

# GLOBAL DIALOGUE

## Real Utopias for a Global Sociology

Erik Olin Wright

## Development as Justice: A Real Utopia from India

Kalpana Kannabiran

## Confronting Water Injustice

José Esteban Castro

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NEWSLETTER

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Association



## > Editorial

Sociology has always attempted to defatalize and denaturalize the present, demonstrating that the world could be otherwise. Thus, in this fifth issue of *Global Dialogue* we begin with a discussion of 'real utopias,' an idea advanced by Erik Wright which refers to existing institutions that pose some challenge to the logic of capitalism. The articles that follow illustrate the idea of real utopias: Kalpana Kannabiran writes about a real utopia from India – development as justice; Teresa Sordé and Tatiana Santos describe recent experiments in participatory democracy in Spain, while José Esteban Castro writes about water justice in Latin America. Distinguished sociologists of labor take the idea of 'real utopia' in a different direction, also contributing to our on-going debate about global sociology by exploring the notion of 'counter-hegemonic globalization.' Thus, Edward Webster discusses global labor movements as seen from South Africa, Pun Ngai as seen from China and Enrique de la Garza as seen from Mexico. Farid Alatas covers a much anticipated Middle East conference in Tehran, and Ana Vidu reports on an energetic conference of young sociologists in Barcelona, while Nadia Asheulova and Jaime Jiménez report on RC23's celebration of Robert Merton, the great sociologist of science. Special columns deal with: the threat to academic freedom when universities collaborate in counter-terrorism; the history of the bicameral structure of the ISA; and with cowdung sampling in tropical Africa. Finally, we start a new column that introduces our different editorial teams across the globe. In this regard I'm delighted to welcome a team of young sociologists from Tehran who will be translating *Global Dialogue* into Persian – our tenth language.

*Global Dialogue* can be found on [Facebook](#), and at the [ISA website](#).



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of alternative institutions and structures; and third, the development of a theory of transformation which tells us how to get from here to there. The study of real utopias is one way of approaching the second of these tasks.

The *utopia* in “real utopia” means thinking about alternatives to dominant institutions in ways that embody our deepest aspirations for a just and human world. This is fundamentally a moral issue: figuring out the moral standards by which institutions should be judged and exploring how alternative institutional arrangements might more fully realize those values. The *real* in “real utopia” also explores alternatives to dominant institutions, but focuses on problems of unintended consequences and self-destructive dynamics. What we need are clear-headed, rigorous models of *viable* alternatives to existing social institutions that both embody our deepest aspirations for human flourishing and also take seriously the problem of the practical design of workable institutions – and thus are attentive to what it takes to bring those aspirations to the real world.

Exploring real utopias implies developing a sociology of the *possible*, not just of the *actual*. But how can we do this without falling into idle armchair speculation? One of the most fruitful strategies is to identify actually existing social settings that violate the basic logics of dominant institutions in ways that embody emancipatory aspirations and prefigure broader utopian alternatives. The task of research is to see how these cases work and identify the ways in which they facilitate human flourishing; to analyze their limitations, dilemmas and unintended consequences; and to understand ways of developing their potentials and enlarging their reach. The temptation in such research is to be a cheerleader, uncritically extolling the virtues of promising experiments. The danger is to be a cynic, seeing the flaws as the only reality and the potential as an illusion.

The study of inspiring empirical cases, however, is only part of the agenda of real utopias. Focusing exclusively on empirical cases tends to narrow the conception of alternatives to specific kinds of institutions, often at a fairly micro-level of social organization. We also

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## > Real Utopias for a Global Sociology

by Erik Olin Wright, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Erik Wright is President-Elect of the American Sociological Association and the theme of his Presidency will be “envisioning real utopias,” which is also the title of his latest book. I assigned him the task of explaining in less than 1500 words what he means by real utopias and what is their relevance for global sociology. Do you think he passed?

The idea of *real utopia* is rooted in what might be termed the foundational claim of all forms of critical sociology: we live in a world in which many forms of human suffering and many deficits in human flourishing are the result of the way our social structures and institutions are organized. Poverty in the midst of plenty

does not reflect some unalterable law of nature; it is the result of the way the existing social organization of power and inequality massively affects the possibilities for human flourishing. This foundational claim suggests three central tasks for a critical sociology: first, the diagnosis of the social causes of these harms; second, the elaboration

need an understanding that “another world is possible” at the macro-level of the functioning of social systems as a whole. In the past that kind of discussion revolved around the epochal contrast between capitalism and socialism. To explore this kind of system-level alternative requires more abstract theoretical analysis of different models of social and economic structures. A fully developed sociology of real utopias integrates the concrete empirical investigation of institutions that prefigure emancipatory alternatives with such abstract theoretical discussions of the principles underlying alternative systems.

In this short essay there is not space to elaborate this full agenda. What we can do is put some flesh on the bare-bones idea of studying real utopias by examining two illustrative empirical cases. Each of these cases embodies, if still in partial and incomplete ways, the utopian vision of radical, democratic egalitarian alternatives to existing institutions. The first comes from the Global South; the second from the Global North.

### >Urban Participatory Budgeting

The idea of a ‘direct democracy’ in which citizens personally participate in making democratic decisions within a political assembly seems, to most people, hopelessly impractical in a complex modern society. The development of what has come to be known as ‘participatory budgeting’ is a sharp, real utopian challenge to that conventional wisdom. Here is the basic story: Participatory budgeting was introduced almost by accident in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989. Porto Alegre is a city of around one and a half million inhabitants in the south-east corner of the country. In late 1988, after long years of military dictatorship and a period of transition to democracy, a left-wing party won the mayoral election in the city but did not control the city council, and thus faced the prospect of having four years in office without being able to do much to advance its progressive political program.

Faced with this situation, the activists in the party asked the classic question, what is to be done? Their answer was a remarkable institutional innovation: the participatory budget, a novel budget-making system anchored in the

direct participation of ordinary citizens. Instead of the budget being formulated from the top down, Porto Alegre is divided into regions each of which has a participatory budget assembly. There are also a number of city-wide budget assemblies on various themes of interest to the entire municipality – cultural festivals, for example, or public transportation. The mandate for each of these participatory budget assemblies is to formulate concrete budget proposals, particularly for infrastructure projects of one sort or another. Any resident of the city can participate in these assemblies and vote on the proposals. After ratifying these regional and thematic budgets, the assemblies choose delegates to participate in a city-wide budget council for a few months until a coherent, consolidated city budget is adopted.

The participatory budget has been functioning effectively in Porto Alegre since the early 1990s. In some years the budget process is vibrant, actively involving thousands of residents in city budget deliberations; in other years, especially when discretionary spending is limited, participation declines. By all accounts the participatory budget has contributed to invigorating public involvement in city affairs and redirecting city spending towards the needs of the poor and disadvantaged rather than of elites. Overall, then, the participatory budget has opened a space for an expansion and deepening of democracy beyond the limits of what had been thought possible.

In the years since the invention of the participatory budget in Porto Alegre, there have been over 1000 cities around the world in which some form of participatory budgeting has been tried. This is an instance in which a real utopia innovation in the Global South has migrated to the developed regions of the world.

### >Wikipedia

Imagine that in 2000, before Wikipedia existed, someone proposed to produce, within ten years, an encyclopedia with about 3.5 million English entries which would be of sufficient quality that it would become the first place to which millions of people would turn to get basic information on a very wide range of

topics. Then suppose that this person proposed the following institutional design for producing and distributing the encyclopedia: (1) the entries would be written and edited by hundreds of thousands of people around the world without pay; (2) anyone could be an editor and anyone could edit any entry in the encyclopedia; (3) access to the encyclopedia would be free to anyone in the world. Impossible! To imagine hundreds of thousands of people cooperating to produce a fairly high quality encyclopedia without pay and then distributing it at no charge flies in the face of economic theory that insists such widespread cooperation needs monetary incentives and hierarchy in order to be effective. Wikipedia is a profoundly egalitarian, anti-capitalist way of producing and sharing knowledge. It is based on the communist principle “to each according to need, from each according to ability.” It is organized on the central principles of horizontal reciprocities rather than hierarchical control. And, in less than a decade, it has basically destroyed the commercial market in encyclopedias that had existed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Wikipedia is the most familiar example of a new form of noncapitalist, non-market production that has emerged in the digital age: peer-to-peer, collaborative, noncommercial production. These new forms of production, in turn, are closely connected to a number of other real utopian dimensions of the information economy, such as the creative commons, copyleft licensing, and open-source software. What remains to be seen, of course, is the extent to which these new forms will be corrosive of conventional capitalist forms of intellectual property rights, or simply increase the diversity of economic forms within a dominant capitalist economy.

These two examples illustrate the basic idea of social alternatives that run counter to the dominant ways of organizing power and inequality in contemporary institutions. These – and many other – examples open up new spaces for more egalitarian and democratic forms of social interaction. They reflect utopian aspirations for transformed conditions for human flourishing, yet they also seek ways of embodying those aspirations in real institutions. Understanding such possibilities is the point of the real utopias agenda. ■

# > Development as Justice: A Real Utopia from India

by Kalpana Kannabiran, Council for Social Development, Hyderabad, ISA Program Committee



Adivasis protesting in front of the governor's house against displacement in Jharkhand.

**I**n India the dense discourse of development is as internally diverse, ironically, as the stunning biodiversity of our forests, hills and forested lands, though not anywhere near as energizing as these might be if conserved. Rather than follow a path through this discourse, I will attempt to trace some connections that emerge from my work with adivasi communities and our collective engagements with the Constitution and law in the course of this work.

For a start, there are several ways of approaching 'development.' The dominant associations of the term are: 'displacement,' 'big dams,' 'environmental degradation,' 'green revolution,' 'economic growth,' mining, armed occupation, the appropriation of indigenous knowledge, trade liberalization and globalization. Somewhat muffled by the juggernaut of this 'development' – both its practice and importantly, the resistance to it – is the 'other development' associated with sustainability, permaculture, environmental protection, the nurturing of ecological systems and traditional knowledge systems. Included here are the small, yet determined, struggles across the Indian subcontinent to find survival, voice and visibility – the resistance

to POSCO, Vedanta, Narmada, Polavaram; and the resistance in Chhattisgarh and Manipur, among others. The list is a book in itself.

If we use the frameworks of this 'other development' as our point of departure, it can scarcely be contested that pluralism and diversity (of all life forms) should lie at its core. A close look at the struggles for survival and dignity by communities and practitioners of the 'other development' (pardon the clumsiness of this formulation, but it is quite systematically othered and distanced from the norm), underscores the practical unattainability of justice as its core problem. While it is important to look at development as freedom, and to map carefully the ways in which development may be achieved through the realization of capabilities (see the enormous corpus of writings especially by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen), it is necessary also to re-examine the barriers to freedom and the realization of capabilities in their historical and social specificity; it is imperative to understand the ways in which our social order engenders the development of underdevelopment and unfreedom (to recall a much older debate).

Among adivasi communities, there are more than 500 scheduled tribes recognized under Article 342 of the Constitution of India, that are spread across the country with the exception of the states of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Pondicherry and Chandigarh. Central and North East India have the largest concentrations of adivasi communities, the proportion being over fifty percent in the states of the North East, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Of these, roughly 75 are described as Primitive Tribal Groups [PTGs] in official discourse, a description that is ostensibly based on habitat, economy and population size – but one that is also a stigmatizing descriptor.

Non-discrimination and liberty take on a very distinctive resonance for adivasis. Nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, as well as pastoralists and tribes engaged in hunting, food gathering and shifting cultivation, require the guarantee of the freedom of movement with the right to a mobile territoriality. Tribes living in areas recognized under Schedules V and VI of the Indian constitution require the right to remain in these areas without fear of eviction, assuring them of the freedom not to move. Persons belonging to tribes listed in the Schedule who live in non-scheduled areas have no guarantees of protection of their homelands, even though these might have existed for generations.

In all these cases, the right to liberty is expressed in terms of definitions of territoriality – homelands that could be mobile or fixed, but they confer a particular identity on its people, enabling distinct livelihood practices. Relations of land have been at the core of the adivasi engagement with the law and the constitution – both in the case of the peasant and non-peasant communities – so that major victories have been won through taking struggles into courts of law.

Since a majority of adivasi communities are forest dwellers, the homeland issue is not limited to land, but extends to their presence in the entire forestscape. Accordingly, the concerns of these communities are not limited to livelihood and residence alone, but spread out over issues of ecology, environment, conservation, regeneration and knowledge systems that are all part of the political economy of the forest. Because of their close connection to forest life, they are easy targets of wildlife protection and forest conservation authorities and groups.

Their location in the forestscape gives rise to struggles around governance, autonomy and self-determination, as well as forest rights – struggles that pose a threat to the conception of sovereignty held by the neo-liberal developmental state. Yet, it is the very defense of autonomy – expressed in the adivasi slogan “maava naate maava raaj” [our land, our rule] but also in Schedules V and VI of the Indian Constitution – that specifically protects adivasi homelands and provide the language, tools and strategies to counter the callous, hegemonic and violent sovereignty that tries to limit the reach of the constitution.

Adivasis also increasingly find themselves pitted against a powerful lobby in the Supreme Court, which is located at an insurmountable physical and social distance from them. They have nevertheless asserted their right with a

tenacity that has been their primary inheritance across generations – although the popular imagination tends to stigmatize them as “simple,” and “lacking in guile.”

The *Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act* of 1996 (hereafter PESA) and the *Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act* of 2006 (*Forest Rights Act*) are designed to regulate governance and political autonomy. As such they became the lightning rod of intense struggles and deliberations by adivasi networks across the country. In an important sense, the debates around these acts represent an exercise in popular and even transformative constitutionalism.

**“... it is productive to use constitutionalism to promote the close connection of development and justice.”**

For adivasis to enjoy the right to non-discrimination under the Constitution of India, the right to liberty must translate into freedom from internal colonization, a right that was affirmed on paper in 1950, the year the constitution came into force. It is therefore apt to situate PESA and FRA within the framework of constitutional morality. For Ambedkar, the great defender of popular and constitutional rights, the peaceful working of a democratic Constitution required a “form of administration [...] appropriate to and in the same sense as the form of the Constitution.”

We can now restate the question: How does discrimination produce exclusion from development conceived of in terms of justice? It is this multi-layered context of discrimination and intersecting multiplicity of oppressions that needs to be reckoned with in constructing an idea of development. Given the specific and increasing manifestations of discrimination and its self-perpetuating tendency, the idea of development must not remain, as it has for the most part been in the past, a counter-constitutional project, but enter the field of constitutionalism and proliferate its tools. Although the field of justice may be opened up in many different ways, it is productive to use constitutionalism to promote the close connection of development and justice. What aspects of constitutionalism are indispensable for this idea of development as justice? If we agree that pluralism and diversity without prejudice are *ideally* the pulse of a vibrant and just society, and therefore central to the idea of development, how does the constitution speak to this imperative?

The constitutional approach frames development as a bounded endeavor in which justice and freedom are spatially and socially hedged in and held together by the democratic state – responsible for protection against harm, for distribution of goods and for the realization of capabilities, in short a key repository of constitutional morality. These are not responsibilities easily or willingly borne by any government, but they are undeniably the responsibility of the state that can discipline governments, especially when subject to pressures from movements for civil liberties and adivasi rights. ■

## > History Corner: National Associations and Research Committees

by Jennifer Platt, ISA Vice-President for  
Publications

**N**ational Associations are collective members of the ISA, and Research Committees are also a vital part of its internal structure, but their functions have changed considerably over time. When the ISA was founded in 1949, under the auspices of UNESCO, the United Nations model of national representation was used. Few national sociological associations existed at that time. That changed rapidly, as countries were encouraged to create them, and by 1959, 35 associations had joined. The ISA's governing Council consisted of representatives of the member countries, and they elected the Executive Committee (EC) from among themselves. This had a Research subcommittee (RC), which decided to start work on issues of social stratification and mobility. By the late 1950s, however, this had proliferated research into other fields, such as the family, by what were notionally its sub-committees. Each remained, however, a small working group, recruited by invitation, with no more than two members from the same country.

Over time RCs came to be seen as more actively internationalist, and therefore meriting a more salient role. In 1970, important constitutional changes both opened up the RCs and introduced individual membership, while EC members were no longer drawn only from the governing Council. The Research Council was created, and elected four EC members to join the 11 national representatives. The more open RCs became much larger and some members were no longer currently active in research in their field, so joint RC research became less practical. Gradually the RCs became more salient in governance, and in 1994 the present structure was introduced, where RCs and National Associations each meet as a Council and vote for half of the rank and file EC members.

The RCs elected the Vice-President for Research, but this left some national representatives dissatisfied with their limited role. In 2002 it was agreed to establish a Vice-President for National Associations, and Sujata Patel was elected as the first holder of the post. This has made the national associations active once more. The two Vice-Presidents have developed a pattern of organizing a conference alongside the required meeting of their Council between World Congresses. This both allows for more effective and wider participation in ISA affairs, and also associates the structure of governance with patterns of intellectual life. The collective publications that have appeared in recent years display the new intellectual energy of this bipartite structure.

## > Celebrating Robert K. Merton

by Nadia Asheulova, Center for the Sociology of Science and Science Studies, St Petersburg Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences, RC23 Board member; and Jaime Jiménez, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, ISA Executive Committee

**T**he 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Robert Merton's birthday was celebrated in July 2010. He was one of the leading sociologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was not only this date that made us look at Robert Merton, but also the fact that his name was so closely connected with the emergence and recognition of Sociology of Science as a subfield of sociology. In 1966, Merton co-founded (with Joseph Ben-David) ISA's Research Committee 23



Robert Merton,  
1910-2003.

– Sociology of Science (and Technology), and then became its first President until 1974. He also served as Associate Member of the ISA Executive Committee in 1970-71. Merton was born in Philadelphia in 1910 of immigrant parents from the Ukraine. His name is connected with many directions of sociological research, but mainly he became the eponym for the Sociology of Science. The phrase 'Mertonian sociology of science' became widely accepted by the scientific community. Merton became the first sociologist to receive the National Medal of Science, USA's highest scientific honor, in 1994. By concentrating on 'middle range' theory – rather than grand theory or abstract empiricism – Merton established concepts that were incorporated into everyday life. He coined the concept of *self-fulfilling prophecy*, developed the idea of *role models* and created, with his colleagues, the *focused interview* that later developed into *focus groups* – a distortion of Merton's original idea. In 1942, Merton gained much attention when he described the *ethos of science*, and the consequences of these values for the behavior of scientists within institutional settings. Merton's work had consequences beyond the academia, including his study of successfully integrated communities that helped shape the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which, in turn, led to the Supreme Court's ruling to desegregate public schools in the US. Merton is probably best known for his work *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, and for his coining of the *Matthew effect* which referred to the phenomenon of *the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer*, i.e. accumulation of advantage. Biblical in origin, the concept describes the social phenomenon in science whereby power and economic or social capital accrue to those who already have them, who then leverage those resources to gain more power or capital. A special issue honoring Merton's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary was published by the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg Branch, and by RC23. ■



*Demonstration against Water Privatization at the World Social Forum in 2003.*

# > Confronting Water Injustice

by José Esteban Castro, Newcastle University (UK), ISA Program Committee

In the 1980s the United Nations 'Water Decade' had set the goal of bringing 40 liters of clean drinking water daily to every human being on earth by 1990.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, we missed the target, as in 1990 around 17% of the world population lacked access to even 1 liter of safe water, while 40% lacked access to basic sanitation services. Then the UN adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000. These, in comparison with the goals of the Water Decade, look meaner, even regressive, perhaps as a result

of the influence of the free-market conservatism that became dominant in the 1990s.

The MDGs for basic water and sanitation services envisage halving the proportion of the world population lacking access to these services by 2015. Although some experts claim that the new goals are more 'realistic' than those of the 1980s, in practice it means to accept that millions of human beings will continue to suffer and die from preventable diseases for the foreseeable future. In fact, official

reports of the UN bodies monitoring the progress of the MDGs show that in some of the poorest regions of the world the situation will worsen, and though most countries may achieve the target for clean water many will fail to meet the sanitation target. To make matters worse, meeting the MDGs for water and sanitation may also imply worsening environmental conditions, as more fresh water would have to be withdrawn to satisfy the unserved population and there will be a significant increase of wastewater flows. If we take into ac-

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count that in the Global South only about 5% of wastewater receives some form of treatment before being released into the environment, among other reasons because of the enormous costs involved, it becomes clear that meeting the MDGs not only requires substantive economic, financial and logistic efforts but also has very thorny and long-term ethical and political implications.

### > **Social Struggles and Commodification of the Public Good**

The international predicament on this matter can be illustrated by the fact that a UN initiative to declare daily access to a few liters of clean water to be a “human right” has been firmly opposed by many countries, particularly in the rich North. Although in 2010 the UN finally managed to get a majority vote in favor of making access to water a human right, most of these countries that had opposed the initiative abstained from voting. This is not unconnected with the fact that since the 1980s mainstream public policies promoted worldwide to ‘solve’ the water and sanitation crisis were centered on the privatization and commodification of water and water-based services, which required the abandonment of the notion that access to basic services is a social or public good. Although straightforward water privatization policies have been defeated in many countries, the process of commodification is relentless and proceeds independently of the public, private or ‘civil society’ identity of the service providers. Public companies are often required to behave as private businesses, placing economic efficiency (often understood as ‘profit’) before social efficacy (i.e. providing a universal service to everyone independently of their capacity to pay). Also, many public operators have to enter into public-private ‘partnerships’, often a de facto privatization with a different name, in order to get access to investment funds. These and other problems, including the protracted practices of corruption, inefficiency and unaccountability characterizing the running of public services in many cases, and not just in poor countries, continue to be the source of mushrooming social and political confrontations.

Access to basic water and sanitation services is clearly a fundamental aspect of civilized life that continues to be beyond the reach of a large proportion of human beings. However, the problems highlighted above are just the tip of the iceberg of the structural conditions of inequality and injustice characterizing the relationship of humans with water, and more generally with the natural environment. Without moving out of the water topic it would still take much space to provide even a sketchy description of the multidimensional character of these conditions. There are, however, some issues of particular salience that have to be mentioned in this short piece. These include the uncontrolled expansion of opencast mining, which since the 1990s has been extended to regions of the planet where mining had been rather marginal as in much of Latin America. Currently, opencast mining from Mexico to Patagonia is destroying glaciers and forests, contaminating water and soil with cyanide, mercury and other harmful substances, and displacing – often forcefully – or poisoning human populations. At the root of continued – though often silenced or hidden – social struggles worldwide are: the unabated deforestation with significant consequences for hydrogeological systems, human communities and global climatic patterns more generally; the construction of massive water infrastructure works including dams, river diversions, and hydroways; and the destruction of fragile water ecosystems such as mangroves and wetlands to make room for the expansion of business activities.

### > **Confronting Water Inequality and Injustice**

From a sociological perspective that places emphasis on the transformative potential of scientific knowledge, these processes have a two-sided character: they are worthy and relevant as intellectual objects of study, but the knowledge resulting from such intellectual endeavors has also very practical, material, and fundamentally political consequences, whether this is recognized or not. This a fundamental premise of current inter- and transdisciplinary research efforts on issues of water inequality and injus-

tice in Latin America and the Caribbean, conducted by the research network WATERLAT ([www.waterlat.org](http://www.waterlat.org)). The network’s research approach is framed by three main assumptions:

1) The capitalist character of water government and management. The fact that the central dynamic that increasingly structures the activities related to water government and management worldwide is largely driven by the process of capital accumulation. Considerations such as the need to tackle environmental unsustainability, inequality, and injustice are subordinated to the dominant dynamics of the accumulation process.

2) The sociogenesis of defencelessness<sup>2</sup> in relation to water. Human beings are exposed to a wide range of dangers and hazards related to the ways in which water is governed and managed. These dangers and hazards are derived from a number of causes – from the lack of access to clean water and essential water services to the exposure to natural or anthropogenic phenomena such as floods, droughts, or pollution. Despite increasingly sophisticated techno-scientific knowledge and capacity for foresight and intervention, such dangers and hazards continue to be among the biggest threats to human civilization. WATERLAT places emphasis not only on the study of human vulnerability and fragility but more fundamentally on the sociogenesis of the defencelessness affecting a large proportion of the world population in relation to these threats.

3) Confronting defencelessness through the substantive democratization of water use, management and control, but also the democratization of the production of and access to knowledge about water. WATERLAT adopts a transdisciplinary approach, that brings together academics and a wide array of social actors involved in the struggle to democratize these water-related activities. These actors include policy makers and implementers, water managers, social movements, labor unions, environmental organizations, and indigenous communities among others.

WATERLAT held its 2010 annual meeting in São Paulo, Brazil, which included a 3-day international conference on “The tension between social and environmental justice: the case of water management”. The conference had around 300 participants from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Haiti, Italy, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Spain, Sweden, the UK, Uruguay, and Venezuela. An electronic book with over 100 papers (most in Spanish and Portuguese) presented at the event is available online (<http://www.waterlat.org/publications.html>), and a DVD with a synthesis of the activities, including video recordings of keynote speeches and interviews with participants is also available on request

(e-mail: [waterlat@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:waterlat@ncl.ac.uk)).

The next meeting of the network will take place in Mexico City on 24-26 October 2011, and will be hosted by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO Mexico), one of the network partners. The event will be dedicated to “The struggle against water inequality and injustice in Latin America and the Caribbean”, and will feature keynote conferences, round tables, workshops, and public meetings. Each day will centre around one theme. The first day will be focused on “Forms of water inequality, injustice and defencelessness”, while the second will address issues of “Inequality, injustice and defencelessness in the water-public health interface”.

Finally, the third day will concentrate on “Confronting water inequality, injustice and defencelessness: an x-disciplinary challenge”. Updating information about the meeting will be available on line (<http://www.waterlat.org/AcademicEvents.html>). ■

<sup>1</sup> 40 liters is according to some estimates the minimum amount of safe water required to satisfy basic needs.

<sup>2</sup> While ‘vulnerability’ implies the propensity to be wounded or suffer attacks and ‘fragility’ is the quality or state of a thing that can be easily broken or destroyed, ‘defencelessness’ incorporates the social dimension of the problem: it is the property of human beings lacking the means to defend themselves, that is, the property of being disarmed.

## > Young Sociologists, Young perspectives

by Ana Vidu, University of Barcelona



| Young Sociologists of Catalonia.

**O**ur role in Sociology is essential... The fact that 300 of us, young sociologists, are here today is key to the future of this discipline”. With these words, the President of the Junior Sociology Association – a Master’s degree student and junior researcher – opened the 4<sup>th</sup> Catalan Congress of Young Sociologists, held on April 29-30, 2011 in Barcelona. For the first time students (Bachelors, Masters and PhDs) from Madrid, Granada, Malaga and Valencia also joined those from Catalonia. About 90 papers were delivered on such topics as identities, racism, unemployment, democracy, sexuality, and ecology – demonstrating to colleagues and professors alike our

commitment to sociology. The conference opened with a lecture by Dr. Pun Ngai from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She described the involvement of young Chinese sociologists in the investigation and condemnation of labour exploitation. She found common cause with her audience when she pointed to the ways sociology can contribute to a more democratic society. She inspired us to build a global sociology network of junior sociologists.

In the round table on the *Future of Sociology* we had a debate about the way sociology could become a public service. “We need to stop analyzing what we already know, we need to

stop publishing on topics that are of little public interest, and instead attend to the demands of society.” We also had sessions on the professionalization of sociology, sharing knowledge and experiences from applied and academic research. We found space to discuss our future in the profession and possible collaboration with other organizations such as the Catalan Society of Professional Sociologists and Politologists.

The Congress is organizing a network of young sociologists committed to developing a scientifically rigorous and socially committed sociology. It will develop a website for the Junior Sociology Association as well as its presence on Facebook and Twitter. Last but not least, the Congress party was another key moment when we could debate, create projects, make friends and also dance! ■

# > Sociology in the Spanish Revolution

by Teresa Sordé, Autonomous University of Barcelona and Tatiana Santos, University of Girona



Catalunya Square, Barcelona – “This place has been reclaimed by the people”.

**T**he *Washington Post* has dubbed our movement that began on May 15<sup>th</sup> as “The Spanish Revolution” – a movement that has spread way beyond Spain and reached as far as Japan. Citizens have appropriated public space to debate, argue, reflect on and, finally, to jointly agree on how they would like to reorganize housing, health care, education, and other spheres of society. The people elaborate their particular proposals through a ‘dialogic’ form of democracy, based on the discussion of civil society with itself – a discussion that takes place far from the formal institutions of power and policy making. Among the most

widely disseminated ideas is the principle “nobody represents us”. Thus, the May 15<sup>th</sup> Movement developed a distinctive political form based on the collective self-organization of civil society through assemblies. Public spaces are, thereby, opened to people from different cultures, ages, educational levels and they are all given equal voice to express their views.

In Barcelona’s Plaça Catalunya (Catalunya Square) we find one of these spaces, one of the strongest ‘agoras’ in this movement. Within the permanent camp in the square, the core point is the daily General Assembly, supported by commis-

sions which are based on the needs and requirements of the movement. Any person who comes to the square can join any of the commissions. Each commission occupies a space where facilitators, taking over from one another around the clock, coordinate the meetings. If there is disagreement, the issue is debated in the following meeting. If there is an issue which provokes disagreement in the General Assembly, it is returned to the commission where it was initiated. People who are in disagreement are invited to join the meetings to argue their views. There is a special team that works in shifts to prepare the agenda of the assemblies.

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Catalunya Square, Barcelona - General Assembly in Session.

This 'real democracy' is promoted, disseminated and expanded through social networks, largely based on Facebook, Twitter, various blogs, the web, and an online forum. The web page publishes, 24 hours in advance, the minutes of all the commissions as well as all the important topics that will be voted on in the General Assembly. In the online forum there are debates that parallel the ones in the square. The people themselves decide on the most important issues that face the movement. This was the case, for example, in the decision to continue mobilization in spite of the ruling of the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court in favor of the removal of the camp.

Many sociologists are participating in the May 15 Movement. We are not there to provide the citizenry with 'the true' interpretation of what they are doing or what they should be doing – a stand clearly rejected

by the movement. But we are also not there simply to participate without contributing to the dialogue. The citizens in the square want us to bring our sociological knowledge to the debates. We are there to develop a dialogic approach to democracy, putting into practice a public sociology that demonstrates the value of our social science to all those assembled and beyond.

There have been proponents of an anti-sociological 'spontaneism' who have said that nobody foresaw this movement. This is not true. We were invited on April 12 to launch what we called a revolution from below, with direct democracy and appeals made through the Internet. One of our sociology professors insisted on the gravity of the economic and political situation. He pointed to the example of the movements in North Africa to show how people in different places and facing different conditions were

dreaming of the same revolution. He even put a date on the uprising – somewhere between April 26 and May 31. From that day onwards we did not stop organizing and spreading our beliefs to spark this revolution.

Thus, sociologists have acted in accordance with their own predictions, contributing to the deliberations of the agora, drawing on the wealth of their disciplinary knowledge. But the "Spanish Revolution" has not only benefited from our sociology, it has also contributed to the enrichment of sociology, so that we are better able to understand the conditions of possibility of dialogic democracy. ■

# > Global Labor – A South African Perspective

by Edward Webster, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, former President of the ISA Research Committee on Labour Movements

**T**he English historian, E.H. Carr, was said to have remarked that what you see depends on which side of the mountain you stand. I stand in the southern tip of Africa, in Johannesburg, the city of gold. Johannesburg was built in the first phase of globalization – the first great transformation – in the late nineteenth century.

In this brief lecture I will do three things: (1) provide the social context for an understanding of global labor from a southern perspective; (2) discuss my own work on the impact of global restructuring on workers; (3) suggest a different way of understanding how a counter-movement could be built in the Global South.

## > The Social Context

The idea of worker solidarity – i.e. the idea that the strong should help the weak – goes back to the beginnings of industrial capitalism. It is captured in Karl Marx's well-known slogan, workers of the world unite!!

In South Africa this call for worker unity took a peculiar form when, in the general strike of 1922, white workers mobilized around the slogan “workers of the world unite for a white South Africa.”

Those early revolutionary socialists who brought the idea of labor internationalism from Europe, failed to persuade their fellow white workers – the colonizers – that their destiny lay with black workers – the colonized. The white workers defended their position on the grounds that they were being undercut by cheaper black labor.

This segmentation of the working class remains the central challenge in building worker solidarity – there is no homogeneous proletarian condition, here or anywhere else in the world. Just as in the late nineteenth century, in many parts of the world today, a bad job is better than no job at all!!

But, and this is a story that needs to be told, black workers were over time to win their right to organize and join a trade union. Their struggle to win recognition for their unions was long and painful in the face of intransigent employers and a hostile and brutal apartheid state.

An important factor in their victory was international solidarity. The campaign to boycott South Africa and impose financial sanctions was crucial in persuading the apartheid government to negotiate with the African National Con-

gress under the leadership of Nelson Mandela. The solidarity shown, for example, by dock workers in San Francisco when they refused to unload South African ships is one among many examples of international solidarity.

The victory of the African National Congress in 1994 was a precarious victory as it was won in a world where power had shifted decisively to capital. South Africa was experiencing a double transition. On the one hand, it was a transition to democracy where a militant labor movement had won significant rights, on the other hand, it had entered the global economy, where international competition was forcing employers to cut costs and produce at the China price.

## > The Impact of Global Restructuring

For labor, the process of global restructuring that began with the winning of democracy, reconfigured the labor market creating an increasingly insecure workforce. This is what we examine in our book *Grounding Globalization*. We took the production of white goods – fridges, washing machines – as a lens to show how international competition is creating greater insecurity amongst workers in the three factories in the three countries we studied.

- In Electrolux Australia we found resignation in the face of downsizing, cushioned by the welfare state;
- In South Korea, workers in LG responded to competition by working harder;
- In South Africa, workers retreated into the household in order to engage in various survivalist type strategies in the informal economy.

We framed the study in terms of Polanyi's notion of the double movement, suggesting that this period of neoliberal globalization could best be described as the second great transformation. We did find modest experiments and initiatives to protect society against the unregulated market, but, in general, their responses to global restructuring were localized. The only attempt to challenge global restructuring was an initiative of the workers at Electrolux in Orange, Australia, to globalize their struggle. Through the Internet they were able to establish contact with workers in Electrolux in Greenville, a small town in Michigan, USA, and the home of Electrolux in Sweden. But this attempt at building worker-to-worker solidarity in production failed. The leadership of the Swedish union was too close to management not to see the advantages to the company of relocating to China. But ‘successful failures’ can provide the basis for the next step in the struggle. We remember the Mont-

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gomery bus boycott but, as Aldon Morris has shown, it was preceded by several other 'unsuccessful' and little remembered bus boycotts.

### > The Implications for Transnational Solidarity?

It is useful, in thinking about transnational solidarity, to distinguish between three different types of solidarity.

The first type I will call the *humanitarian*. These are acts of solidarity in defense of victims of human rights abuses – such as victims of racism or child labor or a struggle for union recognition by a group of workers; these are driven largely by moral claims – they can be relatively powerful as the successful anti-apartheid movement has shown. This form of solidarity can take the form of a consumer boycott, or campaigns such as the campaign against Rio Tinto over basic worker rights. These campaigns are relatively easy and inexpensive to organize in the age of the Internet.

The second type of transnational solidarity I will call the *production approach*. Here acts of solidarity are between workers on a factory-to-factory basis. These acts are the most difficult to organize as we see from the Australian case – the internationalization of production has created a competitive logic between countries. If workers in GM go on strike, other car producers will sell better. But in spite of these obstacles there is a growing co-ordination of transnational solidarity in production. Volkswagen workers gather worldwide every year to co-ordinate their demands across VW factories from Germany, Brazil, India and South Africa. Seafarers are the first sector to engage in global collective bargaining. Inspectors from the international transport workers federation carry out inspections on vessels when they dock in port. In this way they are able, for the first time in history, to agree on a minimum global wage in a sector and enforce it for sea farers across the globe.

These new forms of transnational organization challenge the conventional nation-based forms of unionism that prevailed in the twentieth century. According to an older model of international solidarity, such links tended to be channeled through specialized international departments and were more likely to be between the leaders of trade union federations. Instant and direct communication through email and Skype has changed all this. These new forms of transnational action are decentralized and are as likely to be bottom-up as top-down.

The third type of solidarity I will call the *regulatory approach*. This approach does not try to bring workers together in production but tries rather to build a common body of soft law – global rights and standards; the aim is to regulate the market, rather than to replace the market – to make the market, as Peter Evans has said, the servant of society rather than the master.

One innovative idea that is being implemented in the Global

South is the idea of a global social floor – a right to a pension, access to health care, a child grant and a basic minimum of income whether through a job guarantee or a direct cash grant. These are the contemporary innovations in social policy in countries such as Brazil, India and South Africa.

These new policies are the embryo of a counter-movement – but it is a counter-movement from above – the state is intervening in India through the NREGA to provide each rural household with a guaranteed 100 days work a year. It gives each household the right to work, provided they have a job card. Some may dismiss this as mere reformism and a strategy of co-optation – but this misses the point. These could be the first steps in a staircase of a steadily expanding system of social protection.

The point is that globalization is not only a constraint – it is also an opportunity for organization across borders; globalization has accelerated the flow of a rights-based discourse – this is leading to movements from below as we have seen in recent months in North Africa.

However, the most innovative organizations that have emerged are transnational networks such as StreetNet International. StreetNet International, based in Durban, brings street vendors together internationally to put pressure on local municipalities to recognize their right to trade in public spaces.

The choice is not between going global or remaining local, but rather navigating between the local and the global. This combination of the local and the global has led to the emergence of what Sidney Tarrow calls "rooted cosmopolitans".

By linking production globally through global value chains, companies have become vulnerable to new sources of power. A delay in the delivery of an engine part made in Korea to an assembly line in Australia can force employers in both Australia and Korea to the bargaining table. This is not all that different from the challenge Henry Ford faced in Detroit in the thirties. New sources and forms of power have emerged on the age of globalization.

If it is premature to call these forms of action counter-hegemonic globalization, they have nevertheless shaken up our research agenda, and challenged us to rethink the relation between global capital and the International Financial Institutions, on the one hand, and the global labor and social movements on the other. This emerging research agenda will require a multi-level analysis if it is to contribute to the construction of a global counter-movement. ■



In recent years the term ‘workshop of the world’ has been commonly used to describe the capacity of China for global production. When global capital relocates to China it is not only looking for cheap labor and low prices of land, it is also looking for diligent, skilled and well-educated Chinese internal migrant workers who are willing to work in appalling conditions, who are suitable for just-in-time production, and who are also potential consumers for global products. The repositioning of China as a ‘workshop of the world’ hence provides the bedrock for nurturing a new Chinese working class.

It has been widely recognized that workers around the world are pitted against each other in a game of ‘race to the bottom’ over who will accept the lowest wages and benefits, and the most miserable working and living conditions. In this game, China appears to have been setting the ‘floor’ for the world’s workers for labor intensive export industrialization. SACOM (Students and Scholars against Corporate Misbehavior) – a transnational organization which aims to link students to worker struggles – has documented widespread abuses of Chinese workers’ rights by transnational corporations over the past decade. Wage arrears, forced and excessive overtime, and dreadful health and safety conditions are commonplace. This global capitalist market force is somehow facilitated by the post-socialist Chinese state by means of restrictions on freedom of association and the right to strike.

#### > Labor Activism of Migrant Workers in China

The new Chinese working class is in the process of changing and restructuring. Reform-era China has seen the development of class differentiation, class conflicts and class polarization. Lacking institutional channels to voice their grievances, subordinate classes now mobilize mass protests to demonstrate their discontent and to resist oppression. Official statistics reveal that between 1993 and 2005, the number of mass protests had risen nationwide from about 10,000 to 87,000 cases – nearly 20 percent average annual



## > Global Labor – A Chinese Perspective

by Pun Ngai, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**T**he acceleration of the ‘extended reproduction’ of capitalism on a global scale has contributed to a rapid remaking of class relations in China and the rest of the world. Edward Webster (in this issue of *Global Dialogue*) talks about the possibility of a new form of transnational solidarity that might foster the unity of the world’s labor movement. I share the same dream and I would like to contextualize the local struggle in China within a global perspective. We all know that the advance of technology and information creates hyper-mobile flows of capital, and the trans-nationality of new labor continues to shatter existing class relations. However, Western academic ‘farewell to the working class’ or the end of ‘class analysis’ hasn’t made class relations obsolete. Instead, the issue of class and class conflicts were

carried with capital flight into the Third World societies, putting China at the forefront of the struggle.

#### > The Birth of a New Working Class in China

Over the past 30 years, the reformist state and global capital have jointly turned China into the ‘workshop of the world’, creating a new working class of over a few hundred millions. In alliance with the international labor movement, and without optimism, we nonetheless have to maintain an unflinching spirit to confront this global nightmare. If China is now the dream for global capital looking for new forms of capital accumulation with an unimaginable pace and scale, I will argue it simultaneously creates a global nightmare for the new working class. Now is only the beginning of their struggles.

increase. Also, the number of participants in these protests has increased from 730,000 to more than 3 million, and, it should be noted that 75 percent of these protests were initiated by workers and peasants. These protests have not only increased in number, but also in average size, social scope, and degree of organization.

The further polarization of class relations in China has found its expression in the current intensified labor conflicts and proliferating labor activism. Collective struggles such as demonstrations demanding pensions, road blockages by unpaid angry workers, collective legal actions against illegal compensations are no longer exotic news. Whether in private, foreign, or state enterprises, protests are becoming more confrontational, and sometimes protesters even attack government buildings, ending in violent clashes with police. There is ample evidence that migrant workers are becoming more pro-active in defending their rights, and they mobilize actions of various types, which include individual and collective actions, direct and legal actions. That is to say, the collective actions of migrant workers are not restricted to using established institutional or legal means to advance their interests. They are also undergoing a process of 'radicalization,' through their strikes, street actions and demonstrations. Although the development of an organized class-force is being restricted, factory level strikes, work stoppages, collective bargaining on wages, the launching of collective complaints, actions designed to give them media exposure or even attacks on the state apparatus are common means used by migrant workers to express their dissatisfactions and to demand change.

### > The Challenge Facing the Labor Struggle

Obviously there are structural barriers that constrain the struggle of the new Chinese working class. I once argued that the new working class has undergone a never ending process of (semi-)proletarianization but now the new generation is experiencing a tremendous 'spiritual enclosure' in the industrialized towns and cities where they work.

The world history of labor shows us that the formation and maturity of the working class usually took root among second and third generations of rural workers who came to work in industrial cities. This is the process of proletarianization, which turns agricultural laborers into industrial workers by depriving the former of their means of production and subsistence; in fact, this theme runs through the history of world capitalism. As a result, the fate of workers depends on the process of capital accumulation and the extent of labor commodification. These workers neither own nor control the tools they use, the raw materials they process, or the products they produce.

When China transformed itself into the world's factory and became a contemporary industrialized society, it re-enacted a common phenomenon in the world history of capitalism. What is special about China is its peculiar process of proletarianization: in order to incorporate the Chinese socialist system into the global economy, the Chinese authorities created the *hukou* system of registration, which, like the South African apartheid system of pass laws, called on rural workers to work in the city but *not* to stay in the city. For China's new working class, industrialization and urbanization are still two highly disconnected processes, as many peasant-workers have been deprived of the opportunity to live where they work or work where they live. The local urban governments have had no incentive to take up the role of meeting the needs of collective consumption for the laborers in terms of housing, education, medical care, and other social provisions. The rural migrant workers were barred *de jure*, but not *de facto*, from living in urban centers by the *hukou* system and by class barriers that ensured that migrant workers with meager wages would be unable to settle down in urban communities. In sum, the process of proletarianization of Chinese peasant workers was shaped by a spatial separation of production in urban areas and reproduction in the countryside. This separation of spheres, however, has been ceding place to the rise of a dormitory labor regime, which offers a new combination of work and 'home,' which resembles early capitalist work-

and-residence arrangements, and yet continues to segregate the worker from the city.

The resulting pattern is an *unfinished proletarianization*, which leads to a deepening sense of *becoming incomplete*, that is, of becoming *nongmingong* (a 'quasi' or 'half' worker in the industrial world). The individual, suffering from a sense of inadequacy, is subjected to a forced 'wandering'. The gates of the urban and industrial world remain closed to the second generation of migrant workers. The *nongmingong* has had nowhere to go and nowhere to stay, as expressed in the workers' poem: "You say your life is destined to a state of wandering" and you take this path of becoming nobody because you are neither a *nongmin* (peasant) nor a *gongren* (worker). "Never gonna regret, Even though you have to suffer from tremendous difficulty." This is the motto of the new generation of *dagong* workers, who are trying to overcome their experience of incompleteness.

### > Conclusion

In sum, the process of proletarianization in Reform-era China has created a new working class that is increasingly conscious of, and prepared to participate in, various forms of collective action. The 'enclosure' of the second generation of migrant workers has nurtured an epidemic of spontaneous strikes in south China.

We have observed the sense of self, the anger, and the collective action of the second generation of peasant workers, and we have noted that these workers exist squarely at the center of a grid of controls and dominations where workers themselves have to negotiate and articulate their own agency. Despite the structural barriers, the new working class conjures up an array of everyday, collective forms of insurgency, which threatens the forces of capital, and makes the state ever more determined to subdue them. ■

# > Global Labor – A Mexican Perspective

by Enrique de la Garza, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Mexico City

**E**dward Webster addresses a classic yet timely question: whether, alongside the globalization of capital, a globalization of labor as social movement is possible, and in this connection what is the significance of the constitution of other identities and solidarities?

Although Webster focuses on the ‘South,’ I believe his analysis extends beyond the old development-underdevelopment dichotomies, and not just because developed countries, such as Australia, also exist in the South, but because Northern countries contain within them features of the South. Still, the basic issue correctly focuses on how to overcome the fragmentations among workers, fragmentations originating from differences of ethnicity, religion, nationality and, above all, from differences in types of occupations (formal versus informal; wage earners versus non-wage earners; workers in global chains versus those in micro-enterprises; core workers versus subcontracted workers, etc.). In this sense, Webster is correct that strong global pressures on companies to reduce costs and be competitive result in feelings of impotence and resignation among workers, leading them to accept the loss of rights and protections as a strategy of survival. This strategy may also result from the fragmentation of identities.

However, some lessons may still be learned from history:

1. The thesis of the fragmentation of identities, be it due to the new heterogeneity of occupations (Claus Offe) or to divergent labor trajectories (Zygmunt Bauman), ends up being superficial because there has always been heterogeneity in occupations, companies, branches, as well as regional, national or international divisions. (Were the affiliates of the First International any more homogeneous in their occupations? Were the Popular Fronts of the past, occasionally led by unions, examples of occupational homogeneity?) The process of constitution of identities, collective actions and social movements does not depend solely on the positions of actors in occupational structures. To be sure social structures do give rise to the collective construction of differences, but social identities also derive from social interactions, social movements, culture and embedded subjectivities.
2. From the standpoint of the workers, international links in the material sense already exist in the global value chains, including current conflicts involving subcontracting and in particular off-shoring. Nevertheless, this material link does not guarantee solidarity either, although positive examples do exist.
3. An enormous number of workers exist outside the global value chains: formal and informal, wage earners and non-wage earners, and traditional as well as non-traditional workers. It is necessary to ask whether a global movement can be created out of a shared identity of exclusion.



Canadian Steel Workers support Mexican Miners and Metal Workers.

In the case of Latin America, the problems are similar to the ones noted by Webster. In every case, it is necessary to specify the importance of the informal sector, which is not generally subject to labor regulations. According to the new definition of the International Labour Organization, the percentage of workers in Latin American countries occupied in informal occupations or lacking labor protections in formal companies ranges from 40 to 70% of the labor force. The informal sector includes large companies as well as small ones, but it is especially prominent among companies with fewer than five workers. Such micro-entities constitute the majority of companies in all the countries of Latin America. In this sector part of the workforce is wage-earning, but many are self-employed or work without pay in family companies. Employees paid via commission should also be included in this sector. At this moment, the struggles for labor regulation in this sector are very important. The position of workers in international value chains is also an issue, posing the question of the relation between core workers and groups of subcontracted workers.

As well as occupational differences, labor legislation and the policies of workers' organization vary by country. With regard to labor legislation, the region can be divided between those countries that continue to apply an orthodox neoliberal model (Mexico and Colombia are noteworthy examples) and those where alternative state-led policies are attempted (for example, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Brazil.) The decline of union strength and workers' rights is notable in the first set. In the second set, there is some revitalization of unions and protections for workers. During the 1990s, when a hard neoliberalism was consolidated in almost the entire subcontinent, workers suffered notable losses in protection. However, with the dawn of the new

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century, their luck began to change in a positive direction in many parts of the region. Nevertheless, while some national labor legislation allows unionization rights of non-wage earners, in others it does not.

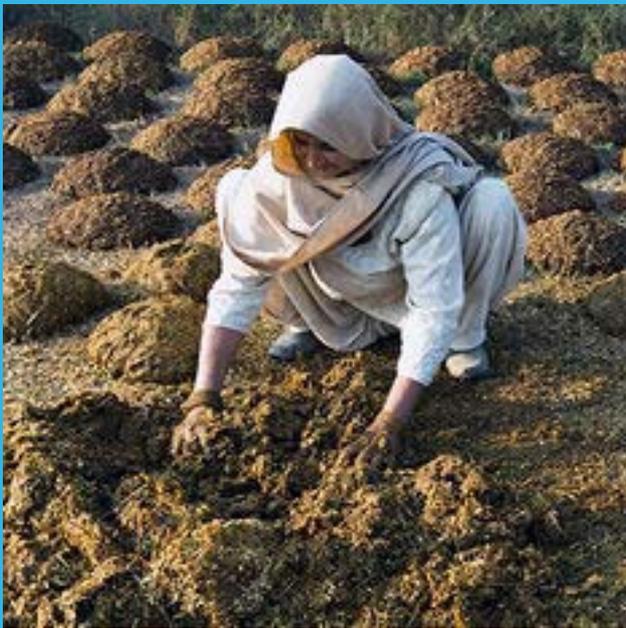
Something similar occurs with union policies. While some unions offer no significant resistance to neoliberal policies, others are quite belligerent in their opposition. Furthermore, some unions are very committed to a narrow definition of labor, limiting it to wage labor, while others are open to a much broader definition. The most important, although incipient, expressions of international solidarity are through the large global confederations, through branch secretariats, through specific agreements between confederations of different countries, through campaigns on specific problems, and using some inter-governmental agreements such as those of the ILO or those connected to trade agreements.

In other words, the already existing forms of international-type solidarity mentioned by Webster are important: the hu-

manitarian, production and regulatory approaches. However, it is possible that the most important impact of the 'liquification' of collective actions and identities needs not be sought in the structure of the occupations or in the fluid labor trajectories, or even strictly in the global market pressures, but rather in the loss of worker utopias. Those communist, socialist, anarchist, or even social-democratic utopias, which existed alongside certain material conditions and fostered the commitment to alternatives to capitalist society, have generally not been renewed or replaced by others.

At the most, feasible reforms may have appeared within the same neoliberal system, as in Webster's three forms of solidarity. They are limited, for example, to the regulation of the financial system, or to an anachronistic projection of the Benefactor State onto the global level, such as the World Social Forum. It would appear that there is still not the confluence of feeling and thinking that translates into global projects, neither of an intellectual character nor on the material plane. ■

## > Letter from Egypt: On the Technique of Cow Dung Rolling



| Cowdung Sampling.

I just heard from one of my former students who is working in Juba, South Sudan, who wrote: "I am trying to explain the 'snowball' technique of sampling, which is a nightmare for Africans who have no clue what a snowball is.

So I described the process of rolling a snowball and how it gets bigger and bigger, and ask them if there is anything with which they are familiar that when rolled grows larger and larger. In that way we could give the 'snowball' technique of sampling an African name.

After a long silence, one of the trainees in the back pipes up: "That's how we roll cow dung."

So, the snowball technique is now the 'cow dung rolling' technique."

Thought you may like to share with colleagues at the ISA, particularly Michael Burawoy.

Regards,

**Ray Jureidini**  
**Center for Migrations and Refugee Studies, American University of Cairo**

## > Introducing the Paulista Editorial Team

In each issue we will present one of the editorial teams that collaborate in the translation and production of *Global Dialogue*.



The Young Paulistas – From left to right Juliana Tonche, Andreza Galli, Pedro Mancini, Renata Preturlan, Fábio Tsunoda, Dmitri Fernandes and Gustavo Taniguti.

It is a pleasure to introduce our team of Brazilian regional editors to the readers of *Global Dialogue* worldwide. Furthermore, we are extremely excited to work in a publication that has contributed greatly to the exchange of experiences and information on sociology from the most diverse places. We hope this space for dialogue will grow ever stronger. The following is a brief summary of the activities of our team members, also known as 'The Paulista Team':

**Andreza Tonasso Galli** has a degree in International Relations from the *Universidade de São Paulo* (USP) and she's currently a graduate student in the Department of Sociology, USP, where she's studying race relations and the black movement. She also takes part in the university extension project '*Educar Para o Mundo*' that works with popular education, immigration and human rights.

**Dmitri Cerboncini Fernandes** graduated with his first degree in Social Sciences (2004) and then received his PhD in Sociology (2010) from USP. In 2008 he pursued sociological studies at *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* of Paris, France, made possible by a FAPESP scholarship. At this moment he is developing a postdoctoral research in Social History at the USP about the relationships between samba symbolical representations and Afro-Brazilian politics of cultural affirmation in the 1970s.

**Fábio Silva Tsunoda** has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Sciences from the *Universidade Estadual Paulista* (UNESP/Marília) and is currently a sociology master's degree student at the USP where he conducts research on militants for human rights in post-dictatorship Brazil.

**Gustavo Takeshy Taniguti** has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Sciences at the *Universidade Federal de São Carlos* (UFSCar), and is currently a doctoral student in sociology at the USP. He has been researching Japanese immigration to Brazil, and also has experience in the sociology of work, economic sociology and immigration. He is on the editorial board of *Plural*, a journal of the social sciences, and a researcher with the urban anthropology group 'Núcleo de Antropologia urbana' (NAU-USP).

**Juliana Tonche** has a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from *Universidade Federal de São Carlos* (USFCar), where she also did her master's degree. Today she is a doctoral student in sociology at the *Universidade de São Paulo* with a focus on restorative justice initiatives. Her interests are conflict management and the sociology of punishment. She is also a member of the following groups: Núcleo de Antropologia do Direito (USP), Grupo de Estudos da Violência e Administração de Conflitos (UFSCar).

**Pedro Felipe de Andrade Mancini** has a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from the USP, where he is also finishing his Master's Degree in Social Media on the topic of sociability in virtual realities. In addition, he also works as a member of the editorial board of *Plural*, the sociology journal of post-graduate students at USP.

**Renata Preturlan** is a sociology master's student at USP and is currently studying Bolivian immigration to São Paulo. She has a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations from USP. She is a member of the Immigration Study Group within the Urban Anthropology Laboratory and of the extension project 'Educating for the World'. ■



*Islam Meets Sociology – Dr Seyed Mohamad Saghafi, a distinguished cleric teaching at Azad University with Dr. Gholamabas Tavasoli, Doyen of Iranian Sociology.*

ologies. It was refreshing that this conference not only discussed these calls but also presented examples of Middle Eastern sources for social thought. Sait Özervarli, Mohamad Tavakol and Seyyed Javad Miri discussed the works of a galaxy of Iranian and Turkish thinkers from the 19th and 20th centuries and urged that the content of their thought be considered seriously for the establishment of a Middle Eastern sociology. Furthermore, the source of Middle Eastern sociology was not to be restricted to narrowly defined social thought but was to be extended to literature, as pointed out by Biuk Mohammadi. Such a sociology does not neglect Western thought but creatively assimilates it. Özervarli brought out how this was done by several Ottoman thinkers of the 19th century.

Another issue, central to discussions of sociology in the Middle East, is the relationship between Islam and sociology. Based on his vast experience in teaching and research in this area, Riaz Hassan discussed what a course on the sociology of Islam might look like. This inevitably raised the question as to whether there was a conflict between theological and sociological approaches, particularly when it came to the explanation of the origins of Islam. Sara Shariati's paper discussed this problematic relation in some detail and in doing so, clearly distanced herself from the idea of Islamic sociology. At the same time the conference also included presentations from several clerics who advanced the idea of an Islamic sociology, and put forward a position more hostile to Western sociology.

Many of the participants were keen on the idea of continuing to meet on a yearly or biennial basis. Plans are underway to organize the next conference on social thought in the Middle East in Istanbul, possibly in 2011. In line with the critical spirit of the conference, however, it was also suggested that 'Middle East' be dropped as it was less than desirable to refer to the region from the vantage point of, as the Dutch student of colonial trade and society J. C. Van Leur once said, "the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading-house". ■

## > Middle East Sociology on the Move

by Syed Farid Alatas, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore

The first of what might become a series of regional meetings on sociology in and of the Middle East was held in Tehran on May 28 and 29, 2011. Entitled the "Regional Conference on Social Thought and Sociology in the Contemporary Middle East", the meeting brought together Arab, Iranian and Turkish sociologists from the region and beyond. The conference was organized by the Iranian Sociological Association in collaboration with the International Sociological Association and supported by the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture, the National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Institute for the Study of Religion and Thought in Mashhad, the Center for International Scientific Studies and Collaboration, and the Social Sciences Faculty Branch, of Jamee-Shenasan Publications. Some fifty papers were presented over the two days, half of them in Persian.

Opening lectures were delivered by Michael Burawoy and the doyen of Iranian sociology, Gholamabas Tavasoli. Burawoy directed his remarks to what the conference felt to be an all important issue, that is, the establishment of a regional sociology in the Middle East. Such a sociology was expected to com-

prehend processes not only within nations but also across nations. Burawoy saw the Middle East as testing the possibility of a global sociology, to the extent that the region can contribute to the universalization of sociology. Tavasoli, basically in harmony with Burawoy's position, drew attention to alternative perspectives in social thought, emphasising, for example, that there are ideas in sociology, such as civil society, that have their origins in pre-Islamic or Islamic Iran and not only Greece.

Discussions of sociology in the Middle East usually critically assess the state of sociology and emphasize the need to consider Middle Eastern alternatives to Western traditions. This conference was no exception. Several papers, by Tina Uys, Sari Hanafi, Michael Kuhn and Ebrahim Towfigh discussed the problematic state of sociology in the Middle East such as Orientalism or academic dependency. Participants were quick to point out, however, that the objective was not to engage in West bashing but to do good sociology. This meant extending our horizons beyond knowledge generated in the West to include the Middle East and other regions as sources of concepts and theories. Indeed, one often hears calls for indigenous or alternative soci-



Hicham Yezza and Rizwaan Sabir outside the Library that held the controversial Al-Qaeda Manual.

## > **Attacking Academic Freedom: The Case of The Nottingham Two and a Whistleblower**

by **Alf Gunvald Nilsen, University of Bergen, Norway**

**A**t the University of Nottingham (UoN), recent events suggest that academic freedom – the freedom to carry out research and to present the result of that research in the public domain without fear of disciplinary action, dismissal, or infringements upon our civil liberties – may very well have become a casualty in the so-called ‘war on terror’.

On 4 May this year, Dr. Rod Thornton, a former British soldier and an expert on international terrorism and counter-insurgency, was suspended from his job as lecturer at the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), UoN. The suspension was a result of Dr. Thornton publishing [a paper](#) in which he claims that the upper echelons of the UoN were directly responsible for the wrongful arrest of two innocent Muslim men – Rizwaan Sabir, an MA student at the SPIR and Hicham Yezza, a member of staff at the School of Modern Languages and editor of the political

journal [Ceasefire](#) – as suspected terrorists three years ago, in May 2008.

The Nottingham Two were held for six days after their arrest, and then released without charge. The arrests followed the discovery by one of Yezza’s colleagues of a document entitled “The Al Qaida Training Manual” and two academic articles on the desktop of his office computer. [Sabir](#) originally downloaded the documents for his MA dissertation on radical Islam and then sent them to his friend Yezza in order to get his views on the materials. Crucially, Sabir retrieved the Al Qaida Manual from the US Department of Justice website.

In his paper, Dr. Thornton details how, instead of carrying out a risk assessment when the documents were found – something that the UoN is obliged to do according to government guidelines – university management directly contacted the police. As a result of which the two innocent

men were arrested. Not only this: Thornton also shows how, after the men’s release, university management engaged in a concerted effort to discredit the two men and their supporters within the university so as to silence their challenge to the UoN’s claim that the research material was illegal and the arrests were justified.

[The UoN](#) has labeled Thornton’s claims as ‘baseless’, and argues that the report defames his colleagues. However, they have failed to provide the public with a single piece of evidence for this claim. In other words, the purpose of Dr. Thornton’s suspension seems to be that of [silencing a whistleblower](#).

Dr. Thornton’s paper appears as a meticulously researched report, which marshals solid evidence for its claims. Over 112 pages, he subjects a barrage of internal university communications, collected under the Freedom of Information Act over a period of three years, to forensic analysis. It is also worth noticing that before publishing the paper, Thornton had exhausted all internal avenues for addressing his grievances against the UoN.

It is precisely for this reason that Dr. Thornton’s report, and his criticism of the UoN and its conduct, does not deserve to be met with yet another attack on academic freedom. If justice is to be done in this case, Dr. Thornton must be immediately reinstated, and the UoN must submit to an independent public inquiry of the claims made against it in his report.

Please join [Noam Chomsky](#) and others in giving support to these demands by signing the [S.W.A.N.](#) petition at <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/support-whistleblower-at-nottingham/>. ■