

## **Introduction to *PORTAL* ‘Other Worlds’ special issue**

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*PORTAL* opens 2006 with a special selection of papers focusing on the transformative power of social movements. In an age of globalisation and of ideologies of globalism, we debate sources and potential for alternative scenarios, for ‘other worlds.’ Many commentators have proclaimed this the global age, where humanity lives under one world power, one world market, and one world order. Yet many other worlds find new and fertile ground in this age, flourishing against the norm. Social movements set new agendas, inspire participation and crystallise solidarity. At the centre of contestation, they can create emancipatory knowledges—knowledges for change. In this issue of *PORTAL* we ask how social movements generate new ways of being, new subjectivities, or new modes of existence. We debate the role of affective meaning, of symbolic action and collective conscience, and discuss the place of reflective action. Contributors debate the dialectics between power and counter-power, and the role of strategic conflict and dialogue. They analyse sources of revolutionary and transformative change, discussing the praxis of counter-globalism.

The papers in this issue were presented at a conference held in April 2005 in Sydney, on the theme of ‘Other Worlds: Social Movements and the Making of Alternatives.’ The conference was hosted by the Research Initiative on International Activism at the University of Technology Sydney, and was supported by the Research Committee on Social Movements and Collective Action of the International Sociological Association. The conference was aimed primarily at researchers interested in debating the creative power of social movements. Forty papers were presented, with participants from India, Canada, USA, Taiwan, China, the Philippines, Zimbabwe and South Africa, as well as

from Australia. Topics included: rural reconstruction in China; the emergent Maoism in South Asia; young women and consumerism in Australia; student groups in Taiwan; anti-racist community media in Sydney; organisations of undocumented migrant workers in France; movements challenging coal extraction in Australia; anti-dam movements in Taiwan; the role of slum-dwellers' organisations in Africa and Asia; community action and sustainability in the Philippines and Canada; the internet as a realm of creativity; art as political expression; the role of spirituality in acting for sustainability in India; the emergence of 'the commons' as a social movement agenda and practice; and the experience of mutual understanding in building shared alternatives for global justice. There were plenary contributions from Kevin McDonald (University of Melbourne), Saroj Giri (Centre for Human Sciences, New Delhi), and Lau Kin-chi (Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives, Hong Kong).

Two key themes emerged at the conference. The first related directly to the central concerns of the organisers, namely the ways in which social movements create emancipatory knowledges and the role of affective engagement and reflective action in that process. Several papers centred on the praxis of counter-globalism, discussing how social movements relate with one another in a counter-globalist or alter-globalist 'movement of movements.' These discussions spilled over into discussion of specific contestations, where the question of solidarity within and between movements was encountered in a wide range of specific contexts. The second theme emerged partly as an outcome of the debate on emancipatory process, and centred on questions of developmentalism. Several papers addressed this issue, directly investigating specific challenges to developmentalism, both in the 'North' and in the 'South.' Coalitions of social movements centered on variants of environmental justice were analysed in India, South Africa, the Philippines, Canada, China, Taiwan and Australia. The specificity of 'Southern Praxis,' and its alignment with Northern agendas and movements as expressed in North-South relations, were discussed in several contexts as a key dimension of counter-globalism.

The conference ended with a plenary discussion on the state of social movement research in Australia, and in the region. Participants resolved to establish a social movement research network to draw people together on a more regular basis, to share perspectives and research agendas. A large number of papers that were presented at the

conference do not appear in this issue of *PORTAL*, but the full list of paper titles and abstracts from the conference can be found on the web at:  
[www.international.activism.uts.edu.au](http://www.international.activism.uts.edu.au).

In keeping with the theme of this issue of *PORTAL*, the bulk of the papers debate the emergence of alternative scenarios of globalism through social, cultural and political action. The first ten papers share a concern with the creative role of social movements; the remaining two papers are more general in orientation, but are included for the special insights they offer.

Our interest is both with the principles and practice of social movements. Accordingly we have consciously sought to bring these two threads together. The twelve papers are divided into three broad categories, the first focused on ‘themes and channels,’ the second on ‘sectors and spaces,’ and the third on ‘values and alternatives.’ The first two sections focus most directly on social movements, and are designed to be complementary. While themes may emerge as principles for action or aspiration, and while channels may open-up for movement action, it is only in the concrete context of social movement sectors, and in the material spaces where mobilization occurs, that these principles or aspirations are enacted. The third section is less centred on social movements, but focuses on broader processes of constructing social and cultural alternatives to globalisation.

### **Themes and channels**

The issue begins with an overview by Hamed Hosseini of the dilemmas and possibilities of cross-movement solidarity within the ‘alternative globalisation’ movement. Hosseini’s focus is on the emergence of what he describes as an ‘accommodative consciousness,’ where movements address tensions between reform and revolution, build inclusive structures and find common ground in addressing the dynamics of globalisation. Hosseini takes us beyond the levelling effect of simply invoking a ‘movement of movements,’ and instead emphasises the process of constructing shared consciousness across profound differences.

The paper constructs an interpretative framework building on social movement theory to distinguish attributes of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ praxis. It applies this schema to social

movements that seek to mobilise against corporate globalisation, and in the process develops the concept of ‘accommodative consciousness’ to understand how alter-globalisation movements overcome divisions between these modes of praxis through forms of engaged dialogue and solidarity. The paper offers a comprehensive engagement with this process, and its specificity in terms of how the commitment to multiplicity is operationalised politically. As a political tool, accommodative consciousness opens up ‘global fields of resistance.’ The scope of this field defines a foundational consensus, in the first instance, that there is a problem, and that it has to be addressed along the lines of common principles, namely that any alternative globalism must in some sense be democratic, have some commitment to shared dignity or rights, and must take us away from corporate commodification.

In the second paper one of the co-editors, James Goodman, picks up this debate about the process of constructing a shared consciousness and capacity to act against corporate globalism. His primary concern is with the spatial logic of solidarity, and the extent to which it marks a shared imaginary ‘frontier’ between protagonists on a global scale. As globalism is contested in particular places, resistance is necessarily embedded in specificities. Such specificities generate particular narratives. These become mutually aligned, and thus map out global lines of antagonism.

Such antagonism is seen as a key element of the emergence of what Goodman refers to as ‘counter-globalism.’ Marking a point of difference with Hosseini, Goodman insists that resistance to corporate globalisation is in the first instance ideological resistance. The ideology of globalisation—globalism—is vested in structures of material power, to make a normative claim on society. Opposition to that claim is not only vested in the idea of an alternative globalism, but also, argues Goodman, in a variety of anti-globalisms. Conceptualizing resistance more broadly as a ‘counter’ movement, Goodman explores its spatial dynamics.

Goodman argues that three themes are central to resistance—the appeal to deep democracy, the assertion of livelihood and the commons, and the creation of autonomy with solidarity. Each of these has a specific spatial logic: the commons are extended through North-South dialogue in campaigns for de-commodification; democracy is deepened through forms of multipolar disengagement and trans-localist re-linking;

autonomies and solidarities are elaborated through forms of affective engagement and radical re-embedding. Goodman concludes by asserting the centrality of these forms of connectivity for constituting the 'frontier' of counter-globalism.

The third paper, by James Arvanitakis, picks up on the role of social movements in producing alternatives to globalisation, focusing on debates about the 'commons.' Arvanitakis develops an inclusive schema for understanding the commons as the broad swathe of life that is not wholly subsumed by the private market, and by commodification. While the commons have traditionally been understood in material terms, Arvanitakis suggests that they should be thought of as a deeply variegated space, ranged across categories of socialised provision, including, for example, the 'cultural commons' and political debate. The paper mobilises some evocative themes, such as scarcity versus abundance, and opening up versus enclosing, in order to reverse the conventional idea of the 'tragedy of the commons.' Rather, Arvanitakis argues, the more pressing problem in our globalised world is the 'tragedy of enclosure.'

The fourth paper shifts the focus to a discussion about channels for resistance, as against principles. Jon Marshall uses the work of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt to debate the possibilities for 'distributed governance' amongst social movements, understood as mutual arrangements for self-governance in contesting globalism. The specific channel Marshall explores is the much-debated field of digital exchange, and specifically the extent to which that field generates an intellectual commons that resists subsumption by capital. The paper powerfully challenges commonplace and often uncritical equations between networks, interdependence, and democracy. Instead, Marshall argues that networks can extend central power as much as weaken it. Free and open source software movements, for example, are often comprised of self-constituted technical elites who tend to be politically unaware. Likewise, the internet is shown to be a deeply problematic model for a future form of democracy. Contra Hardt and Negri, Marshall contends that information technology, always susceptible to colonisation by corporate and military interests, is not automatically imbued with transformative potential.

### **Sectors and spaces**

Having discussed some broad themes and channels we move to examine the specificity,

in terms both of the specific social movement sectors and spaces in which globalist alternatives are constructed. An important aspect of this is the dynamic of inter-culturalism, where mutual recognition enables a form of reciprocal action that brings new alternatives to globalisation into view. There are five papers in this section, taking us from the labour and community sector, to refugee solidarity, indigenous environmentalism and self-determination, and ethno-cultural community mobilization.

The issue's fifth paper, by Amanda Tattersall, operationalises some of the broader themes by examining the links between two social movement sectors—the labour movement and the community sector. The focus of the paper, 'Four shades of political coalitions,' is on trade union organisations and community-based organisations, and how they relate. Ultimately, Tattersall sees the relationships between workplace and community as both necessary and productive: trade unions and community organisations clearly have different imperatives and priorities, but their relationships are capable of producing new social formations and political configurations. They thus act as crucibles for producing global alternatives, where elements are combined, reassembled and reordered to create new forms of resistance.

Tattersall identifies four types of political coalitions between unions and community organisations: ad hoc, support, mutual-support, and deep. This framework allows us to understand the range of engagements between unions and community organisations, from episodic, instrumental partnerships, which build useful short-term relationships without altering the pre-existing organisational trajectory of each party, through to long-term, grassroots-based mobilisations, which open up decision making structures and frames of vision.

The sixth paper, by Diane Gosden, offers an account of a social movement sector centered on solidarity, namely the movement for asylum-seeker and refugee advocacy. Her focus is on the resurgence of this movement in Australia, in the face of especially restrictive and oppressive Government policies from the 1990s. It particularly highlights the inter-subjective process that these initiatives generated, and discusses some of the political dynamics within which they were embedded. What is remarkable about the movement, as Gosden highlights, is its diversity, ranging across distinct geographical, institutional and ideological groupings of individuals and organisations.

The factor that knitted the movement together, she argues, was the imperative to take action in the face of government policy, thereby, in Melucci's terms, constituting 'collective action expressing a conflict.'

The seventh paper, by David Ojatorotu, focuses on the spatial dynamics of oil exploitation and local resistance in Nigeria. Taking a thirty-year perspective, Ojatorotu maps the tensions between local peoples on the one hand, and multi-national oil companies and the Nigerian government on the other, highlighting the rise of resistance politics through a charismatic local leadership geared to local ancestral claims and linked with international environmental agendas.

Ojatorotu outlines the dynamics of claims for self-government and self-determination, defined against both corporate interests and unitary national interests. His emphasis is on the distributional question and its environmental side-effects; that is, on the conditions under which oil is exploited, rather than oil exploitation per se. Reflecting this, in the closing section Ojatorotu offers a series of prescriptions, for creating a stakeholder constitution in Nigeria through to safeguarding minority interests, along with the statutory enforcement of environmental safeguards; code of responsible conduct for MNC's toward local populations; uncompromising governmental attention to the welfare and survival of its citizens in priority to its relations with profit directed MNC's; and dialogue as vehicle for conflict resolution rather military force with the emphasis on consensus building. The Integrated Master Plan for the Niger Delta is (with certain reservations) commended for its attempt to resolve some of the issues at stake.

The eighth paper, by W. F. Lalich, focuses on ethno-cultural movements in Sydney. Centring on the cultural dynamics of 'Collective action of "others" in Sydney,' the paper examines how minority ethnic communities construct collective cultural places, geared to meeting social needs. These culturally-specific social resources are patterned by different capacities and orientations of ethnic communities, and the paper debates how they differ in their capacity to construct a collective cultural meaning, and to deploy human and material resources.

Lalich argues that through the collective creation of social space, migrants add a new

and dynamic dimension to the social environment, effectively enacting multiculturalism. The post-1945 expansion of migration to Australia brought dramatic changes to Sydney's demographic and cultural structures. In the three decades after 1945 over 450 'other' (ethnic) collectives mobilised through grass-roots efforts, and created collective spaces, such as places of worship, clubs, schools and aged-care facilities. Lalich shows these ethnic communities constituted themselves as cultural collectives, creating communal roots and various forms of inclusion in a dynamic culturally diverse society. Ethnic communal places thus came to signify collective conscience, participation, and the embeddedness of transplanted cultures in a transforming social environment and transnational social space.

### **Values and alternatives**

A number of additional papers presented at the 'Other Worlds' conference discussed global values and alternatives, without directly focusing on social movements. A small selection of these papers appears in this section, debating the required policies for sustainability, the process of changing environmental value-systems, the importance of women's spirituality in the construction of sustainable urban living, and finally, the importance of recognising religious belief-systems as a key factor in socio-political transformations.

The ninth paper, by Ian McGregor, takes up the question of sustainability. The focus here is on the corporate barriers to sustainable practices, and on the economic preconditions for a more socially and ecologically sustainable scenario. A starting point is that the current crisis of sustainability is especially intense in high-income countries such as Australia. A key cause of this crisis, for McGregor, is the reckless pursuit of economic growth, a 'strong and continuing societal focus on economic growth partly driven by business corporations' focus on profit growth.' The paper focuses primarily on the business sector and proposes a range of policies to ensure all businesses, especially powerful global corporations, contribute to sustainability. McGregor outlines the 'natural step' model to identify required societal changes, and changes in governance structures. A range of proposals are floated, including business and product licensing, restrictions on use of non-renewable resources, policies to ensure that renewable resources are only harvested at or below their replenishment rate, ecological tax systems, work-time reduction, income guarantees and international governance

measures to encourage ecologically sustainable behaviour by society, business and consumers.

The tenth paper, by David Worth, takes the reader to a tightly focused case study of environmental consciousness in the local areas of Western Australia where there are still substantial stands of ancient 'old-growth' forests. Worth questions the extent to which changing social and environmental values can be explained by highly local demographic and socioeconomic shifts. Specifically, the paper explores a link between the growing opposition to the logging of 'old-growth' forests and three factors – falling employment in the timber industry, rising educational levels and, interestingly, falling religious observance. Environmental consciousness, Worth speculates, appears to emerge as a form of cultural or spiritual fulfilment for relatively highly educated people working in the newly-emergent mining, tourism and wine-growing industries, and related services. In this respect, Worth suggests, such forests become our 'Our New Cathedrals'.

The eleventh paper, by Yamini Narayanan, Dora Marinova, and Jeffrey Kenworthy continues the discussion of consciousness. Again, the focus is on a specific urban context—in this case, Delhi. The paper is primarily concerned with the preconditions for urban sustainability 'in a city like Delhi,' and focuses on the role of spirituality, especially amongst urban women, in generating the required consciousness. The paper asserts in the first instance that women's experiences of the city are one of the key indicators of 'community success,' and of sustainability. In the case of women, cities must create a safe and empowering environment if women are to play crucial community leadership roles—developing the idea of what a city's spiritual sustainability might look like. Such experiences in India, the authors argue, centre on issues of spirituality and community. The paper asserts that Delhi offers a model for spiritually-grounded sustainable development, and is an appropriate reference point for developing the concept of women's urban spiritual sustainability. The paper concludes that urban spiritual sustainability requires continuous effort, and moreover that such effort is an embodiment of what it is to be human.

The final paper, by John Rees, continues the discussion of consciousness and spirituality, debating the respective place of religious and secular institutions in a

democratic polity. His focus is on the post-invasion democracy in Iraq, and on claims that religion and democracy cannot coexist. Rees debates how the secular assumptions of analysts and commentators might be challenged and corrected by the inclusion of religious actors and perspectives. Focusing on the Shi'ite community as central actors in an emerging Iraqi democracy, the paper deconstructs secularist views that the world of the mosque exists in a 'parallel universe' to the liberal democratic West. By reframing the Shi'ites as essential actors in the democratic project, the paper brings the 'other' worlds of religion and secularism into a 'sphere of interdependence.' Rees ends by asserting the importance of bringing 'post-secularist' conceptualisations structures into discourses on democratic change.

Taken as a whole the collection of papers offers a series of insights into the process of social and political change under globalism. It does not so much present a comprehensive picture as generate a series of avenues for the critical investigation of social and political praxis. In different ways the papers show how social movements envisage and enact global alternatives, constituting themselves and broader social relations, and thereby constituting society. In the tradition of engaged sociology, we see in such scenarios the sociological imagination at work, producing knowledge for social change. Across the various dimensions debated, from themes and channels of mobilisation, to more specific sectoral and spatial dynamics, to broader globalist alternatives and values, we see a shared concern to both imagine and contribute to the construction of 'other worlds.'