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Notes From the Field **A Critical View of Graduate Unions**

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Abstract

Institutions of higher education increasingly focus on their economic functions and have adopted labor force practices that resemble private businesses. One such strategy is a greater reliance on employing graduate students to perform tasks previously done by faculty. Simultaneously, graduate employees have organized labor unions and pushed for rights and benefits other organized workers have sought. This is a practice that should be of concern to human rights sociologists, lest we neglect to critically reflect on the social relations that our work is embedded within, thereby damaging our abilities to champion the oppressed. This case study examines how graduate labor organizers see their efforts as enabling what they call the corporatization of the university in unintended ways. It adds a new dimension to existing scholarship that depicts graduate labor unions as a counter-force to corporatization and businesslike practices in higher education while arguing that graduate unions are actually participants in these. With this in mind, this paper suggests reasons for human rights sociologists to still support graduate labor union efforts and suggests ways that we can do it without undermining our goal, given the unintended consequences identified by graduate labor organizers.

Keywords

Graduate Unions, Corporatization, Higher Education, University

Burawoy (2006) as well as Moncada and Blau (2008) situate contemporary sociology and its discourse on human rights within the third wave of marketization. They define each wave by states' affiliations with capital and the distinct challenges these present to labor rights. Wave one was state capitalism perpetuated by the colonial powers managing the appropriation of wealth through the use of force and coercion. Labor rights were sought and protected through local communities and enshrined in custom. Wave two was defined by nation states using their powers in protection of private companies. Labor activism was institutionalized and protected

through laws regulating commodification. This third wave is the era of globalization and it is dominated by multinational corporations rather than states. Increasingly, institutions, even those not intended to seek profits, are organized by a corporate logic.

Labor struggles in this third wave of marketization are distinct due to the changing face of labor oppression in the era of globalization. Formerly marginalized groups within organized labor, such as migrant and temporary workers, have moved into positions of influence within the union movement (Burawoy 2006). Increasingly organizing campaigns focus on previously ignored populations of workers and are resorting to member concentrated tactics that recognize the changing look of American labor and focuses on the issues specific to the workers. For example, unions have more success organizing women and people of color when they incorporate women's issues and racial inequality into union agendas. This is also seen in the nurturing of alliances between organized labor and previously antagonistic groups such as immigrants and environmental activists (Clawson & Clawson 1999). Graduate assistants (GAs) at research universities, who were looked down upon for "playing union" by the establishment labor activists in 1960s, have risen to leadership positions within influential, national organizations (Dizikes and Sewell 2011). Moreover, in the United States, where there has been a transition from an industrial economy to one that is knowledge based, "education constitutes an essential factor of production" and universities have emerged as sites of prominent labor struggles (Goldstene 2012: 8).

According to Clawson and Clawson (1999) labor activism and unionization has decreased across most sectors with regards to their "density, organizing capacity, level of strike activity, and political effectiveness" (p. 95). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2012) reports that union members accounted for 11.8% of employed wage and salary workers in the United States in the year 2011. This is down significantly from 20.1% in 1983, the first year for which comparable statistics are available. Conversely, on the campuses of research universities, where many human rights sociologists work, unionization is flourishing and spreading among graduate employees. During this period of union decline, prominent labor organizations have invested more resources and attention to organizing GAs (Dixon, Tope, & Van

Dyke 2008; Zinni, Singh, & MacLennan 2005). The growth in unionization is among the graduate assistants who universities increasingly rely upon for cheap, temporary, easily controlled labor that enables institutions to fulfill their missions and satisfy growing demand for higher education with reduced numbers of permanent faculty members (Bousquet 2008; Ehrenberg et al. 2004). As a result, graduate employment on the scale that it now exists, functions to undermine future employment opportunities for current graduate employees.

With these in mind, this paper constitutes an attempt to push human rights sociologists to examine the nature of social relations, particularly labor relations, within universities where many of us work. I focus on graduate labor union efforts, utilizing GAs' unique standpoints as both students and employees. Furthermore, GA unionists are both organized labor and student activists. This standpoint, which is typically ignored by scholars, allows us a unique view of institutional relations that many human rights sociologists are part of. I use this approach to suggest that it is in the best interests of human rights sociology for us, as its proponents, to concern ourselves with GA union efforts.

This work's goal, however, goes beyond merely reorienting human rights sociologists' focus to the conditions they oftentimes work within. Moncada and Blau (2006) are critical of scholars who take up the role of defenders of the oppressed yet operate on insufficiently small scales. They urge sociologists to broaden our scope and to use our imaginations to promote "ethical principles of cooperation and solidarity, individual freedom and autonomy, peace and reconciliation" on a worldwide scale (2006:120). Given the increasingly global nature of research universities, and their newly configured relationships with industry and corporations in a globalized economy, I propose that we recognize the academy as a zone of struggle for human rights. Feminist and critical race scholars have used sociology to focus on academia and knowledge production as sites of patriarchy and white supremacy. Human rights sociologists must also pay attention to exploitative labor practices within the academy and use the discourses and methods of our discipline to counter them (Burawoy 2006). Moncada and Blau (2008) warn us that sociologists will inevitably be forced to choose between the human

rights model of sociology and the market model. This decision will often be made within institutions and networks that are organized by the market model, so any rejection of it requires us to focus our critiques on what is going on right around us.

Additionally, if the goal of our sociology is to engage publics in ways that facilitate collective efforts, as Burawoy (2006), Blau and Moncada (2007), as well as Moncada and Blau (2006) assert, we must tend to the reality that messengers effect how well their messages resonate (Benford and Snow 2000). If we exalt ourselves as champions of human rights and opponents of exploitation, it behooves us to recognize exploitation that enables our efforts and make the university enterprise work.

In what follows, I analyze graduate labor organizers' views on GA unionization efforts. I pay particular attention to how they see it in light of current trends in higher education during this third wave of marketization. I focus on graduate labor organizing and organizers' views of its consequences and possibilities. By studying GA organizing from a sociological perspective, we can better comprehend the structure and management of today's global universities as well as other institutions that are increasingly organized by market determinism and employ the same workforce strategies that currently define academia. What is more, we can gain insight into the functions of graduate labor unions, and inform similar change efforts as to the foundations and limits of authority and activism which is of the utmost importance when conducting human rights sociology. I end with a discussion of this analysis's implications for sociologists, especially those who promote human rights as a part of their professional identities.

I utilize a case study approach to examine organizing at the University of Florida from the year 2005 through 2010. This research was conducted amid administrative attempts at college restructuring and state budget cuts. I explore what graduate labor organizers see as unintended ramifications of their union organizing. The data collected reflects GA organizers' tacit understandings of power and resistance as interrelated, reciprocal phenomena. Specifically, their discussions of organizing portray the university as what Acker (2006) calls an inequality regime. Management and GA unions are seen as utilizing shared resources in order to influence the outcome of social

transactions. Organizational relations are understood as the products of interlocking practices that reproduce them, including concerted change efforts consciously seeking to alter institutional organization. This view counters existing scholarship on GA unions that sees them as a force capable of fundamentally reorganizing universities (Bousquet 2008; Lafer 2003) — and has consequences for both unionists and management that should be of concern to human rights sociologists.

GRADUATE LABOR IN THE THIRD WAVE OF MARKETIZATION

The use of graduate assistants' labor in fulfilling research universities' instructional obligations and doing other work that, for the most part, used to be done by faculty, has become hard to ignore (Bousquet 2008; Ehrenberg et al. 2004). Increasingly, GAs have formed labor unions and pressed for the same rights and benefits afforded other unionized workers (Barba 1994a,1994b; Rhoades and Rhoads 2003). Most union activity has taken place in public research universities, and there are no signs that the move towards unionization is passing (Ehrenberg et al. 2004; Lee et al. 2004). By the end of the twentieth century roughly thirty-two major public research and doctoral universities in the U.S. and Canada had recognized graduate unions (Ehrenberg et al. 2004; Zinni, Singh, and MacLellan 2005). According to Lafer (2003) roughly 20% of GAs in the United States are covered by union contracts. The BLS (2012) reports, that in 2011, 13% of all workers were covered by union contracts. There is general consensus that the trend is towards increasing GA unionization (Lafer 2003; Ehrenberg et al. 2004; Singh, Zinni, and MacLellan 2006; Zinni et al. 2005).

Since 1990, the prevalence of GA unions increased nationwide (DeCew 2003; Rhoades and Rhoads 2003; Singh et al. 2006; Smallwood 2001; Wickens 2008). This growth period coincided with other changes within the academy, and more broadly, the United States' transition from an industrial economy to a knowledge/information-based one (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). Changes to the political economy of academia have been most pronounced in public institutions due to the ascendance of neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies that have led government agencies to reduce public resources

devoted to higher education while simultaneously shifting the remaining funds towards investments directed at maximizing efficiency and stressing higher education's economic functions (Giroux 2002; 2004; Rhoads and Rhoades 2005; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Tightened budgets have resulted in academic managers having to focus more on short-term economic concerns and implement policies that can potentially generate revenue. Such policies have led to new, expanded connections between higher education, states, and private sector organizations.

It is probably not a coincidence that the majority of graduate assistants willing to take on the task of union organizing are from the humanities and social sciences (Rhoads and Rhoades 2005). Within those fields of study, the reliance on graduate labor and time to degrees has grown most dramatically while the chances of attaining tenure track employment upon graduation have declined the most (Bousquet 2008; Rhoads and Rhoades 2005). In other words, in order to enable universities' functioning, GAs in these fields are more and more working dead end jobs that devalue the degrees they are pursuing.

Likewise, the humanities and social sciences have been receiving diminishing shares of institutional monies that are disproportionately allocated to potentially profitable departments and programs (Bousquet 2008; Rhoads and Rhoades 2005). The concentration of unionists in particular fields highlights the differing fates of various disciplines, but it also, ironically, illustrates their functions (Rhoads and Rhoades 2005). The social sciences' and humanities' purpose, to some extent, is to develop criticism and commentary on relevant social institutions. In a way, these economic shifts and policies have created the conditions from which their challenges emerged. This contradiction leads Rhoads and Rhoades to depict GA labor unions as simultaneously reflecting shifts in academia and challenging them.

What is more, universities have increasingly adopted top-down methods of management that are commonly associated with corporations, the chief economic powers in third wave marketization. Aronowitz (2000) claims these types of practices had become the norm for most public and private schools by the mid-1990s. GA labor activists see the growth of graduate unions, at

least in part, as a political reaction to these changes that “seeks to alter the distribution of power within the academy” (Rhoads and Rhoades 2005:243). Within the context of changing academic economies, some scholars see graduate employee unions as a potential source for resistance or progressive reforms (Bousquet 2008; Lafer 2003; Rhoads and Rhoades 2005).

To Bousquet (2008) graduate labor unions, in conjunction with adjunct instructor unions, offer the best chance of halting these trends and undoing what he characterizes as corporatization of the university. These unions’ potential comes from the fact that there are so many GAs and contingent faculty working on campuses. Collectively, they can wield an incredible amount of influence. Beyond GA and contingent faculty unions, Bousquet sees little hope, for he views these groups as the only source of energy, movement, critique, and theory available. Bousquet rules out hope that tenure-stream faculty unions will contribute to stymieing corporatization because they are beneficiaries of sharply tiered workforces, and they oftentimes cooperate with management to create them.

Lafer (2003) agrees with Bousquet about GA unions’ potential. But Lafer sees it rooted in the power of example. Graduate unions, in his eyes, might inspire organizing drives among faculty and other employees, and they offer a working model. Unionization would be the best form of opposition to current trends, according to Lafer, because organized labor alone has the capability to counterbalance them. Although no spike in faculty organizing has been observed, Lafer contends that recent practices, such as salary freezes, transfers of intellectual property rights, limits on academic freedom and the erosion of tenure protections, have created an environment in which unionizing is more seductive.

BACKGROUND

This study is situated at the University of Florida (UF), a Doctoral Extensive university with a student population that exceeds 50,000. UF’s chapter of Graduate Assistants United (UF-GAU) represents 4,273 GAs performing various types of work (University of Florida 2009). Of those employees, 925 (21.64%) of them are members of UF-GAU (UF-GAU 2009). Because Florida is a right-to-work state, membership in UF-GAU is voluntary, GAs are neither

automatically enrolled in the union nor are dues compulsory. Regardless of membership status, all GAs at the university are covered by the contract negotiated between UF-GAU and the University of Florida's Board of Trustees (UFBOT). Membership dues are 1% of GAs' paychecks.

This data was gathered from the years 2005 through 2010, a period marked by state budget cuts, administrative attempts at college reorganization, and union busting, that Emery (2010) utilizes for her case study in "management-by-crisis." Emery documents the significance of market determinism and administrators' strategic use of crisis rhetoric in struggles with faculty, staff, and other parties over the structure of higher education. By continually invoking crises, academic managers pressure employees to increase efficiency and entrepreneurialism while justifying program cuts that are concentrated in the humanities and social sciences. Unions facilitate resistance to management-by-crisis because they impede the top-down practices that increasingly characterize university governance. I make use of this same situation to conduct a case study on graduate labor organizing. The work done by GA unionists in this context can be understood as efforts to affect this struggle in ways they see as advantageous.

In some ways, the case of Florida is an extreme example of common management strategies. In other ways, Florida is a unique case. Because it is a right-to-work state, where employees have contract protections with no obligation to pay union dues, and is located in the Deep South where organized labor is less influential generally, there are added barriers to unionizing. Thus, it requires more concerted efforts on the part of organizers. As a result, this case allows for dramatizing and probing the interactions between the graduate union, administrators, and other relevant parties in a way that can be helpful for understanding similar relationships in other locations, even as changes in higher education and its relationship to the state and private sector manifest in unique ways from campus to campus.

STUDY DESIGN

This research, which is part of a broader project, was conducted using multiple qualitative, case study methods based on an

inductive logic similar to grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967). The focus of the bigger project is on how graduate labor organizing is done and understood. In this piece, I am focusing specifically on how GA labor organizers understand the unintended consequences of union efforts. I utilize GA labor organizers' standpoint, as do Rhoads and Rhoades (2005), in order to add depth to our understanding of contemporary universities by highlighting views that are oftentimes neglected in academic literature. My objectives are to advance GA organizers' analyses of the relationships between graduate labor organizing and businesslike practices in higher education and to engender reflexivity on the part of human rights sociologists in order to increase the effectiveness of our work and sustain our version of sociology.

Utilizing organizers' standpoint, recognizing them as experts, is consistent with the traditions of critical sociology that recognizes all knowledge as privileging the perspectives and interests of particular groups. Epistemologies rooted in standpoint basically hold that less powerful groups develop unique understandings and views of the world separate from the dominant groups'. This combined with the fact that they have to function in institutions organized around dominant groups' perspectives means they develop a broader view than members of the dominant group can (Collins 2000). Therefore, knowledge developed from the margins offers a more complete view of social life. This approach is ideal for studying GA unionists who occupy multiple positions within the university. They are simultaneously students and employees, student activists and organized labor. Utilizing a standpoint epistemology constitutes an attempt to further scholarship on graduate unions that situates the knowledge produced in order to elevate the perspective union organizers' understandings and analyses of universities to the same level as scholars, oftentimes members of faculties, who study graduate unionizing. This is not to say that we must accept the views presented by organizers, but we can use their views on unionizing as tools to reflect on the changing face of the academy and to provoke further inquiry.

My own personal journals and experiences from five years as a graduate labor organizer inform this analysis throughout. The last two years of my participation coincided with my research, so I was

involved as an organizer and as an ethnographic participant-observer. This analysis constitutes an insider's account of labor organizing.

Interview participants and procedures.

I rely heavily on semi-structured, active interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). I identified nine people for interviews. The interviews focused on the standard and unique practices relevant to organizers' union involvement and their experiences trying to recruit others. All interviews lasted from one to two hours. Audio recordings were made and transcribed.

Each participant was a GA and had done work for UF-GAU either as an officer or rank and file volunteer. Collectively, this group constituted the core of activists in UF-GAU during the period examined. They are the "self-selected few that actively take on the challenge towards unionization" and are not intended to represent the graduate student body or GAs as whole (Lee et al. 2004:355). Participants who were not officers were identified for interviews by current officers or because they formerly held positions. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of each participant.

Data analysis.

Analyzing data involved inductively producing informal codes based on the interview transcripts. The original codes were based on incident-by-incident coding procedures (Charmaz 2006). The next step involved comparing transcripts to develop consistent coding schemes for all of them. When a set of codes was developed, I deductively applied them to the interview transcripts as well as my field notes, journals, and organizational documents. I focused the initial coding on the interview data in order to favor the knowledge expressed by my participants and to avoid applying predetermined analyses to their statements. When possible, I utilized in vivo language in order to keep the analysis as close to my participants' articulations as possible.

Once all data was coded, I identified key categories around which my findings would be organized. This led me to applying Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes to the data for the purposes of highlighting the relational foundations of union organizing that my participants expressed. Throughout this process, I spoke with the participants about the analysis taking form in order to retain indigenous understandings.

FINDINGS

The concept of corporatization is an ominous buzzword in academic circles. Although there is considerable debate around its existence and even its definition, the topic is prevalent and frequently discussed within UF-GAU. I first encountered the concept through union work, not academic literature. In private meetings as well as public statements, the corporatization of the university is frequently discussed. As it is used in these contexts, it corresponds closely to Steck's (2003) definition of administrators adopting "the culture, practices, policies, and workforce strategies of corporations."

Emery (2010) documents UF-GAU's successful collaboration with CLAS Unite, a student organization formed to pushback against the university's "Five-Year-Plan" to remedy the College of Liberal Arts and Science's debt during the 2006–2007 academic year. In March of 2007, the groups staged a teach-in on UF's campus. The union's organizing chair delivered a lecture on corporatization and the role collective bargaining and unions can play to minimize its effects. This followed a lecture that I gave documenting administrators' objectionable actions and comments, such as the provost's characterization of the plan under consideration as a coup in an email exchange with the college's dean. The general thrust of the lectures was that unionization offered the best source of resistance to such practices since it allows GAs access to decision makers and enables them to influence and expose management's practices. Plus, collective bargaining offers an opportunity for exerting influence on administrative policies that, unlike what CLAS Unite was doing, is legally binding. Union organizers' public statements such as these depict UF-GAU as a counterforce to corporatization similar to Bousquet's (2008) and Lafer's (2003) analyses.

When talking to organizers in interview settings, however, their assessments of unionizing are more complex. Although they continue to view corporatization as a negative trend, and unions as a crucial tool for making the best of it, they also see unions as enabling and legitimizing some aspects of corporatization. Specifically, graduate labor organizers talk about the union contributing to corporatization in three ways: 1) projecting an image of the university that inconsistent with popular notions of higher education, 2) reallocating responsibility for fair compensation, and 3) by moderating disruptive policies and politics.

The first way graduate unions contribute to corporatization is by projecting an image of universities that is inconsistent with a community of scholars and more closely corresponds to a factory. Their opposition to labor practices entails casting GAs as employees, and there are different criteria for evaluating how employers relate to employees than educators to pupils.

GJ: The union does sort of obliquely contribute to corporatization in the university if you get back to sort of the model of how unions originally worked... they began in factories where we have workers that are being not paid enough... or having to work in dangerous conditions because corporate employers are concerned about their bottom lines, right? So, now you have corporate universities who are concerned about their bottom lines. And so, us having to organize those workers, I think sort of obliquely contributes to the administration's own perceived idea that the university is a corporate thing... I don't think that members of [UF-GAU] think about it that way... It's sort of a self-perpetuating cycle where if we unionized the administration can act more like a corporation. I'd like to think that's not actually how it's playing out.

Part of this image of exploited laborers that GA organizers create is rooted in organizing strategies that they utilize. Each participant discussed the need to frame the GA experience as employment rather than schooling. There is a constant framing contest between the GA union that tells graduates that they are workers and administrators who tell them they are students. The unionists believe that succeeding in that framing contest leads to successfully advancing their agenda. This is supported by empirical data. Isler's (2007) work determines that GAs became organizable when they came to view themselves as workers. In contrast, web designers do not view themselves this way and are therefore unorganizable. But GJ's comments argue that successfully framing GAs as employees is a double edged sword. It makes organizing easier, but it also allows management to run the university more as a private business.

A second way graduate labor unionizing is seen to enable corporate-like labor practices is that it effectively places the burden of fair compensation for graduate labor on the union's shoulders.

Nedda: Because the union is negotiating on behalf of all graduate assistants the department has less of a responsibility to try to improve the pay in there and... improve the conditions of their individual graduate assistants... For example, when I was at the University of Oklahoma where we didn't have a union, we actually, in [my] department, we actually got a thousand dollar raise one year because our faculty fought really hard for it... So that's one way, that responsibility is removed from the shoulders of the individual faculty and departments.

Management's opposition to graduate unions is near universal (Ehrenberg et al. 2004), yet the union's presence allows administrators to deflect criticism for GAs low pay and benefits towards UF-GAU. Article 23.5 of the contract states that "Nothing contained herein shall prevent the units from providing salary increases beyond the increases specified" (UFBOT and UF-GAU 2009). Still, over the course of this research, union organizers had to publicly counter claims by two

different provosts who asserted that raises beyond what is guaranteed in the contract with UF-GAU were prohibited. Concerned GAs were told they needed to take up the issue with their union.

Sometimes, organizers actively participate in reallocating credit for pay scales onto UF-GAU. In March 2009, prior to contract negotiations, union members discussed wage discrepancies at the general membership meeting. From a personal journal entry:

We discussed wage inequality tonight. We proposed various ways to close the wage gap. The idea that got the most traction was an across the board, whole dollar raise as opposed to a percentage because [the latter] gives the wealthiest the lion's share of the benefits. Typically those are not the people that are most active in the union.

The ensuing negotiations resulted in a percentage raise. The whole dollar raise, or even onetime bonus, was a nonstarter with the administration. Given the low wages at the bottom of the pay scale, the cost of living increases since GAs had a pay increase, and the political utility of getting credit for bolstering paychecks, union negotiators could not reject the offer when the alternative was the status quo. Even if the investment of resources was skewed towards those making more money, UF-GAU could take credit for getting graduate employees raises.

Minus collective bargaining, the university's expenditures on GA pay may have tilted even more towards the high end. That they did not highlights another way organizers see their work assisting management's businesslike practices. The union is seen as a moderating force. It functions as restrictor plates on racecars that slow them down in order to keep them from flying off the track. The union does not reverse the current trends in the academy. It just slows them down and minimizes flack that could derail management's efforts.

Bilbo: It's beneficial for them to kind of get feedback before they really shoot themselves in the foot. If they propose something and we say "no, that's crazy and insane" sometimes they back

off from that... If there was no union they wouldn't do something like that and it might just blow up in their faces and they won't be ready for that. We're sort of like the canary in the coalmine for them, in some ways. That's what happened at [The University of] South Florida when they proposed changing graduate enrollment from nine to twelve hours and people flipped out. They have a union, but it's a ghost chapter, so there was nobody to talk about that before it happened.

Organizers also see their work as restricting radically inclined GAs who are attracted to organized labor. Unions provide institutionalized, controlled avenues for activism. Acting outside of established channels can decertify the union resulting in losing contractual protections. Therefore, when politically inclined GAs—who organizers target—work through the union, actions and tactics they might otherwise employ are discouraged.

Dusty: All the radical politics that I love came out of the labor movement, that's what I want to do. But I started even more to the left than that though... When I first started really trying to get people organized... I was trying to get people organized for the IMF protest that was going to be going on... I just felt like it could be something really exciting where you're questioning authority, like that's what I loved about it and, and a lot of those people there were also involved in a labor movement.

Interviewer: One of the things [it seems] you are talking about [is] the [graduate] union counterbalancing that kind of resistance [or political action].

Dusty: Yeah

In spite of these perceived consequences, the fact these activists continue working through their union indicates that they see it as a net plus.

ANALYSIS

GA organizers' public statements and assessments are consistent with Bousquet (2008) and Lafer (2003) in casting graduate unions as a counterforce to corporatization that can slow or turn back many of the trends associated with it. However, activists' statements in interviews, where they could explore subjects they had not considered before, depict UF-GAU more as a moderating force in the university rather than one that fundamentally alters the distribution power. UF-GAU functions to stabilize and entrench particular exercises of power in ways that minimize backlash against administrators. At times, the graduate union shields and validates administrative practices that union organizers regard as corporatization.

GAs articulate a view of their work as contributing to corporatization, as they define it. At times, graduate unions are vested parties in the practices that they critique or view as problematic, such as when these organizers benefitted by taking credit for a raise that did not address income equality as their members had requested. This is also the case when UF-GAU benefits from the work of GAs who might engage in more radical, disruptive actions if they were working outside of the union.

I have found GA labor organizers' views to coincide most closely with Ackers's (2006) discussion of inequality regimes. Acker utilizes a relational understanding of power in her examination of workplace change efforts that unions are often a part of. Her concept of inequality regimes depicts organizational relations as the products of interlocking practices that reproduce them in spite of concerted efforts to the contrary. Consequently, the studies of change efforts are opportunities to observe frequently hidden facets in the reproduction of institutional relations.

Acker (2006) developed the concept of inequality regimes to explain why change efforts frequently fail at achieving their stated goals of countering power and end up reinforcing it. This is not to say that they do not create any change. They simply do not lead to the

outcomes expressly sought. Consistent with participants' statements, Acker's model explicates organizational relations in a way that accounts for dynamic interaction on the part of management and subordinates. Her concept, therefore, provides an exceptional framework for making sense out trends in higher education in relation to graduate labor activism and why it produces the outcomes organizers observe. It is particularly useful for understanding the interactions between graduate unions and university administration.

None of this is to say that GA unionists embrace corporate academies. These participants universally deemed corporatization problematic and think unionizing is a net positive, even necessary. But we can take three things from this data. Firstly, GA unions and university administrators are not on equal footing with regards to influencing labor policy, even though they are theoretically equals at the bargaining table. The union operates from a position of disadvantage. As a consequence, their political opportunity is limited. Sometimes this means that union activists have to pursue goals that GAs see as less than optimal. In these cases, such as when union organizers claimed credit for an across the board raise, the graduate union can be co-opted to advance the administration's agenda.

Second, Rhoads and Rhoades (2005) argue that we should recognize graduate labor unions as simultaneously indicating that corporatization is underway and challenging it. This data implies that GA unions are also contributors. Organizers are apprehensive, but their work can be seen to facilitate what they see as corporatization. What is more, GA unions that are beneficiaries of corporatization should not be expected to undo it any more than the faculty who reap its rewards.

That graduate unions indicate, challenge, as well as contribute to corporatization are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily given. Corporatization does occur in GA unions' absence. In fact, at the end of the period under examination, UF-GAU organizers were participating in a campaign to establish a graduate union at another state university in Florida as a way to address graduate labor issues similar to those on UF's campus where UF-GAU has operated for more than thirty years. Moreover, just because this union is doing things that help solidify corporatization does not mean all GA unions' actions always do. What this draws attention to, though, is the

interconnected nature of power and activism that participants in change efforts of all sorts must consider. It is this interconnectedness that Bousquet's (2008) and Lafer's (2003) work does not account for and that a sociological perspective stressing simultaneity, such as Acker's (2006) reveals. The limitations of case study data should prevent us from concluding that Bousquet and Lafer are wrong, but it does offer an empirical basis for critiquing their work.

Lastly, this data has implications for activism and administrative practices. Activists can utilize this work to help identify latent ways their own work factors into creating the problems they are working against so that they can make tactical adjustments and perhaps reconsider the balance they strike between achieving short-term victories (e.g. convincing GAs that they are workers or getting a small raise) and long-term efforts to fundamentally alter institutions. If the case of UF-GAU is typical, then these can be hard to identify in the absence of deliberate, systematic reflection and examination, such as that which occurred in the interviews used here. Facilitating such reflection is something human rights sociologists are uniquely positioned to do through our research and methods of inquiry.

Such reflection on the administrative end might lead to alterations in how they interact with unions also. In general, university administrations have opposed collective bargaining for GAs, even though available research demonstrates that the cost of organized graduate labor to universities is minimal (Ehrenberg et al. 2004) and often leads to better work relation among faculty and GAs (Julius and Gumport 2002; Lee et al. 2004). Even from a management perspective, hostility towards GA unions appears to be more of a predetermined stance rooted in ideology than a rational, calculated, position. Based on this data, there may be ways that administrators can make use of GA unions in order to increase their capacity to manage. It stands to reason that these are possible in other contexts also.

DISCUSSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS SOCIOLOGISTS

Burawoy (2006) argues that any sociology for human rights must start at home, "back in the university" (2006:14). He writes of an approach to sociology that is similar to the view articulated through

the organization Sociologists Without Borders (an academic NGO) as well as the publication *Sociologists Without Borders*—that adapted its title from this organization’s name. It is a public sociology that is firmly and openly rooted in the discipline’s critical traditions (Blau and Moncada 2007). It casts sociology and social scientists as crucial components in collective efforts to undermine power and enable people to participate and exert meaningful influence in decision making processes that affect their lives. The pursuit of value-free analyses is dropped in favor of inquiry that recognizes and utilizes the political nature of all research in an effort to transform existing social relations and create a better world for oppressed, marginalized populations, groups and communities. This project requires scholars to ascribe to ethical principles that recognize human equality and reject hierarchy and domination (Moncada and Blau 2006).

Critical sociology is a tradition that also emphasizes reflexivity (McCarthy 1996). It is vital that specialists are mindful of the social conditions and relations that engender specific types of knowledge production. As human rights sociologists, we see the potential for our work to create social change. We must also recognize that our own analyses are fashioned and influenced by the world as it currently exists. Consequently, our project requires us to account for the social relations we are embedded in as we advance our causes. A failure to do so leaves our work incomplete and undermines the goals of our collective efforts.

As sociologists working under this human rights model, who want to encourage or enable more of our colleagues to opt for this approach to scholarship rather than the market model, we have a unique set of interests that should lead us to supporting graduate union efforts. These interests are rooted in our need to cast ourselves as credible messengers on the topics of oppression, exploitation, and activism as well as to demonstrate for future faculty desiring to embrace human rights sociology that our model can provide a viable career path. Nevertheless, support for graduate unionizing, in light of this data showing GA union activity to entrench objectionable social relations, is not without complications.

One way human rights sociologists can offer support for GA union efforts is to legitimate the struggle through our scholarship, as I am attempting in this paper. By incorporating the

experiences of graduate employees into our discourse on human rights, we can elevate GA labor issues to a level that draws attention to them and recast them as fights for democracy and self-determination, rather than kids playing union. In other words, we can further undo the marginalization of graduate labor exploitation within organized labor and among scholars. Additionally, by incorporating these efforts into our research, we demonstrate a commitment to critical reflexivity that can enhance our credibility when we address struggles taking place outside of academia. Benford and Snow (2000) make it clear that messengers influence how messages are received. They also claim that inconsistency between words and observed reality lessen the resonance of the messages being delivered. If scholars are seen to be paying lip service to equality and liberation while simultaneously working in universities that rely on exploitative labor, their credibility will diminish and their arguments will more often ring hollow.

Supporting GA labor can also bolster our credibility as champions of the oppressed within the academy among graduate students, a population containing future faculty members. This is an audience that is important to us, assuming we want to sustain a human rights model of sociology, assuming we want sociologists to choose the human rights approach when they are confronted with the inevitable decision Moncada and Blau (2008) warn us of. As mentioned previously, GA unionists tend to be concentrated within the social sciences and humanities (Rhoads and Rhoades 2005). GA unions provide an opportunity for faculty in the same institutions to access and advise scholars who have already demonstrated a concern for labor struggles which are a central concern in human rights sociology. If we want those scholars to choose to chart career paths that pursue sociology for human rights, we have to socialize them professionally. We have to demonstrate that there are practicable career tracks that do not require acquiescing to the market. Selling graduate students on the human rights approach will be easier if we incorporate their issues into our work, just as unions more successfully organize women and people of color when their agendas prioritize issues of race and sex (Clawson and Clawson 1999).

Support for graduate labor unions is not a simple matter, however. As this data indicates, sometimes graduate unionizing can

serve to further entrench practices that are deemed corporatization. Such efforts can make rejection of the market model, at the university level, harder to achieve. This presents human rights sociologists a dilemma. How can we support GA unionizing without sacrificing principle for practical goals? This dilemma requires sociologists to think in both the short and long terms. A long-term effort to transform universities is a project that requires deliberation and theory as well as strategizing for coordinated collective actions. It is a worthwhile focus of our scholarship and grounds upon which to engage publics.

In the short-term, actions can be taken and supported to improve working conditions and job security for GAs through collective bargaining. Such initiatives can be supported by statements of solidarity through faculty unions or faculty senates that express disapproval for GA exploitation. We can initiate such statements on our own campuses through participation in these bodies. Through the mechanisms of faculty governance and professional organizations we can promote GA unionizing and contractual rights in the name of self-interest, since research demonstrates improved relationships among faculty and graduate students when union protections are in place (Julius and Gumpert 2002; Lee et al. 2004). This may help draw attention to and validate GA labor rights in the eyes of other faculty who have chosen the market model.

These short-term, practical efforts should be seen as imperfect, but they can also lead to new possibilities. As Boff and Boff (1987) and Feagin and Vera (2001) argue, liberation requires first claiming everything available under the current system. As new benefits are claimed, new possibilities for resistance emerge. This view recognizes the dialectic relationship between oppression and activism that Collins (2000) identifies. GA organizers in this study express an implicit understanding of this imperative through their discussions on unionizing. It is why they endorse unionizing in spite of their views that it is not undoing corporatization.

Ultimately, the bind human rights sociologists encounter—by either supporting GA unionism and helping entrench corporatization or ignoring graduate labor struggles and damaging our credibility as champions of the oppressed—is similar to the dilemma Nickel (2010) identifies. Her critique of human rights sociology's overarching

narrative asserts that it relies on a discourse rooted in governmentality. Therefore, it latently functions to stabilize the existing logic of ruling. She concedes that a public sociology for human rights is admirable in intent, but it results in undesirable consequences. Her conclusion is that human rights sociologists have to consciously maneuver so as to find ways of contesting the logic of ruling. The takeaway from Nickel's critique should not be to abandon the human rights model or its goals until we have figured out the best way to contest this logic of ruling. The same can be said of activism that latently entrenches businesslike practices and the market logic. We have to maneuver in order to find ways of engaging in labor struggles within the university that do not facilitate the exploitation of labor in the long-run. Human rights sociology can engender reflexivity that enables this maneuvering.

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