

**Social Movements and 21st Century Cultural-Political Transformations:
An Inter-University Consortium on the Americas in
Comparative and Transnational Perspective**

Coordinated by the Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies (CLACLS),
University of Massachusetts, Amherst (UMass)
and
the Democracy and Global Transformation Program,
Universidad Nacional General San Marcos, Lima, Perú

**Project Summary
September 2008**

Project Overview

Our international Consortium promotes collaborative research on the two faces of social-cultural-political struggles evident in the Americas today: the proliferation of civic participation through the so-called “third sector” and governmental programs, on the one hand, and the increased visibility of less “civil-ized,” more contentious collective action, on the other. Both facets—which we dub the “Civil Society Agenda” and “Un-civic Contention,” respectively—have profound policy and cultural implications for the future(s) of democratic politics. Indeed, we maintain that the most promising pathways to democratic deepening and innovation can be found in new and changing combinations and intersections of both these forms of activism.

Involving faculty, graduate students, and affiliated activist-intellectuals and rights advocates linked to major research institutes at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Brown University, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Harvard University, the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG-Brazil), the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp in Brazil), the Universidad General San Martín (Argentina), the Universidad del Valle (Cali, Colombia), the Universidad Nacional de San Marcos (Lima, Peru), and the Universidade de Coimbra (Portugal), as well as ‘members-at-large’ from universities and research-focused NGOs in a number of other countries, our Consortium seeks to interrogate the prevailing assumptions that have guided the Civil Society Agenda by investigating the limits and possibilities of the wide variety of participatory schemas found throughout the Americas today. At the same time, we will explore what lessons other, contemporary, apparently “non-civic” or more transgressive social movement practices may offer for promoting democratic innovations.

While civil society participation in participatory deliberative or consultative arenas linked to official local, national or international institutions is presumed to be the most direct path for fostering innovative democratic practices, we will challenge that assumption through critical assessments of “actually existing experiences of civic participation.” Our proposed Consortium also will explore alternative pathways to democratic innovation being charted by social activists and rights advocates within and outside prevailing models of civic engagement.

Continuing in the tradition of the two influential volumes produced by Alvarez, Escobar and Dagnino, our proposed Consortium forms part of and extends an on-going collaborative, interdisciplinary and transnational research agenda on Latin/o American social movements, civil society, cultural politics and democracy.¹ While these earlier volumes explored intersections of strategy and identity, and of culture and politics, this initiative addresses the nexus of civil and uncivil-ized projects for social change. Our collaboration will identify and research particular locations in Latin America where activists are forging new modes of engagement that combine practices across civil and uncivil, State and non-State, boundaries.

¹ Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez, eds., *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992); Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar, eds., *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

With \$25,000 in matching funds from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Office of the Vice Provost for Research, the Consortium held its inaugural meeting on April 24-27, 2008, with the aim of fostering cross-disciplinary, cross-border and cross-regional synergies and promoting the formation of collaborative research teams among our US and Latin America-based members.

The Consortium has now embarked on what will be a cyclical, cumulative path and iterative strategy for establishing, sustaining and refining an on-going, transnational collective research agenda on social movements, civil society, cultural politics, and democratic innovation. At our next biannual Conference, already planned for Lima in April or May 2010, we will delve deeply into the collaborative research findings resultant from questions emerging at our 2008 meeting (see below) and we will, in turn, set a collective agenda to be pursued by collaborative research teams for the 2010-12 cycle.

Research Objectives

Three complementary analytical axes form the foundational guideposts for the Consortium's proposed collaborative work overall. First, we set out to critically examine the practices of existing national, regional and global participatory arenas to analyze two heretofore largely unexplored dimensions of "civic participation"—on the one hand, the extent to which such arenas promote good governance, stable governability or disciplinary governmentality and, on the other, the degree to which they facilitate other cultural-political process of citizen empowerment or disempowerment with respect to gender, race, class, sexuality, and other vectors of oppression. Second, whereas less civil-ized social actors are often presumed to pose a threat to democracy, our collaboration aims to explore the innovative democratic practices of purportedly "un-civil" social movements such as the *Caracoles* Zapatistas in Mexico, the MST and the rural women's movement in Brazil, the *Movimiento Paz para Viequez* in Puerto Rico, and the *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* in Colombia. Finally, transnational research teams emerging out of synergies forged at our April 2008 meeting—composed of both U.S. and Latin America-based scholars and activist-intellectuals—will identify and research particular locations where activists are forging new modes of engagement that combine practices across civil and uncivil, State and non-State, boundaries.

The priority themes for these research collaborations, which will also form the core axes of our 2010 Consortium Conference in Lima, were consensually agreed upon during our inaugural conference in April 2008, and include: 1) Art, Cultural Agency, and Other Knowledges; 2) the Transversality of Gender, Race and Sexuality in Contemporary Social Movements; 3) Socio-Environmental Movements, Territory, and Natural and Cultural Resources ; and, 4) Crisis and Breaks in the Neoliberal Agenda and its Impact on Social Movements/Civil Society. We also decided to encourage researchers to consider the following four analytical/methodological axes in designing their collaborations: 1) comparative methodologies; 2) multi-scalar analyses; 3) projects that privilege innovative methodologies, especially those for working with social movements; and, 4) mobilizations, movements, masses, other worlds (different dimensions of citizenship/citizen action). Ford funds will enable us to

support 3-4 collaborative teams, each of which will include at least two Consortium members, at least one of whom must be a faculty member or senior researcher and at least one of whom is based in Latin America or the Caribbean.

Consortium Structure

At our April 2008 meeting, we agreed on the following four responsibilities of all institutional members: 1) To host, and fundraise for, at least one biannual Consortium conference or interim meeting in the future and to involve other Consortium members in relevant activities at their institutions where possible and appropriate; 2) To fund participation in the biannual conference for at least one person from their institution or “hub” (see below); 3) To contemplate including Consortium-related and collaboration-inspired activities in their own institutional fundraising efforts; and, 4) To establish formalized linkages or create “hubs” through which other academic and non-academic knowledge producers (including activist-intellectuals, research NGOs and independent research centers or institutes) would be able to participate in the collaborative work of the Consortium.

We elected a subset of our group to serve as an Executive Council. We also unanimously agreed that the Democracy and Global Transformation Program at the Universidad General de San Marcos in Lima would be the “Latin American Secretariat” for the Consortium. Both the U.S. and Latin American coordinations will, of course, rotate periodically. Consortium partner, Leonardo Avritzer also offered to organize an interim meeting on methodologies, especially for working with social movements, in Belo Horizonte, presumably immediately before or after the June 2009 LASA meetings in Rio de Janeiro.

Funding Received and Support Sought

We have received \$150,000 over three years from the Ford Foundation to support two core Consortium activities. First, Ford funds will underwrite the work of four or more transnational research teams emerging out of the dialogues facilitated by our biannual meetings. The themes for the first set of transnational collaborations are mentioned below. Second, to assist with both the administrative and substantive research dimensions of the Consortium, the Ford grant provides for a graduate research assistant, a research stipend for a Project Coordinator at the U.S.-based Secretariat (UMass), and program coordination support for the UMass team and the Latin America-based Secretariat. We are seeking additional funding to support our 2010 consortium meeting (to be held in Lima) and emergent research collaborations, advocacy-focused workshops aimed at practitioners (to be held in tandem with our biannual conferences), graduate student and activist research-internship exchanges among participating institutions, the production of collectively edited volumes (published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese), and a website/portal on the multiple pathways toward democratic innovation implicated in a diverse array of social movement practices found in the Americas today.

Consortium Institutional Partners:

University of Massachusetts, Amherst (current Secretariat)
 Universidad Nacional de San Marcos, Lima, Peru (current Latin American Secretariat; co-
 coordination)
 Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA
 Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA
 University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA
 University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras
 Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia
 Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
 Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Brazil
 Universidad General San Martín, Argentina
 Universidad de Coimbra, Portugal

Affiliated Researchers and Members-at-Large:

Alvarez, Sonia E. (Political Science and CLACLS, UMass)
 Asher, Kiran (International Studies, Clark University)
 Avritzer, Leonardo (Sociology, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brasil)
 Baiocchi, Gianpaolo (Sociology and the Watson Institute, Brown University)
 Bigenho, Michelle (Anthropology, Hampshire College)
 Castillo, Luís Carlos (Sociology, Univalle, Colombia)
 Cornwall, Andrea (IDS, University of Sussex, UK)
 Cotto, Liliana (Sociology, Universidade de Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras)
 Cruikshank, Barbara (Political Science, UMASS)
 Dagnino, Evelina (Political Science, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Unicamp, Brasil)
 Delgado, Guillermo (Latin American and Latino Studies, UCSC)
 Di Marco, Graciela (Sociology, Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Argentina)
 Escobar, Arturo (Anthropology, University of North Carolina)
 Green, James (History, Brown University)
 Heller, Patrick (Sociology, Brown University)
 Hoetmer, Raphael (Institute for Democracy and Global Transformation, San Marcos, Peru)
 Holland, Dorothy (Anthropology, University of North Carolina)
 Holmquist, Frank (Political Science, Hampshire College)
 Hemment, Julie (Anthropology, UMass/Argentina)
 Junge, Ben (Anthropology, SUNY – New Paltz)
 Krupczynski, Joseph (Architecture and Design, UMass)
 Laó Montes, Agustin (Sociology, UMASS)
 López-Maya, Margarita (History, Universidad Central, Venezuela)
 Lucero, José Antonio (Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington)
 Pallares, Amalia (Latin American and Latino Studies, University of Illinois-Chicago)
 Quiles, Edwin (Architecture, Universidade de Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras)
 Ríos-Tobar, Marcela (Political Science, UNDP-Chile and Diego Portales, Chile)

Rubin, Jeffrey (History, Boston University/UMASS)
Schwedler, Jillian (Political Science, UMass)
Sommer, Doris (Comparative Literature, Harvard University)
Sousa Santos, Boaventura de (Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal)
Suarez, Lucia (Spanish, Amherst College)
Svampa, Maristella (CONICET, Argentina)
Tatagiba, Luciana (Political Science, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Unicamp, Brazil)
Teivainen, Teivo (Institute for Global Democracy, San Marcos)
Thayer, Millicent (Sociology, UMass)
Vargas, Virginia (Institute for Democracy and Global Transformation, San Marcos, Peru)
Velasco, Alejandro (Latin American Studies, New York University)
Wampler, Brian (Political Science, Boise State University)
Wolford, Wendy (Geography, University of North Carolina)