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# “Social Science without Borders: Looking Back, Looking Forward”

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**A Special Issue of *Societies Without Borders: Human Rights and the Social Sciences***

**"Social Science without Borders: Looking Back, Looking Forward"**

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This special issue of *Societies Without Borders: Human Rights and the Social Sciences* (*SWB*) collects articles, commentaries, notes from the field, as well as poetic and visual expressions devoted to critically commemorating the first decade of the scholarly NGO Sociólogos Sin Fronteras/Sociologists Without Borders (SSF). As SSF enters its second decade of work with scholars, students, activists, and community members in SSF chapters around the world, we are pleased to present a series of reflections on the origins, evolution, and future not only of SSF's mission, but also of the broader project of building a social science without borders.

As the flagship journal of SSF, *SWB* has been deeply involved in the human rights revolution in the social sciences, particularly sociology. This issue of *SWB* serves as the perfect venue for the consideration of a series of questions: What does it mean to undertake a social science without borders? What are the relations among the three aspects of the academic profession—research, teaching, and service—in a human rights-oriented social science? How might human rights-oriented social scientists reconcile their concern for scientific rigor with their commitment to changing the world?

In introducing this special issue, it makes sense to recall SSF's mission statement:

SSF is a transnational association of sociologists committed to the following principles: that all people have equal rights to political freedoms and legal protections, to socioeconomic security, to self-determination, and to their personality. That is, old or young, regardless of where they live, their faith, and whether they are male or female,

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gay or straight, and regardless of their skin color they have the same universal rights, including their rights to their own particular cultures. SSF<sup>7</sup> also promotes an understanding that collective goods, including a sustainable environment, cannot be privatized.

In preparation for this issue, we asked one of the founders of SSF, Alberto Moncada, to illuminate the conditions that accompanied the creation of the organization:

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many sociologists shared the Marxian idea that we must not only understand society but also to help to change it.

In 2000, I approached the Spanish State Department proposing to work on a referendum for the inhabitants of the former Spanish colony of Sahara in Africa. It was a zone rich in phosphates, which Morocco has violently occupied and still does. The Spanish State Department refused and a group of six sociologists at the University of Madrid founded SSF.

Our deliberations about aims and procedures were long and we decided on a pedagogical purpose, to train young sociologists on the global character of sociology as against the more national and narrow approach. We also established the analysis and defense of Human Rights as our deontology. We secured the approval of Spanish authorities and became a legal Association.

In 2001, I attended the International Sociological Association Congress in Brisbane, Australia and they gave me the opportunity to explain SSF to a wider and more international audience. As a result, more than twenty sociologists joined SSF. Among

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them Isabella Paoletti, who founded SSF Italia and Paulo Martins, a Brazilian who is now president of SSF Latinoamerica.

In the same year, Judith Blau, full of enthusiasm, entered SSF and founded SSF-US, which is now the biggest branch.

In 2010, in order to coordinate actions, Judith and I founded SSF-International, which is a source of initiatives at global level.

SSF has produced many documents and some books. Among them mine *Understanding Globalization*, published by UNESCO and widely used by sociology teachers in Spanish-speaking countries.

Our coffers are not so big and we cannot accept all the missions we are invited to consider, but SSF is today one of the most appreciated NGOs inside and outside the Internet.

In celebration of the first ten years (2001-2011) of Sociólogos Sin Fronteras/Sociologists Without Borders (SSF), we have put together a stellar line-up of scholar and activist members of SSF in the first decade to provide testimony to the promises and challenges of a social science without borders.

We hope you will enjoy the Special Issue and engage in a dialogue about these issues on the journal's blog as well as on the ListSers of SSF and other communities where we continue to wrestle with creating a social science without borders and a better world for all.

We dedicate this Special Issue to Judith R. Blau, in honor of her tireless work for SSF and SWB.

Here's to the next decade of work together!

David L. Brunnsma, Keri E. Iyall Smith, and Mark Frezzo, co-editors

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