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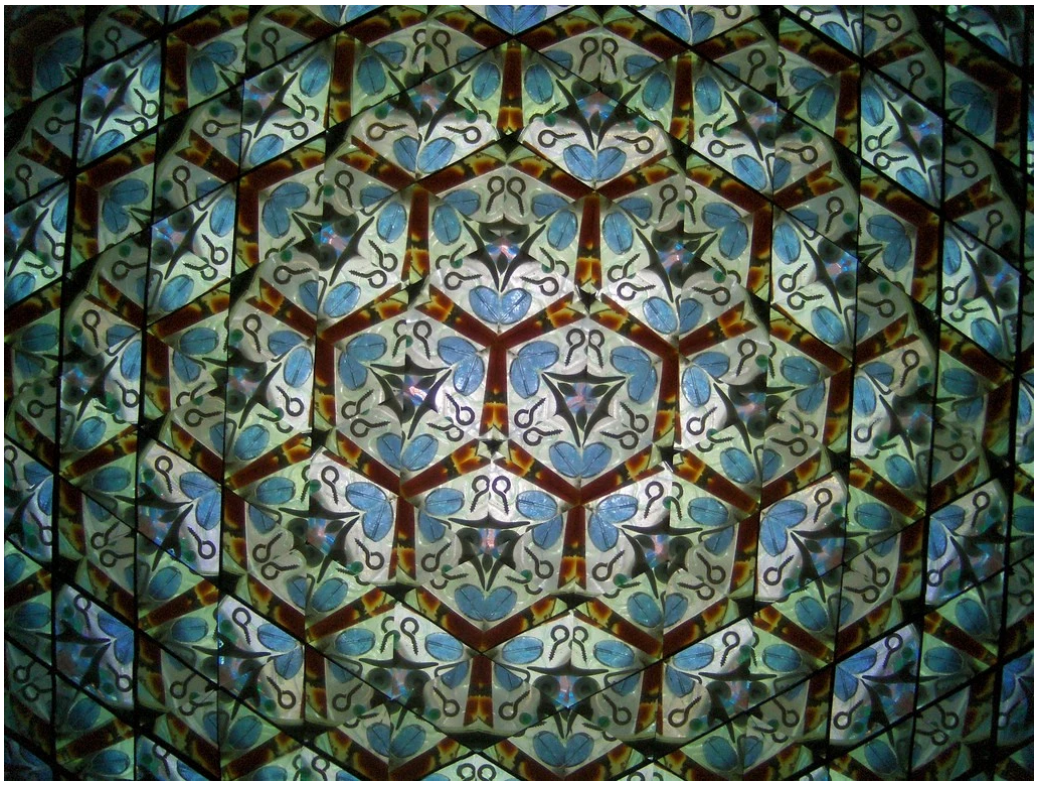
Collidoscope: Of Segmented Markets, Intimate Relationships and War

BY JAHNAVI SEN ON 21/09/2016 • LEAVE A COMMENT

This week's selection from the world of social science research.



Credit: Alice/Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

A friend once told me about a fascination for kaleidoscopes that she never outgrew. She collects them even today – and it isn't hard to understand why. There's something very cool about one thing looking so different, just with a slight shake of the hand.

Looking at things from different perspectives is also a lot of what social science does, then bringing them together in conversations and debates. *Collidoscope* is *The Wire*'s new weekly newsletter on social science research, bringing together different views and ways of understanding and analysing society. Every Wednesday at 10 am, you can receive a curated update on who-is-saying-what in the world of social science research by subscribing here (http://thewire.us11.list-manage1.com/subscribe?u=6b988b13445248b1268a308f2&id=d8c270ffe8).

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Malawi's internal borders

A local market in Malawi. Credit: IFPRI Images/Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Do ethnically diverse societies fare worse on the growth front than those which are homogeneous? And if so, what could that possibly have to do with the price of corn?

There have been efforts to explain the relation between diversity and development before, and find causal links – macroeconomic policy distortions, not enough public goods and so on. In an article in *World Development*, 'Internal Borders: Ethnic-Based Market Segmentation in Malawi', Amanda Lea Robinson has a different suggestion (http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X15305830).

Using Malawi as a case study, Robinson argues that markets and the way they function have a lot to do with this – ethnic segregation and intra-ethnicity trust mean that inter-ethnic trading is reduced, leading to segmentation and agricultural markets that run on ethnic lines. Through the supply chain all the way to the final buyer, ethnic differences govern how markets function, she writes.

Research in the past has suggested that markets within ethnically-diverse Malawi are poorly integrated and that the lack of intra-ethnic trust is one of the reasons this happens. To add to this, Robinson suggests that the patterns of markets segmentation are at least partly because of the geographical distribution of different ethnic groups.

For her study, Robinson combined data on 14 years of monthly maize prices across 70 markets with census data on the spatial segregation of ethnic groups. She then used maize price differentials as a function of the degree of ethnic difference between the markets, while controlling for the distance between them.

Her results support the previously-made argument (and intuitive conclusion) that ethnic differences do mean barriers to trade. Not only is there segmentation between markets pairs with no ethnic overlap, she found, there is a similar degree of segmentation between ethnically identical markets separated by an additional 211 km. The degree of cultural differences between ethnic groups also makes a affects market segmentation, according to her results, though ethnic divides given primacy in national-level conflicts do not.

To understand more about individual behavioural patterns, Robinson did interviews with farmers and traders in three markets situated at "ethnic borders". These patterns support the data she analysed. "The same tribes will trust each other more. Like these if they are both Yao they will trust each other more and do more business while these other are different and they cannot trust each other," a maize trader told her.

Also pointing to how the entire supply chain is impacted by ethnic differences, a farmer told her that "when you go to the market sometimes you ask a price from a Yao trader and they do not treat you well. So we do avoid them."

People Robinson spoke to understood the constraints the lack of inter-ethnic trust put on them, from lending and credit facilities to trade. "Because we can give credit to each other [within our tribal group] while others we cannot, we trade more because more money circulates," a trader said. In times of hardship, ethnic connections are also a form of insurance: "people of the same group trade more in maize because when there is famine you cannot buy maize from the Yao's area. You will go to your own group," a farmer said.

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The political economy of intimacy

Credit: Jen. Y/Flickr CC BY 2.0

What is love's work? Who do we care for, but, more importantly, who cares for us?

That's what Emma Dowling looked at in a fascinating article (http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2499-love-s-labour-s-cost-the-political-economy-of-intimacy) on the Verso Books blog 'Love's Labour's Cost: The Political Economy of Intimacy'. In both the traditional, heteronormative tradition of 'love' and 'the one' and today's neoliberal, individualist notions of looking out for yourself and being 'free', there's barely room to think about the social structure of relationships, Dowling argues.

There's been a lot of blows to the idea of "ideal" heteronormative relationships lately – not only from social change and sexual revolutions, but also from the development of neoliberalism, Dowling says in her article. Women have entered the world of (paid) work, so their reproductive roles in the home have had to be reassigned – to nannies, domestic workers, even sex workers.

Not everything has changed, though, Dowling writes: "And for many, the ideal of romantic love remains premised on care, played out in a

lifetime of caring for each other into old age and facing together the realities of material necessity. The promise of economic security of the reproductive deal transposed onto the affective register of what it means to love and be loved: salvation, surrender, resolution."

The neoliberal ideal of individualism also means that we are constantly told to care for *ourselves*. For women, that's an even bigger deal – being told that it's okay for your priority to be *you* and not someone else. But how liberating is that, really?

Along with the individualism comes the neoliberal imperative to accumulate, Dowling writes. With financialisation, everyone, not just women, is supposed to invest in themselves – that's what will lead to salvation. As she puts it, we are told we have to care for ourselves because that's all we've got.

This investment isn't all financial – it's time, money, effort all spent to become a better version of yourself. But who measures that 'better'? Measurable targets begin to define our self-worth, whether it is at work, home, in the gym or online, Dowling writes. In this scenario, "our sense of control over our own lives *seems* to intensify, but at the same time, there is also feels like it becomes ever-more elusive as we are drawn in more and more into a world which promises to help us (re)gain it".

This works the same way even when it comes to work, Dowling argues. "When it comes to love, the ideology of work sees us striving, not just to find, but to *be* better lovers. Mess is unattractive; emotional inadequacy an obstacle to gratification. We want to experience intimacy and have interpersonal relationships where we don't project our 'messiness', the unresolved traumas and dramas, onto other people. … When we buy into this idea of autonomous agents in relationships, we erase the emotional and affective labour that goes into forging, constructing and maintaining them. We erase the fact that relationships happen *between* people, they are shared, they are a being-in-relation. We don't just work stuff out with and for ourselves, we work through and on each other. But we need to take a closer look at what work is being done, how and by whom."

So who does this work? Who bears this cost? And, more importantly, why should we care?

Women often find themselves performing more emotional labour in the political economy of intimacy, meaning that the gendered reproductive deal is preserved even if transformed. Women of colour, working-class women and queer and trans people are also more likely to be constrained in their expressions of "freedom", whether in a relationship or otherwise. And that, Dowling says, means that "while agency and choice should be affirmed, this must not happen by ignoring the gendered, racialised and classed complexities of living in this society. … We must ask who performs the work, who is able to express their needs and desires and whose desires get heard and enabled."

And what then? Once we've recognised emotional labour? We challenge the way the work is organised and distributed, Dowling argues, and build a movement of resistance.

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War increases social cooperation

A scene from Syria. Credit: Reuters/Muzaffar Salman

> "While the human costs of war are horrific, there may at least be some reason for optimism once the violence ends."

It's hard to imagine that people have been looking for positive outcomes of war – because really, why would you? But this isn't a new phenomena. Through the history of social science, scholars from different disciplines have provided different perspectives on the outcomes of war – the political, social, historical, economic legacies that wars left behind, some of which, in the long-run, can be classified positive.

In an article in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Michal Bauer, Christopher Blattman, Julie Chytilová, Joseph Henrich, Edward Miguel and Tamar Mitts look into whether wars do, in fact, strengthen social cooperation (https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.30.3.249) as others have stated.

Looking at a number of social, anthropological and political studies over the years and individual surveys from seven countries, the authors find that wars do increase social cooperation and altruism. This behaviour continues after the war. In fact, they found, such behaviour often increases with time. People exposed to war situations tend to take up more community leadership roles, join social groups and act altruistically.

Why does this social change happen? The authors' provide a range of explanations. Of course there's the shock of what a community has gone through together, tying them closer in a shared horror. Belief in local norms and social participation then becomes something of a lifeline, they argue. It is also sometimes the case that the trauma, depression, anxiety and other negative impacts of the war are more easily understood by those in close proximity, making the social unit stronger.

Why does this matter? Looking at a devastated post-war society, if it is true that the barriers of individualism are somewhat melted, the argument for heavy community participation in rebuilding efforts becomes even stronger. Instead of looking at a post-war country as a

collection of 'victims', what you have is a social group (or several) willing to work together. If policy measures are asked of them rather than thrown at them, it could, perhaps, make all the difference.

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Feeling the heat: Can TV ads change how we act?

Credit: PTI

Before films, on TV or in newspapers, awareness campaigns are often hard to take seriously because of their quality and obvious we're-here-to-teach-you-something look. I've often wondered whether they really have any impact at all.

Using data from a heat-wave awareness campaign in Odisha, Saudamini Das's article in *World Development* sets out to answer the following question: Do media awareness campaigns really make a difference (http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X15302576)?

The title is kind of a giveaway: 'Television is More Effective in Bringing Behavioral Change: Evidence from Heat-Wave Awareness Campaign in India'. Video media awareness campaigns, she found, were most effective in reducing heat-wave related deaths, followed by newspapers and the radio.

Odisha sees heat-wave related deaths every year, but 1998 was the worst – 2,042 people died. Since then, it has been under 100 deaths every year except 2005 and 2010. Media awareness campaigns have played a big role in the state government's heat-wave death prevention measures, using public and private TV channels, radio channels and newspapers. Decisions on where to place ads were governed by both cost and reach.

Given the difficulties of identifying a 'no media' control group, Das compares those with more access to media to those with less. Looking at data from 98 summer days in the years 2005-2012, her analysis found that the access to media campaigns does have an impact on heat-wave related deaths. It was also repeated exposure to campaigns that reduced deaths, not one-time ads. In addition, she argues, TV and newspaper ads are much more effective than radio.

According to Das, Odisha's heat-wave awareness campaign saw some level of success because it used the local vernacular, clearly mentioned what people should do and required no additional skills for the directions to be followed. Good to know for those planning campaigns in the future.

That's it for this week! If you liked what you read, please consider subscribing (http://thewire.us11.list-manage1.com/subscribe?u=6b988b13445248b1268a308f2&id=d8c270ffe8) to this weekly newsletter.

If you have any comments or suggestions on what could be carried in this column, write to me at jahnavi@thewire.in

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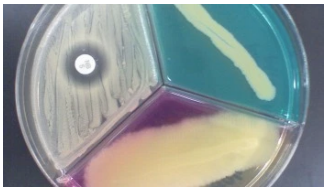

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