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A Note from the Editors

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Note from the Editors

Societies Without Borders – *What Is That!!!?*

The journal's title was adapted from the name of an academic NGO, Sociólogos sin Fronteras/Sociologists without Borders, which is committed to a relevant and publicly engaged sociology and aims to advance a unitary (trans-disciplinary and trans-national) approach for understanding the foundations for a better world. That is, better for those now oppressed. Better for the peoples of the Global South. Better for the world's precious resources. Better for all our children. Better for all the children of all our children.

The journal advances critical analyses (of institutions and systems of oppression), promotes utopistic projects that clarify pathways for progressive transformation, and seeks to open up spaces that intellectuals, activists, and practitioners can share. The journal, like the NGO, highlights the indivisibility of human rights, deep democracy, and the close connections between human rights and collective goods, such as natural resources and the technologies that are necessary for empowered development.

Because there is a widely shared understanding about the modalities of critical social science (Karl Marx, W.E.B. du Bois, Immanuel Wallerstein, Frances Fox Piven, Arundhati Roy, and so on), we do not need to elaborate what we refer to as “critical analyses,” but “utopistic projects” requires a brief comment. We encourage such submissions that rely on exceptionally solid analyses, creative insights, make clear connections between ideas and praxis, and recognize the dialectic character of social and historical processes. Sociological training *does* prepare scholars to venture into utopistic projects even when the discipline of sociology does not especially reward those who undertake them. As editors, we will consider utopistic submissions that meet the highest standards of excellence, raise counterintuitive questions, and sparkle with creativity. *Societies Without Borders* is a peer-reviewed journal, and reviewers are selected who are open to new and fresh approaches and ideas.

The journal title, *Societies Without Borders*, may leave some readers wondering about the premises we wish to convey or the ideas we wish to provoke. First, we intend to suggest that societies (and the politics and economies they embed) deserve more critical interrogation than now recognized in

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mainstream social science, and do so whether as they are considered as dynamic processes, complex and embedded structures, practices, or as patterns of knowledge and symbols. We might also understand societies as vehicles for citizen participation, through which people exercise their individual and collective political and economic freedoms. Second, we intend to suggest that “societies without borders” are pluralistic, dynamic, cosmopolitan, spatially indeterminate, and inclusive. Third, we propose that it is primarily open societies that have the capacity to energetically promote and protect human rights and collective goods.

This issue of the journal amplifies these themes. The articles by William Robinson and Ruy Braga are deeply critical of neoliberalism – Robinson writing on the macro-dynamics of transnational capitalism and state subordination to transnationals, and Braga on the proletarianization of labor in Brazil’s service sector. Robinson’s thesis is strikingly different from that of others writing on globalization in that he downplays the importance of political elites. US imperialism is *not* what is behind globalization, but rather transnationalization of capital and transnational state apparatuses that impose capitalist domination beyond the logic of the inter-state system.

Braga situates his study of Call Centers and Call Center workers solidly in his sophisticated post-industrial class analysis, and helps readers understand why it is that there is diminished class consciousness among service-sector workers. But he sets up the theoretical argument that would lead us to expect diminished class consciousness among all workers in the globalized, outsourced economy that dominates the world today. He also helps to clarify the particular stresses experienced by female employees, and why such stresses induce their greater compliance to the demands put on them by the company’s supervisors.

Bereket Selassie’s article is a personal and moving account of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, an historical moment of continental solidarity after centuries of colonial domination and the barbaric practices that accompanied the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Selassie’s article is a remarkable provocation: how do enlarged territorial forms articulate with existing borders: ethnicities, languages, political culture, religion, and national identities? Now the African Union (AU), this entity is different in significant ways from, say, the European Union, perhaps because the AU emerged as a pluralistic entity, and remains committed to maintaining pluralism. Bereket Selassie played important roles in major events throughout Africa’s transformation during the second half of the twentieth century. Julius Nyang’oro’s short biographical sketch refreshes readers’ memories of

these landmark events and clarifies the role that Selassie played in them, as well as his participation, as a freedom fighter, in the Eritrean liberation movement.

David Brunnsma and David Overfelt dialogically critique the pedagogical and epistemological borders that dominate in the American academy. They ask: How do we know what we know? What is the nature of learning? Who learns from whom? What is the relationship between praxis and knowledge? We believe they have read the tealeaves correctly; there are shifts occurring in higher education and the question is, how dramatic will these shifts be?

Written with exquisite clarity and graceful scholarship, Fatos Tarifa's cameo piece on the transgression of sexual borders in rural Albanian communities provides readers with an understanding of how varied sex and gender roles can be, and how they might evolve within different societal contexts. How do culture, time, place, and ecology shape sexuality and gender? What forms of sexuality and gender are disappearing with global media and communications?

The two articles by Jerry Pubantz and Alex Neve take readers to the realm of worldwide political order/disorder. Pubantz clarifies that the new reforms that the United Nations is undertaking are designed to make the UN a more responsive and democratic organization that engages citizens directly. In doing so, UN reforms will reinforce societies (which are not the same as nation-states), and ease national and other borders that now divide peoples, while also strengthening locales and communities. The United States has been – throughout this process – obstreperous and obstructionist. To make it worse, US media fail to report how the American government undermines international efforts on a wide range of undertakings, such as the Global AID Fund, the International Criminal Court, most UNESCO programs, foreign aid, and the reduction of small arms sales and trade.

American citizens were both furious and humiliated when they learned about the US's rendition practices, namely transporting prisoners to other countries for "interrogation," a euphemism for torture. Canada, Alex Neve, Secretary General of Amnesty International, Canada, describes how the Canadian government was complicit in renditions. He describes the arguments in favor of torture (under such and such conditions, by such and such authority), and soundly rejects all these arguments. Torture, Alex Neve states, cannot be justified under any conditions whatsoever, and it is a global responsibility to ensure that it never happens. Herein lies the importance role that INGOs, such as Amnesty International, can play: as whistleblowers, as monitors, and to sound the alarm when international norms are violated.

In 'If That Is Heaven, We Would Rather Go to Hell,' Luis E. Rumbaut and Rubén G. Rumbaut situate current Cuba–US relations against the backdrop of Cuba's and the US's intertwined and tumultuous history, the Cold War, and ongoing regional tensions involving Latin America, Caribbean states, and the US. They raise challenging questions about the relationships between liberal rights – the civil rights of individuals as well as the sovereign rights of nation-states – and human rights, suggesting that while Cuba has a poor showing on civil rights, the US's ongoing efforts to contain Cuba must also be understood against the backdrop of Cuba's superior record on ensuring people their security and socioeconomic rights.

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