

PREFACE

By Gosta Esping-Andersen

Society is undergoing very rapid change in our times. An excellent way to gauge just how radically our World is being recast is to reread one of those dusty old Sociology textbooks from the 1960s. Today's families bear very little resemblance to Talcott Parson's idea of the normative family; today's employment structure seems a far cry from either the marxian doom of across-the-board proletarianization – a la Braverman – or the optimistic disappearance of class – a la Lipset and Bell. Change can be said to be revolutionary when old concepts become unrecognizable in current empirical behaviour; when, indeed, professional sociologists are at a loss to explain the real dynamics of our society.

All the social sciences have recognized the arrival of new logics that organize the social life of citizens, communities, and nations. But except for a handful, often pretentious, scholars few claim to have any clear idea of what these logics might be. We are searching through empirical variations and regularities, siphoning through data, in search for clues. At the risk of exaggeration, two themes dominate the sociological agenda. The first is that everything is becoming 'a-typical', the arrival of atypical households, of the de-standardized life course, of post-modern politics and attitudes, of non-typical work. In fact, the a-typical is often becoming the normal. The second is that we are caught in 'bad' societal dynamics. The trend seems to produce more and more family instability, bad jobs, rising precariousness, mounting social exclusion, polarization of wages, incomes and welfare.

I read Javier Polavieja's book in the spirit of this new Sociology, an attempt to come to grips with what massive change implies for the lives of citizens. The book is about Spain in the past two decades, but the questions it raises and the answers it gives are of universal relevance. Having now read it (twice in fact), I conclude that not only is this 'new' Sociology but it is also *great* Sociology. To borrow from C. Wright Mills, Sociology is great when it manages to link private troubles to public issues, the fate of individuals to social structure. This is what the sociological imagination is all about, and Javier Polavieja's study has it in abundance.

The study begins with what might appear a relatively technocratic issue, namely the social consequences of the 1984 labour market reforms in Spain and the spread of fixed-term contracts. Now, there is nothing especially spectacular about studying this. Look at the book's bibliography and you will see that sociologists and economists have written literally hundreds, if not thousands, of articles and books on this. But Polavieja's contribution is in a different class. Where almost all existing studies take a rather narrow focus, examining wage effects or unemployment correlations, Polavieja's study is impressively comprehensive, amounting almost to a full-blown examination of the changing social structure of Spain. In so doing, the study addresses a broad gamut of sociological theory, from theories of class and social stratification to political sociology. The book practically ends up as a test of major theoretical tenets.

Since I believe that this book is *must* reading for any Spanish social scientist, I will not provide a detailed description of its analyses and findings. But I would like to give the reader an idea of my interpretation of his work. Beginning with the premise, I think it would be a wrong reading to see the book as solely a study of the consequences of labour market de-regulation. It is really a book about the broader societal impact of the changing world of work (which, in Spain, does happen to be driven a lot by temporary work contracts). It is *great* Sociology because his analyses of the consequences manage so well to link individual life chances to the emerging new social structure. Polavieja shows us –with exceptional clarity I should add – how Spanish-style de-regulation helps create a world of two distinct human biographies, a bi-modality of life chances. The growing divide between insiders and outsiders appears as an increasingly permanent new social equilibrium in which the fate of individuals (risks of precariousness or of unemployment, citizens' career horizons) are profoundly overdetermined. The emergence of a dualistic structure of life chances, shows Polavieja, has second-order consequences for the system of social stratification. According to conventional sociological theory, unemployment and career chances are intrinsically linked to social class. There is no denying that this remains so, also in modern Spain. But a new axis is being forged, one that divides citizens *within* the same social class. For example, if job security is a desired goal, then manual

workers on permanent contracts are much better off than are professionals on fixed-term contracts. We are witnessing a radical reconfiguration of the Spanish social structure.

Similarly, the emerging insider-outsider divide is reshaping citizens' associational and political affinities and loyalties. Polavieja's analyses suggest profound second-order consequences of the insider-outsider axis on the political and institutional landscape. He shows how outsiders cultivate not only political discontent and frustration, but also detachment and spreading inefficacy. I read this as an alarm that a growing share of the citizenry is becoming trapped into a reality which does not promise any realistic hopes for a good life. I would hypothesize that herein lies one fundamental reason why Spaniards no longer have children. In the absence of realistic hopes for a good and secure life, a rational citizen would think twice about having children.

In conclusion, Spain seems to be embarking upon a 'post-industrial' model that is exceptionally fragmented and in some ways bi-polar. Polavieja's study leaves one with the deeply pessimistic impression that, if this continues unabated, we shall see a society made up of the 'A-team' and 'B-team'. But, he is careful to note, membership in either does not automatically imply good versus bad welfare across-the board. In terms of relative income risks, the 'B-team' is not necessarily worse off, mainly because they are very likely to live in a household with at least one member from the 'A-team'. In other words, the divide between insiders and outsiders has to do with career hopes, mobility chances, and job insecurity but it does not necessarily create a welfare abyss. The perpetuation of traditional *familialism* in the Spanish welfare state is problematic for many things, not least for women's emancipation, but it does still deliver on its traditional task of pooling the risks of members within the four walls of the family.

Javier Polavieja's book is great Sociology because it connects so well the lives of Spaniards with the evolving character of Spanish society. It is also imaginative Sociology in the very sense that C. Wright Mills wrote, namely an analytical ability to make connections between the micro-World of everyday life and the massive macroscopic forces that, on one side, so over-determine how we move from one day to the next and, on the

other side, themselves are formed and shaped by the many little actions that we citizens take to better our lives and cope with obstacles and insecurities along the way. And if 'Spanish-style' deregulation was very much the lynchpin of societal fragmentation, there is room for some optimism. After all, this one macroscopic force was man-made and so, likewise, would any reform that might garner less dualism and more national cohesion. Imaginative Sociology might help produce imaginative politics.