Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World: Towards the Futures We Want

Edited by Markus S. Schulz

The contemporary world has reached a pivotal moment of escalating injustices and apocalyptic risks, but also of unprecedented opportunities. As an epoch is ending and the contours of a new are not settled, critical analyses and bold visions are needed more than ever. In this constellation, the mounting pressures of social and ecological problems are met by a confluence of intellectual trends that allow the questioning of entrenched assumptions and the unleashing of a forward-oriented sociological imagination. This monograph, edited by Markus S. Schulz, Vice-President for Research of the International Sociological Association (ISA), brings together the expertise of leading authors from around the world, including Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Asef Bayat, Nora Garita Bonilla, Todd Gitlin, Stephan Lessenich, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Saskia Sassen, Alain Touraine, and Michel Wieviorka. It is based on revised papers that were initially presented at the Opening and Closing Plenaries of the Third ISA Forum of Sociology, which was held under the motto “The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World.”

This book combines global and regionally grounded perspectives to explore pertinent trends, alternative visions, and new directions for sociological research. It discusses the processes and actors that shape globalization in the 21st Century. It addresses the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, global inequality and its backlash, the transformation of global knowledge regimes, the rise and fall of imperial powers, the role of nation-states and the subterranean processes that cut across borders. It engages with influential social movements, including the feminist, indigenous, Muslim, and workers’ movements. It does not stop at describing and criticizing problems, but it also points to alternatives. It probes how democratizing projects from the grassroots relate to the different scales of a global system of markets and nation-states. Connecting disparate fields of knowledge, it views social problems not in isolation but within their broader contexts and helps rethinking the relations between social, cultural, economic, and political sphere.

Democracy relies on the self-constitution of social actors as imaginative agents who perceive problems, demand change, formulate visions, and struggle for betterment. The ‘we’ of the ‘futures we want’ can be any community, a small group, an imagined nation or planetary ‘we’, just as a public emerges around an issue, constituted by people discussing it. ‘Futures’ in the plural do not refer to a monolithic ideology, nor to a totalitarian blueprint, but to the diversity of visions, desires, needs, values, and wants.

The decades-long neglect of ‘futures’ as research subject of the social sciences is coming to an end. This book orients sociological research forward and contributes to the democratizing discourse of futures that are equitable, sustainable, and desirable.
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