

What binds us together?

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What binds people together and turns them into a society? In an ambitious book, the sociologist Serge Paugam wrestles with this question, while bringing sociology into conversation with psychology.

Reviewed: Serge Paugam, *L'attachement social. Formes et fondements de la solidarité humaine* (Social Attachment: Forms and Foundations of Human Solidarity), Éditions du Seuil, 2023. 640 p., 27 €.

In his new book, Serge Paugam revisits the fundamental question of sociology: what binds humans together? What makes them a society? For Paugam, the answer lies in the forms of attachment that humans develop over the entire course of their lives: attachment to one's family, to those to whom they have chosen to be close, to their colleagues and work environment, to their country. It will come as no surprise that Paugam, by analyzing the elementary forms of social attachment, aligns himself with Durkheimian sociology. He claims that a theory of social bonds cannot rest on the analysis of two forms of solidarity (mechanical vs. organic) but that a sociological theory of social attachment must be founded be based on the various kinds of morality that tie individuals together.¹

¹ Unless we are mistaken, Paugam never cites the following passage from Émile Durkheim's *Moral Education*, which strengthens and completes his thesis: morality "consists in his attachment to those social groups of which he is a member ... Since, in fact, man is complete only as he belongs to several societies, morality itself is only complete to the extent that we feel identified with those different groups in which we are involved--family, union, business, club, political party, country, humanity" (trans. Everett K. Wilson and Herman Schnurer, New York, Free Press, 1968, p. 80).

This thesis explains Paugam's shift--which is sufficiently rare, for a sociologist, to be noteworthy--from sociology to psychosociology² and specifically his use of the work of John Bowlby³ and his followers on imprinting and attachment, concepts that Paugam seeks to relate to Bourdieu's theory of the habitus (pp. 71 and 82).

The first part of the book lays down its theoretical foundations. This section is particularly rich, as it draws on a diverse array of authors, including Durkheim, Weber, Tönnies, Elias, and Halbwachs, as well as more recent scholars--including, of course, Bowlby and his followers. Next, Paugam revisits the typology of social bonds that clearly constitutes the heart of his system⁴: bonds of filiation, bonds of elective participation, bonds of organic participation, and bonds of citizenship. "Bonds of filiation" are based on affective recognition and intergenerational solidarity. For "bonds of elective participation", protection and recognition are rooted in personal connections (between friends, acquaintances, and so on). "Bonds of organic participation" are based on the contractual protections associated with stable employment and (material and symbolic) recognition at work. Finally, "bonds of citizenship" arise from membership in a nation, which entails legal protection (that is, rights) and recognition of the sovereignty of the individual.

Each of these social bonds can be defined according to two dimensions: recognition and protection. The connection between these two dimensions makes it possible to identify four configurations: bonds that are liberating (entailing both recognition and protection), bonds that weaken (recognition without protection), bonds that are oppressive (protection without recognition) and broken bonds (entailing neither recognition nor protection).

In an approach that resembles Gøsta Esping-Andersen's in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*,⁵ Paugam distinguishes the four dominant social forms of attachment in contemporary society: the familial regime, the voluntarist regime, the

² Paugam returns to this connection on pp. 590 and following

³ John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vol. 1. *Attachment: Attachment and Loss*, New York, Basic Books, 1969; vol. 2, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger*, New York, Basic Books, 1973; vol. 3. *Loss: Sadness and Depression*, New York, Basic Books, 1980.

⁴ It is worth recalling that Paugam is the founder and director of the "Lien social" series at the Presses Universitaires de France.

⁵ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990; see, too, Esping-Andersen (ed.), 1996, *Welfare States in Transition, National Adaptations in Global Economies*, London, Sage (2006).

organicist regime, and the universalist regime. Every society is an unequal combination of these four types of bonds. Depending on which type of bond dominates in each society, it can be classified as more or less *familial*, *voluntarist*, *organicist*, or *universalistic*.

Based on international statistical data relating to 34 countries on five continents, Paugam, in collaboration with a Swiss team led by Christian Suter, attempts to identify the attachment regimes that are distinct Europe, North America, South America, and Asia⁶ (chapter 11). This complex comparative research results in the classification of France as a predominantly organicist regime, the United States and the United Kingdom as primarily voluntarist, and Latin American countries as largely familial, while Scandinavian countries are more in line with the universalistic regime.

This summary of the architecture of this big book of 600 pages does not do justice to its author's analyses. Of this very dense work, we wish to emphasize the passages in which Paugam builds on his earlier work devoted to disqualified labor and the process of socially disqualification tied to receiving state assistance, which affects entire sectors of French society.⁷ Due to an "inability to imagine a future and social status that, on the prestige scale, is constantly deemed inferior" (p. 250), these people are now described as "living off social assistance," a phrase prefiguring the policing of the poor.⁸ Also remarkable is the book's analysis of social movements as mechanisms for strengthening social bonds, with particular emphasis on the Yellow Vest movement. Chapter 10 contains a wonderful examination of how public space can be both a useful resource and a form of oppression, as seen in its analysis of public libraries' limited resources for the homeless or its discussion of familialism in the global south and its illuminating discussion of social dynamics in Japan as well as the United States, Chili, Argentina, and Brazil.

As they are necessarily based on limited data, the results of the international comparative analysis are, however, open to discussion. This is the case, for instance, of its claims about the typically "organicist" character of French society. The analysis reveals more about the role of the social welfare state than the centrality of work relations. One would expect Germany, rather than France, to exemplify organicism. More generally, the typological approach risks obscuring the internal contradictions of various regimes. Some of these contradictions are lasting, while others emerge with

⁶ Paugam addresses Africa, but only South Africa. This makes the consideration of Africa not particularly relevant, for any number of reasons.

⁷ See our article, "Misère de l'assistance," *La vie des idées*, March 30, 2022

⁸ See Pierre Dubois, *Contrôler les assistés. Genèses et usages d'un mot d'ordre*. Raisons d'agir, 2021.

social change. The different parts of the book devoted to different national attachment regimes sometimes creates the impression that all change necessarily occurs according to Paugam's models.⁹ This methodological angle sometimes results in debatable conclusions. We will limit ourselves to two examples: the analysis of the politics of the *Bolsa Família* in Br sil and the discussion of the development of the North universalistic model, against the background of anti-immigrant policies.

Does *Bolsa Família* (BF) belong to the clientelist tradition of familial societies or, to the contrary, does it break with the political and cultural legacy of Brazilian society.? BF is an example of an innovative social program that combines social handouts and family commitments (such as the requirement that children attend school) that was born in Latin America (*Progresas* in Mexico since 1997, BF in Brazil since 2003) before being imitated throughout South America and many "emerging" countries. Despite their diversity, "conditional cash transfer" programs were promoted from the outset as a break with the clientelist practices of social assistance in southern countries, and subsequently for their effectiveness as means for fighting poverty.¹⁰ While Paugam does not reject the *Bolsa Família*'s effects, he does not hesitate to write that that the BF perpetuates "ancestral reproduction of practices that establish a relationship of domination between local elites and the poor" (p. 473) and that it lends itself to political and electoral use of social assistance Determining BF status depends, in part, on personal relationships between the beneficiaries and elected officials or candidates in political elections." (p. 470). This analysis is based on a single source, a doctoral thesis defended at EHESS (in Paris) devoted to the municipality of Cear  in northeastern Brazil. Generalizing the findings of a local study should be done very prudently. There is an extensive body of scholarly literature that seeks to measure BF's political and electoral effects. This literature by no means confirms Paugam's thesis. While some studies tend to confirm that *Bolsa Família* results in the political cooption of its beneficiaries (Hall, 2008), others conclude that its political impact is nil or nonexistent (Layton, Donagby, Renno, 2017; Correa and Cheibub, 2016; Bohn, 2011).¹¹ Paugam's claim and the resulting analyses seem, to put it mildly, tenuous.

⁹ It is perhaps relevant here to mention Raymond Aron's critique of  mile Durkheim: "for the notion of society as a complete and integral unit we must substitute the notion of social groups coexisting within every complex society. [One must recognize] the plurality of social groups and the conflict of moral ideas." *Main Currents of Sociological Thought*, vol. 2, Durkheim, Pareto, Weber, translated by Richard Howard and Helen Weaver, London and New York, Routledge, 1970 p. 79.

¹⁰ F.-X. Merrien (2013), "Social Protection as Development Policy: A New International Agenda for Action," *International Development Policy*, 5(1), 69-88.

¹¹ Matthew L. Layton, Maureen M. Donaghy and L cio R. Renn , "Does Welfare Provision Promote Democratic State Legitimacy? Evidence from Brazil's Bolsa Fam lia Program," *Latin American Politics*

Secondly, the analysis of recent transformations in societies deemed universalistic (Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden) also raises questions. The universalistic regime appears, in Paugam's typology of attachment forms, as the most developed form of citizenship. It is characterized by high levels of citizenship, civic-mindedness, equality, universal social protection, and pluralistic and consensual democracy. Consistent with his method, Paugam seeks to account for the historical genesis of social-democratic universalism by emphasizing historical continuity. Yet how can one reconcile the principle of universalism with the radical anti-immigrant turn taken by Nordic societies in recent years? Paugam is not unaware of the change in public policies in these countries. He does not neglect them. He writes that "one of the delicate points in the modern conception of social-democratic solidarity concerns the handling of immigration" (p. 578), and observes that Nordic countries have now embraced "what one might call a minimalist version of the universalist principle" (p. 580). A further question seems in order: can one describe as universalistic a regime that "privileges the protection of nationals and is only parsimoniously and selectively open to populations from elsewhere"? Once countries transform attachment to the national community into a xenophobic desire to reject non-Western foreigners and to fall back on their own national identity, they have abandoned universalism. Reading the passage in which Paugam compares integration policies in France and Finland makes one feel uneasy. While one might share his conclusion that the French policy is minimal, it is difficult to share his enthusiasm for the efforts of Finnish social workers to integrate migrant women and to "take them from their relative marginality to full-fledged citizenship" (p. 581), or for his view that the contemporary social policies of Nordic countries towards migrant populations should be "an inspiration for countries like France" (p. 582).

Does the concept of universalism need to be reexamined? Let us simply recall that, historically speaking, the desire to establish a community of similar people has occasionally led the Nordic people to mistakes, which are now acknowledged and

and Society, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Winter 2017), p. 99-120; Diego Sanches Corrêa, and José Antonio Cheibub, (2016) "The Anti-Incumbent Effects of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs," *Latin American Politics and Society* 58, 1: 49-71 ; Simone R. Bohn (2011) "Social Policy and Vote in Brazil: Bolsa Família and the Shifts in Lula's Electoral Base," *Latin American Research Review* 46, 54-79; Anthony Hall (2008), Brazil's Bolsa Família: A Double-Edged Sword? *Development and Change* 39, 5: 799-82.

denounced. Hence "the Nordic countries' universalist aspirations" authorized decades of large-scale eugenicist policies (from 1929 to 1977).¹²

Despite the scholarly controversies that some passages might provoke, Paugam's book is a major work that deserved to be read and discussed. Drawing on earlier, more focused studies,¹³ Paugam has written a vast sociological treatise in which he does not hesitate to grapple in a very pedagogical way with some of the most contemporary sociological theories: the sociology of habitus, network theory, social capital, and so on. The book can also be read as a testimonial to his intellectual and research trajectory, in which Paugam does not hesitate to draw on his personal impressions from trips to Sao Paulo (p. 467, 489), Córdoba (p. 438), Buenos Aires (p. 439), and Finland (p. 581).

For these reasons, we can only recommend this book to sociology students and their professors.

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¹² In August 1997, the major Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter revealed that between 1935 and 1976, 63,000 people were sterilized in Sweden, including: 9,000 sterilizations of disabled people, without their consent; 13,000 to 14,000 sterilizations for "intellectual deficiency"; 4,000 sterilizations of women for "eugenicist" reasons following an abortion. In Norway, 44,000 sterilizations took place between 1934 and 1977. In Finland, nearly 58,000 occurred between 1935 and 1970. In Denmark, too, several thousand people were sterilized due to laws passed in 1934 and 1935 (concerning voluntary sterilization). See Patrick Zylberman, "Eugénique à la scandinave: le débat des historiens," *Histoire et sciences sociales*, Med Sci (Paris) 2004; 20: 916–925). Outside the Nordic countries, Switzerland, another country that has affinities with the universalistic attachment regime, also played a pioneering role in the propagation of eugenicist ideas and policies. According to Horizons, the Swiss magazine for scientific research: "from the early twentieth century through the 1970s, eugenics manifested itself in Switzerland in official procedures, in cantonal laws, as well as in various concrete measures ranging from consultations for sexual matters to sterilization" (no. 72, March 2007).

¹³ Serge Paugam, *La disqualification sociale. Essai sur la nouvelle pauvreté*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1991; *La société française et ses pauvres. L'expérience du revenu minimum d'insertion* (1993); *Le salarié de la précarité. Les nouvelles formes de l'intégration professionnelle* (2000); *Les formes élémentaires de la pauvreté* (2005); *Le lien social* (2018).