shaping their own life trajectories and managing their children's.

Marian Burchardt & Johannes Becker: Subjects of God? Rethinking Religious Agency, Biography, and Masculinity from the Global South

Religious specialists inhabit ambivalent institutional positions. On the one hand, as professionals working for organizations, their scope of autonomy is constrained and subject to organizational rules, religious dogmas, and religiously sanctioned restrictions on their own lives in the form of celibacy, choice of residence, etc. On the other hand, because of their charisma and their epistemic authority with regard to, for example, the interpretation of everyday events, personal crises, religious scriptures, and moral judgments, they may also have considerable autonomy and power. In this article, we compare the lives of Greek Catholic monks in the Middle East and Pentecostal pastors in South Africa. We focus on the question of how the subjective understandings and objective realities of personal autonomy relate to one another and change in the course of religious specialists' careers. Scrutinizing religious agency in a gendered environment allows us to analyze how dominant constructions of connections to God, religious charisma, and ecclesiastical careers reproduce the masculine structure of church institutions. While Eastern Catholic monks are often portrayed as extremely constrained by institutional rules, Pentecostal pastors appear as largely autonomous, organizing the religious affairs of their congregations in a highly independent fashion. Our analysis demonstrates that such images often mirror idealized portrayals that are produced by dominant religious discourses. As our analysis also shows, however, these discourses obfuscate both the agency of monks and the institutional constraints of pastors.

Hannah Schilling: Navigating Uncertainty: Young Workers and Precarity in Berlin and Abidjan

These days, many young urban dwellers work in precarious jobs to make a living, such as gig workers for digital platforms or informal traders for mobile communication companies. Their working conditions are characterized by temporary contracts, low salaries, and fiddly tasks. In what ways does gig work shape and enable transitions into adulthood? To answer this question, this article uses two unusual case studies – the making-do of young adults working respectively in the digital economy in Berlin and Abidjan. Instead of tracing individual trajectories against an ideal of stable employment as a marker for transitions into adulthood, we practice a Global

Sociology through comparative analysis. We start from the context of Abidjan to focus on young dwellers' practices of kinship. Based on in-depth interviews with young residents of Berlin and Abidjan, we reveal differences in the ways independence as an individual is expected in interpersonal relations and institutionalized redistributive practices. At the same time, we carve out similar mechanisms and, as such, overcome a Eurocentric analytical framework in which the majority world is described as "lacking in" or "a variation of" modern expectations about the role of paid work for life-course and youth transitions. Instead, the analysis shows the relevance of studying the realm of paid work as closely entangled with care relations.

Arne Worm: Migrantized Biographies. Reconstructing Life-Stories and Life-Histories as a Reflexive Approach in Migration Research

The social category of migrants has been marked by state policies of bordering and "managing migration," powerful discourses on social groupings, and global, regional, and local conflicts around participation and exclusion. The complexity of this category has been emphasized by critical approaches in the fields of migration research that have been crucial in de-essentializing it. In this article, I will discuss how, as a processual, comparative, and case-oriented approach, biographical research might contribute to more reflexive, Global Sociology-oriented migration research by empirically reconstructing migrantization (turning movements into migration and turning mobile people into migrants) as a multilayered and complex process. In doing so, I will present empirical findings from the research project "Biographies of migrants from Syria and West Africa in Brazil and in Germany: processes of inclusion and participation in the context of so-called irregular migration." These findings reveal the different ways in which members of migrant groupings present themselves and their migration trajectories, divided into an "individualized type" and a "we-group-oriented type." This leads me to demonstrate the need to reconstruct mechanisms of migration-related boundary-making from a processual perspective in order to understand migrantized people's positions and positioning practices within asymmetric balances of power, as well as the overlapping processes that generate both movements and mobilities.

Joschka Philipps: Whose Uncertainties? Dealing with Multiple Meanings in a Transnational Biography

Uncertainty permeates and structures social life, biographies, and research. In its ubiquity, it may well be the "the most ordinary thing in the world" (Wohlrab-Sahr 1992, 10), and has been considered a key concern of sociology (Boltanski 2011, 55). This article reflects on how uncertainty looms large both in the social world and throughout the social scientific research process. The focus is on the biography of N., a woman who grew up in Conakry in the Republic of Guinea and currently lives in France, and how her lived experiences are being turned into an academic text. N.'s narrations of her life feature uncertainty in different forms, ranging from moments of existential crisis to a quotidian contingency produced by the multiplicity of norms, languages, ideologies, and systems of meaning of her transnational life-worlds. The article reflects on the relationship between the researcher and N., showing how our work on her biography implies multiple translations and transformations of meaning, as well as miscomprehension and doubts. On a theoretical level, uncertainties are also implicit in situating an academic text in relation to others, especially in inter- and transdisciplinary contexts with contradictory concerns and ideals of scholarship. The article is embedded in a broader research project on so-called conspiracy theories,

a prime example of a concept and a burgeoning academic field where scholars tend to externalize and sometimes pathologize uncertainties about political power.

Michael P. K. Okyerefo: The Autobiographical Self as an Object for Sociological Enquiry

(Auto)biographies are not accidental products; instead, they are shaped by the social world which gives birth to them. Societies inherently impact an individual's life by means of their very social structures, which are themselves created through the interaction of social actors within and across a society's history. In other words, the constant symbiotic interaction between social structures and social actors is an ongoing dynamic that can be observed and explained within historical and contemporary events. Consequently, the different social worlds in which an individual grows up and lives impact that individual's life course. This conceptual paper draws on my experiences of teaching and researching in different societies. It examines an example of autobiography becoming intertwined with social structure in a way that shapes one's academic life and discipline through socially constructed networks. It argues that social worlds shape the social actor regardless of society, lending credence to the necessity for biographical and oral history, or "narrative" approaches to sociological discourse across societies. In this paper I rely on different facets of my life to reflect on many years of engagement in teaching and researching sociological material and of the inner longing to unravel the eternal interconnectedness between the personal and the social.

Eva Bahl & Yvonne Berger: Processes of South-South Migration in Their Historical Context: Biographical Case Studies from Brazil and China

This article examines interweaving collective histories in different formerly colonized regions of the world: 1. Migratory movements from the territory of the former Ottoman Empire to the Americas, specifically to Brazil, and 2. transregional migration between different regions within China. On the basis of empirical data, we discuss sociological biographical research as an approach to analyzing migration and social mobility as transgenerational processes. In the case of Syrians in Brazil who have fled from the civil war, these processes are reflected in transnational family structures, transgenerational mandates, and knowledge transmission. In the case of domestic migration within China, the "mission" that families give their children is social advancement through education (e.g., Crabb 2010; Fong 2004). In the context of anti-Western discourses in China, it can be demonstrated that postcolonial discourses are functional in the effort to regain former international strength and national prosperity, and that discourses on "becoming a modern citizen" pervade family aspirations. The article is intended as a plea for i) taking a closer look at historical and contemporary South-South relations, and ii) situating current migration movements historically. It ties into global historical and sociological debates on "shared/common histories" and "intertwined histories."

Nkululeko Nkomo & Sibusiso Nkomo: Melancholy as Witness and Active Black Citizenry in the Writing of A.S. Vil-Nkomo

This article highlights the importance of viewing an author's body of work through an emotive lens as a sociological source of archives from which we can extract a biographical life story. It accomplishes this by citing examples from two of our late grandfather A.S. Vil-Nkomo's short stories that were published in the 1930s and by utilising biographical and historical analyses. Both stories used melancholy as a literary method to underscore the sombre circumstances of black suffering, errantry, and death. By highlighting the ungrievable social, psychical, and material consequences of racial tyranny and injustice, they are rendered visible. We can see

how the loss of selves, including selves rooted in ancestral histories, selves anchored in their families and communities, and ideal selves capable of realizing their full potential to be, surfaced a type of affective community with shared grief and marked a social landscape where it is difficult for someone who is black to find a place. The stories also convey the urgency of changing this status quo. A.S. Vil-Nkomo used a form of self-writing in a country where the oppressed black majority was denied a voice in order to inspire an active black citizenry driven by the desire to create new selves and societies free of racial segregation.

Gaku Oshima: Societal Envisioning of Biographical AIDS Activism among Gay People Living with HIV in Japan

The purpose of this paper is to examine the hidden history of AIDS activism among the sexual minority of those living with HIV (PLWH) who practiced societal envisioning from the 1990s to 2000s. The concept of “societal envisioning [shakai-koso 社会構想]” has been developed by sociologists in Japan. Based on research data from the life and oral histories of 22 PLWH, two biographies and related life documents were examined. One biography focused on the founder of a gay-content magazine, the other on the editor of a medical information journal for PLWH. The former aimed to create a gay community through societal envisioning in cooperation with neighbors and visitors. The latter not only collected medical information but also used biographies to cultivate hope for survival and empowerment. By focusing on the concept of societal envisioning, this article contributes to Global Sociology as a way of exploring and discussing how people can confront and enable solidarity to change the lives of those who are colonized, oppressed, and marginalized by prejudice and discrimination.

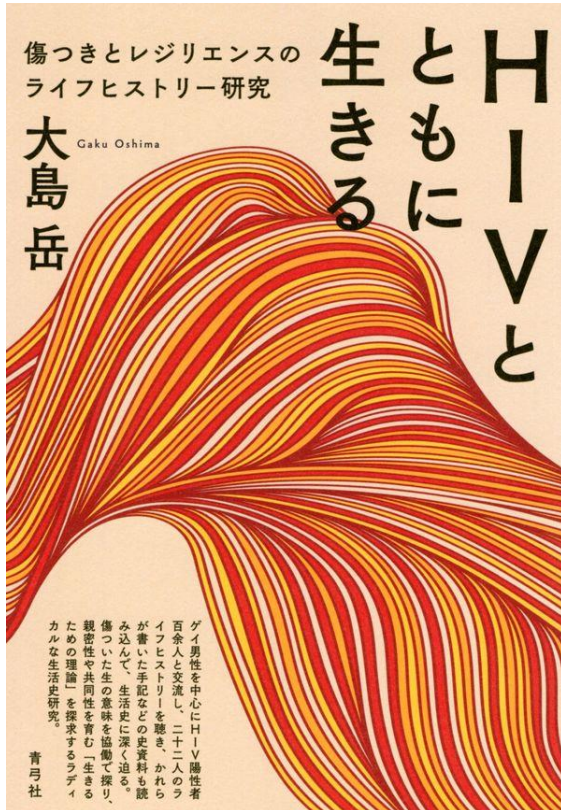
Fabio Santos: Mind the Archival Gap: Critical Fabulation as Decolonial Method

This article tackles a question long deemed impossible and unthinkable: how can sociology come to grips with the colonial past and present, situating the uprooting and re-composition of families and biographies in the *longue durée* of enslavement and its aftermaths? As centuries-long and continent-spanning processes of violence, subjugation, exploitation, extermination, and alienation, enslavement and the trade in enslaved people have dramatically transformed social structures, including kinship ties, across the Atlantic and beyond. Seeking to reconcile sociology and slavery studies, I retrieve forgotten pieces of the sociological and abolitionist archive to engage with historical and artistic counter-narratives challenging not only white-washed European self-understandings, but also the standard methodologies and epistemologies upholding them. Unapologetically undisciplined, this article hence follows two interrelated decolonial strategies: besides conceiving of uncovering and closely reading long-forgotten foundational sociological works as a decolonial device challenging knowledge canonized by hegemonic positions in the North, I also introduce Saidiya Hartman’s literary-historical method of critical fabulation as a decolonial method. I do so via a sociological reading of La Vaughn Belle’s contemporary audiovisual artwork *In the Place of Shadows*. Mobilizing her childhood memories of racism and objectification on the US mainland, the Crucian artist traces and imagines the forced displacement of Victor and Alberta, two half-siblings from the Caribbean island of Saint Croix who were caged and exhibited as part of the 1905 colonial exhibition in Copenhagen.

Living with HIV: A Life History Study of Vulnerability and Resilience

Gaku OSHIMA

Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2023 (in Japanese)



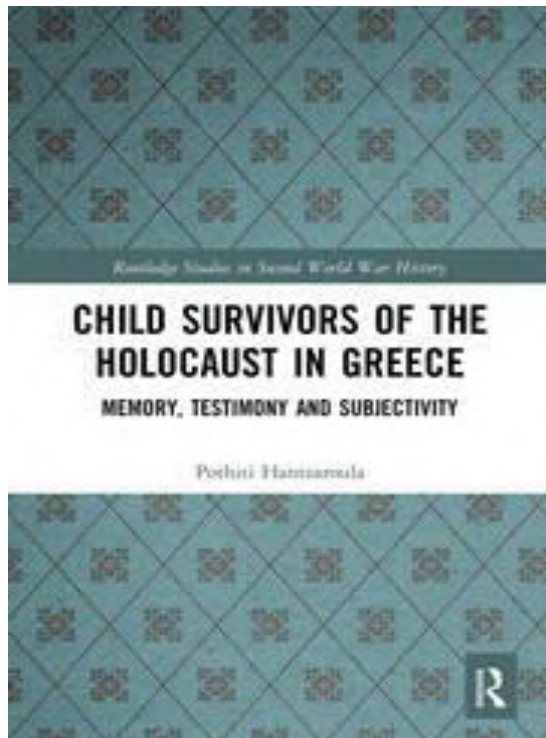
Experience, HIV/AIDS is one of the most serious infectious diseases on the planet today. With the progress of medical treatment, HIV/AIDS patients are now able to live the same life as other people without dying as long as they continue to take their medication. However, intersectional discrimination and prejudice, including discrimination based on gender, sexuality, disease, and disability, still persist. What is it like to "live with HIV" in Japan? The study delves deeply into the life histories of more than 100 HIV-positive people, mainly gay men, by interacting with them, listening to the life histories of 22 people, and reading memoirs and other historical materials written by these people. The project will uncover the collaborative practices of those involved and their supporters, and discover the power of inclusion while creatively engaging with those around them. Sociological theories such as vulnerability and resilience, illness narratives, queer theory, and critical

theory will be used to highlight how the power to live that each individual has cultivated in the midst of their suffering can be connected to society and how society can be envisioned. A radical life history study that collaboratively explores the meaning of wounded lives, and a "theory for living" that fosters intimacy and community.

Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Greece: Memory, Testimony and Subjectivity

Pothiti Hantzaroula

Routledge, 2022



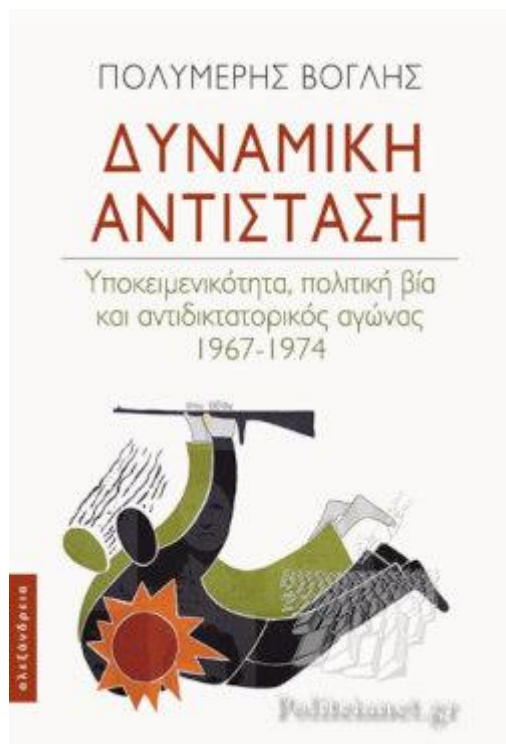
Experience, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Greece: Memory, Testimony and Subjectivity* investigates the ways in which age, gender and generation shaped child survivors' memory of the Holocaust in Greece. In which ways have age and particularly childhood influenced the narratives of war and its aftermath in adulthood? Do generational differences in childhood, as defined by Holocaust scholarship on child survivors, play a role in memory so that we can talk about a generational memory of the Holocaust? Can one approach children's experience of war through the memory of adulthood? How can one analyze the enfoldment of trauma in the body? The book places child survivors' memory in the context of a global Holocaust memory and of scholarly work based on arguments about the "impossibility of testimony." It retraces the genealogies of the testimonial post-Shoah culture and the shifts on

the status of testimony. Furthermore, by examining oral and written testimonies by Greek survivors over a long period that spans from the end of the Shoah to nowadays, the study focuses on the transformations of testimonial narratives in relation to the impact of archival collections of testimonies such as the VHA/USC Shoah Foundation in shaping testimony. Children in the camp of Bergen Belsen were almost the sole Jewish children under fourteen years of age upon whom the death penalty was not inflicted on their arrival in concentration camps. Child survivors' testimonies provide a rare opportunity to explore children's subjectivity shaped by the experience of captivity. Pothiti Hantzaroula also explores contested memories around survival and the role of the Jewish council in post-war Jewish communities. Anti-Semitism and the stigmatization of Jews by the gentile population are key factors in the construction of Jewish identity. The dynamic role of shame in the formation of identity is an important analytical framework to understand the participation of the subject in the making of her/his subjectivity in traumatic situations. Children are approached in this study as active agents participating in the transformation of postwar Jewish identity.

Dynamic Resistance. Subjectivity, political violence and struggle against the military junta 1967-1974.

Polymeris Voglis

Athens: Alexandria, 2022 (in Greek)



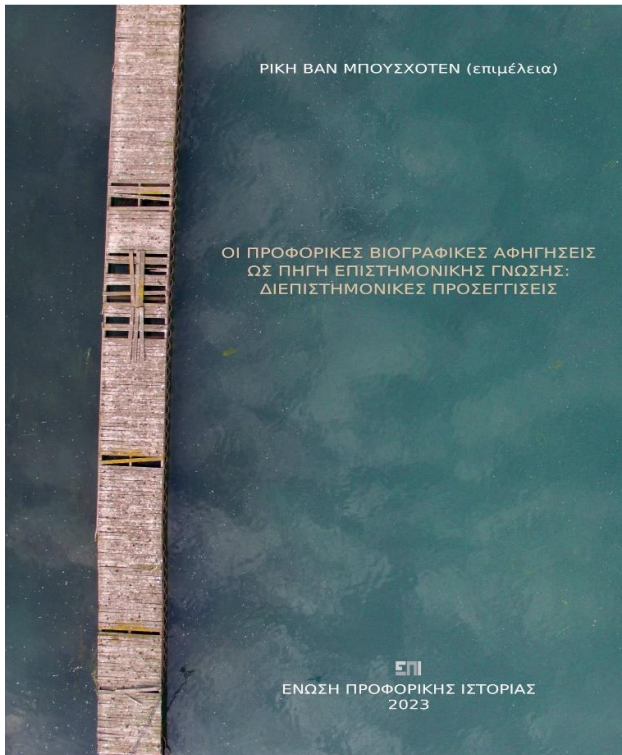
This book marks the growing interest of oral historians in Greece for more recent periods of the country's history, moving beyond the turbulent 1940s. The study is based on the life stories of militants involved in the so-called 'dynamic resistance' against the military dictatorship that ruled Greece between 1967 and 1974. Their actions aimed at breaking the climate of fear and inertia by planting bombs. Militants belonged to a wide spectrum of clandestine organizations, ranging from the political center to the revolutionary left. According to their accounts, this form of political violence was legitimized by the harsh repression of the regime and the impossibility of other forms of action. Their memories offer unique insights into the formation of the actors' subjectivities, highlighting the biographical turning points in their lives, their motivations to join the resistance and their feelings. The crucial role of oral history in this research is highlighted in the epilogue, entitled "How History Becomes Silence", in which the author exam-

ines the reasons why this form of resistance against the dictatorship was largely ignored by mainstream public memory and how its protagonists came to terms retrospectively with this episode in their lives.

Oral Biographical Narratives as a Source of Academic Knowledge. Interdisciplinary Perspectives.

Riki Van Boeschoten (ed.)

Greek Oral History Association, 2023 (in Greek)



This ebook contains the contributions of six Greek scholars involved in oral history and biographical research who took part in a digital roundtable discussion organized by the Greek Oral History Association in 2021. Sociologist Giorgos Tsiolis, historians Dimitra Lambropoulou, Tasoula Vervenioti and Pothiti Hantzaroula, anthropologist Eftychia Voutura and folklorist Paris Potiropoulos discuss the relation between experience, memory and narration, drawing on their expertise in the field. The volume also contains a bibliographic essay by Riki Van Boeschoten and Antonis Antoniou which presents some of the major trends in oral history research in Greece since the 1980s.

Ebook: https://epi.uth.gr/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/proforikes_biografikes-afigiseis_teliko.pdf

Challenges and ambivalences of a global micro-sociology

Eva Bahl, University of Göttingen

Global Qualitative Sociology Network

The palm oil and spices, a white-clad priestess, the omnipresent Adinkra symbols...the many connections and interrelationships between Ghana and Bahia, Brazil cannot be overlooked in the research project on collective memories of enslavement I'm currently involved in. In the project, we do field work in different regions of Brazil and Ghana. The aim is to understand differences and similarities, as well as entanglements, between the two world regions and on a smaller level – like between northern and southern Ghana or between the Brazilian states of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. How is the history of enslavement remembered and told? By whom? In which ways? Is the knowledge transmitted in families via religious and everyday practices, or rather in schoolbooks, or through monuments in public spaces? [...]

Available at: <https://global-qualitative-sociology.net/2023/09/19/challenges-and-ambivalences-of-a-global-micro-sociology/>

Auf der Suche nach Reggae und Sicherheit – (Un-)Geplante Fluchtwege nach Zentral- und Südamerika

Eva Bahl, University of Göttingen

Hinterland-Magazin, (55), pp. 47–51

Es ist eine weit verbreitete eurozentrische Annahme, dass Migrationsbewegungen primär in den Globalen Norden zielen. Der größte Teil der globalen Migrationsbewegungen findet jedoch zwischen Ländern des sogenannten Globalen Südens statt. Die Soziologin Eva Bahl diskutiert in diesem Text Biographien und Migrationsverläufe von Menschen, deren Fluchtwege sie nach El Salvador beziehungsweise Brasilien führten

Available at:

<https://www.hinterland-magazin.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/hinterland-magazin-55-47.pdf>

From Sociology and Philosophy to Film: Hermilio Santos' documentaries

Guido Alt

Philosophy and Community - Newsletter Iberica Philosophica Mediaevalia

December 2023 – In this issue of Philosophy and Community we talked to Hermilio Santos, a sociologist at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, who films some outstanding documentaries. Hermilio's documentaries are inspired by the methodology of interpretative sociology in the works of Alfred Schütz, rooted also in philosophy [...]. We have talked about using documentaries as a tool for dissemination of science, and about Hermilio's specific approach towards integrating them into sociological research. His documentaries and his sociological work – both intimately connected – spans widely, as did this interview: from teenage offenders to

workers on oil platforms, the cotton industry, and the medieval lyrical inspiration in the Brazilian music of Elomar Figueira Mello.

Available at: <https://ipmtoday.com/philosophy-and-community/from-sociology-and-philosophy-to-film/>

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The membership fees to the RC38 for 4 years are (see ISA regulations):

Regular members	U\$40
Students and members from countries B and C	U\$20

If you have any questions concerning the membership, please contact Priscila Susin for advice: pri.qsusin@gmail.com

The deadline for the next Newsletter is at the end of June 2024.

Please send us:

- A short paper (3-7 pages) on a topic you are currently working on
- A presentation of your current project
- Some reflections on your experiences of teaching biographical approaches and methods
- Reports or some notes about conferences you have attended
- General reports about activities in the field of biographical research in your institution, university, country, continent
- Interesting calls for papers for conferences, workshops, summer schools
- New publications from you, also in your respective native language
- Any other thought or information you would like to share.
- Please send your contributions in Word or rtf formats.

Send your contribution directly to: Biography-and-Society@gmx.de

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