
Theory

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Newsletter

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Tristes Tropiques? A Message from the New Editors

One of the editors of *Theory* moved from North to South America and joined the other editor at IUPERJ (Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro), a small but vibrant research institute in social and political sciences in Rio de Janeiro. Together, we will edit the *Newsletter* for the next four years. To inaugurate the new editorship and celebrate the arrival of the *Newsletter* in one of the most spectacular and fascinating cities of the world – which some of you had the opportunity to visit during the interim conference of our research committee in 2004, organized by Elisa Reis, our former chair – this issue of the newsletter is a special one, dedicated to sociological theory in Brazil. We have invited Howard Becker and some of our best known colleagues here in Brazil to write a small contribution. With the exception of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Brazil's most famous sociologist and former president, all have kindly accepted our request.

This issue of the newsletter brings sociological theory from the periphery to the center of the academic world. Taking up a suggestion of Philip Smith and Fuyuki Kurasawa, the current chairs of RC 16, we will radicalize our attempts to “deprovincialize” sociology and invite colleagues from the periphery to send in contributions on sociological theory in their countries. So, this is a call for contributions for the next issue of *Theory*. If you are a theorist from Kazakhstan, Iran, Algeria, Korea, Burundi, Chile, Cuba, Russia or any other glorious nation in the world that is neither part of the EU nor the USA, send us a piece of some 750 words with reflections on sociological theory *in or of* your region, country or city before the 1st of October 2007.

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From the Center to the Periphery, and Back

The present issue of the *Newsletter* is dedicated to sociological theory in Brazil, a country with a long tradition of social thought and a more recent sociological production. This is a large nation, with a language spoken by millions of people across the world, which does not, however, pertain to any of the central countries of modernity.

Sociology initially flourished as a clear-cut discipline in São Paulo, under the leadership of Florestan Fernandes, the main Latin American sociologist, in the 1940s. It appeared as well in Rio de Janeiro, with Luis da Costa Pinto, in particular, and, with less scientific pretences, within the context of the Brazilian Institute of Superior Studies (ISEB), and its nationalistic project.^[1] But theory was not a staple in this production, although Fernandes himself, who thought theories were to be imported from the main university centers of the West, was highly skilled in the subject.^[2] His books were not

translated, however, into English or any other hegemonic language.

We must bear in mind that “rationalized” social sciences disciplines are a product of the last half of the twentieth century in Brazil, when the country fast modernized. The university in Rio de Janeiro had for many decades a complicated evolution due the fact that it was the country’s capital, while especially the University of São Paulo (USP), a powerful state in the federation, managed to keep a higher level of continuity. But the military dictatorship, installed in 1964 and hardened in 1968, also hit USP badly. The contemporary Brazilian social sciences started thereafter, with the reorganization of the university life, strong foreign support (in particular from the Ford Foundation) and new professional academics (many with their PhDs taken abroad).

In spite of a deeper concern with theory – or perhaps in some part precisely because of that – a tension has always beset Brazilian social thought and the social science disciplines later on: between the format and content of concepts and theories born and bred in the West (Europe and the United States) on the one hand and the country’s own specific realities on the other. Could we apply their theories straight away to our realities? Which adaptations were necessary and how to carry them out? Should we start from scratch? Answers ranged from the basic idea that the maturity of national research communities would eventually provide the reply to such questions (implicitly espoused by Fernandes and explicitly by the Italo-Argentinian Gino Germani) to a radical *epoché* based on a phenomenological standpoint that would permit direct and untainted access to empirical reality (as argued by Guerreiro Ramos).^[3] In the context of the Social Theory Working Group (Research Committee) of the Brazilian Association of Post-Graduate Studies

(ANPOCS), the answer seems to have been, implicitly or explicitly, a critical engagement with global modernity, to which Brazil presumably belongs. This results to a great extent from a reversal of the sheer focus on empirical issues in favor of a sustained effort to discuss and construct social theory.

This is indeed what can be seen in Pereira da Silva's article in this issue: he briefly but rather densely reconstructs the trajectory of that research committee, in which many areas of sociological thinking were tackled and developed, from the action-structure debate to the theories of modernity, through a myriad of more specific themes. That can be seen too in the other pieces, insofar as these questions turn up again and again. Other articles in this issue deal with historical and present-day themes that are at the core of concerns and topics of sociological theorizing in Brazil. While Howard Becker presents recollections of the period his spent in the country, Leonardo Avritzer discusses Habermas' reception in the tropics, Sérgio Costa points to the centrality of the debate about democracy, while Elisa Reis focuses on the public role of sociology.

We hope that the short pieces collected here allow for an overview and a map of the increasingly robust production of Brazilian sociology, in particular of its theoretical branch. And that it raises the awareness and interest of sociologists from other countries and regions in this burgeoning national tradition. For too long sociology in the periphery has been dominated by the center and it is time now to revert that direction and export the best of social theory from the periphery to the center.

José Maurício Domingues

[1] See Luiz Werneck Vianna, *A revolução passiva* (Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 1997), ch. 5; José Maurício Domingues, *Do ocidente à modernidade. Intelectuais e mudança social*

(Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2003), ch. 6.

[2] Florestan Fernandes, "O padrão de trabalho científico dos sociólogos brasileiros" (1958), in *A sociologia no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1977) and, despite the misleading title, *Fundamentos empíricos da explicação sociológica* (São Paulo: T. A. Queirós, 1980). See also the praiseful remarks on Fernandes in Robert King Merton, *On Theoretical Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 138.

[3] Gino Germani, *La sociologia en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1964); Guerreiro Ramos, *A redução sociológica* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1965 – 2nd ed.). This issue was somehow taken up again by postcolonial Latin American theorizing (carried out mainly in the United States), although sociology does not figure prominently in their arguments. See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and the critical remarks by Sérgio Costa, "Desprovincializando a teoria sociológica: a contribuição pós-colonial", *Revista brasileira de ciências sociais*, vol. 21, no. 60 (2006).

Social Theory in Brazil

I came to Brazil in 1976, at the invitation of Gilberto Velho, the Departamento de Antropologia of the Museu Nacional, and the Ford Foundation, knowing not much more about Brazil than its repeated conquests of the American popular music scene, of which I had been and still was part. What conquests? In the beginnings of the 20th century the *maxixe* was enormously popular in the States, followed by Carmen Miranda in the 1930s, and then in my period the *bossa nova*, which I was one of the earlier musicians to play in the U.S.

But that did not prepare me for my two month submersion in Brazilian academic life. Although the *ditadura* was still in power, my intellectual companions seemed not to be hampered in their intellectual work, and I soon learned the depth and

breadth of Brazilian social science: the sociology that had grown out of the French mission of the 1940s, the anthropology which escaped the repression which drove sociology out of the universities though not out of the intellectual world, the literary and historical work of such scholars as Sergio Buarque de Holanda and, especially, Antonio Candido. I learned the inescapable lesson that every social science, especially the American versions which pretended to "universality", was embedded in its own national history and culture, asking different kinds of questions and seeking different kinds of answers than were asked and answered in other countries. It was a good lesson for an ethnocentric American.

I saw that my colleagues were not as culture bound as we were in the States. They read widely in the literature of many countries, especially England and France (where many of them had been trained), and in the extensive literature that Brazil (so much larger than I had imagined!) had produced. That pushed me to try, hopelessly behind as I was, to try to catch up, to read the Brazilian classics and familiarize myself with the work from France and England I hadn't known. I didn't always agree with what I learned but I learned from disagreeing. And my colleagues were always ready for a good argument, followed by a *chope* or two.

I returned in 1978, now entrusted with the job of shepherding the Americans (Erving Goffman, Thoms Szasz, and Shere Hite) around the intricacies of a large conference on mental health to which people from all over Europe and the Americas had been invited. This experience taught me that some things are pretty much the same everywhere: Goffman was predictably difficult (as Gilberto Velho has recorded elsewhere), Szasz (after I had assured him that the hosts really would pay for his plane ticket) had a good time, Hite

knew only that the Censura had banned her book and was correspondingly suspicious.

My last visit, teaching again at the Museu, solidified my interest in Antonio Candido to the point that I spent a summer translating a selection of his works for publication in the U.S. The book was not, I'm sorry to say, widely distributed and his work has not received the attention it deserves in English-speaking countries.^[1]

Never a great devotee of social theory in isolation I have not kept up, as I suppose I should have, with developments in theorizing in Brazil (or anywhere else). I'm always more interested in the empirical researches which illuminate areas of the world I know nothing about. Of course, Brazilian social science, like social science everywhere, has grown so much that it isn't possible to "keep up", the way a person once was able to do, so now I can only occasionally add Brazilian cases to the stock of examples I think with and reason from. It's a never-ending source of good work and I thank the coincidences that introduced me to it.

Howard S. Becker

^[1] *Essays on Literature and Society* by Antonio Candido, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). The introduction also appears in Antonio Candido, *L' Endroit et L' Envers* (Paris: A.M. Métaillé, 1995).

Social Theory in Brazil: A Preliminary Balance of the Experience of a Social Theory Group

For Gabriel Cohn, a key reference for the social theory group

During the last ten years, Brazilian social sciences, and particularly sociology, have experienced an

increasing interest in theoretical issues. This interest results mostly from the creation of a research group in social theory within ANPOCS^[1] in the late 1990s as well as its relationship with a correlated group in SBS.^[2] During the first twenty years of ANPOCS' life time, there existed – among its 25 research groups – no single group dedicated to social theory. This does not mean that there was no interest in social theory in Brazil before that time, though it definitely gained a new impulse with the social theory group in 1997, created during ANPOCS 21st annual meeting.

To be sure, Brazil has a long tradition in the study of social thought.^[3] But, apart from the many important theoretical contributions by individual authors,^[4] the main characteristic of Brazilian sociology, which was only institutionalized after World War II, is its orientation toward empirical research. Theorizing seemed to be the task of sociologists of the First World countries, well equipped with both material and human resources; in underdeveloped countries, like Brazil, short of both material and human resources, the task consisted in applying those theories to Brazilian society in empirical research. Obviously, such application was not a mechanical one, requiring instead a previous work of translation to fit the peculiarities of Brazilian society. Hence, the novelty of the ANPOCS social theory group is the explicit collective interest in doing theoretical research.

A preliminary analysis of the contemporary literature on social theory in Brazil, especially that produced by members of the ANPOCS social theory group, clearly shows the existence of two main trends: firstly, a concern with critical appropriations of classic and contemporary European and North-American social theory, and, secondly, the theoretical study of specific themes or subjects. In both

cases, however, there is a clear connection with diagnosing contemporary societies in general, and Brazilian society in particular, around the problematic of modernity/modernization.^[5]

With regard to critical appropriations of other theories, it is possible to distinguish at least three branches of studies: those that emphasize the interpretation of the work of one classic or contemporary author;^[6] those that by means of a theme or concept deal with a group of authors,^[7] and, finally, those that seeking support in different authors or theories aim to build a new theory.^[8] I have to concede that these distinctions are a bit arbitrary, a kind of ideal type, because most of the studies classified under one of these types contain characteristics that can fit as well under another type.

In regard to studies that seek to theorize specific themes or subjects, the number of themes or categories under analysis is immense. For that reason, I indicate only those that appear more often in the meetings of the theory group, as well as in the books edited or written by their members. Here, it is possible to distinguish between approaches aiming at a diagnosis of contemporary society as a whole and those with the more modest aim of focusing upon a specific set of problems. In the first case, besides modernity and modernization, with their many qualifications – late, reflexive, multiple, entangled, plural, Brazilian and peripheral –, globalization, cosmopolitanism, and the post-national constellation, appear as the main concerns. In the second case, more mediating categories as democracy, civil society, public sphere, citizenship, recognition, identity, experience, memory, collective subjectivity and reflexivity are recurrent.^[9]

A close look at that literature shows also clearly the concern in establishing a critical dialogue with key classic or contemporary social theorists, as well as contemporary branches of social theory as critical theory, feminist theory, citizenship theory, social movement theory, post-structuralism and post-colonial theory. Despite the difference in approaches to social theory by its members, the variety of authors, themes and theoretical approaches shows the prevalence within the social theory group of a critical pluralism that refuses any kind of theoretical sectarianism.

As a way to conclude these notes, I would like to call attention to the increasing relevance of normative issues in this Brazilian recent theorizing. Though this is not a Brazilian peculiarity, the problems associated with recent democratization favoring the emergence of social movements along with the persistence of strong social inequality in Brazil contribute to reinforce the concern of Brazilian social theorists with normative issues. Not for other reasons, themes as democracy, justice, inequality, racism, citizenship, and recognition seem to catalyze the theoretical debates.

Josué Pereira da Silva

[1] National Association for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences.

[2] Brazilian Sociological Association.

[3] See Elide Rugai Bastos, "Pensamento Social da Escola Sociológica Paulista", in Sergio Miceli (ed.), *O que ler na ciência social brasileira – 1970-2002*, São Paulo, Editora Sumaré /ANPOCS, 2002, pp.183-230; Luiz Werneck Vianna, "Weber e a interpretação do Brasil", in Jessé Souza (ed.), *O malandro e o protestante*, Brasília, Editora UnB, 1999, pp.173-193.

[4] The works of the following authors are good examples of that theoretical contribution: Gilberto Freyre, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, Raymundo Faoro, Floran Fernandes, Antonio Candido de Mello e Souza, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Octavio Ianni, Gabriel Cohn, Roberto Schwarz, Francisco de Oliveira,

Fabio Wanderly Reis, Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, Elisa Reis, Renato Ortiz, and Roberto da Matta among others.

[5] Besides a number of books written individually by many of its members, the following books are illustrative of our recent theoretical production, most of it by members of the ANPOCS social theory group: Leonardo Avritzer and José Maurício Domingues (eds.), *Teoria social e modernidade no Brasil*, Belo Horizonte, Editora UFMG, 2000; Leopoldo Waizbort (ed.), *A ousadia crítica: ensaios para Gabriel Cohn*, Londrina, Editora UEL, 1998; Josué Pereira da Silva, Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos e Iram Jácome Rodrigues (eds.), *Crítica Contemporânea*, São Paulo, Editora Annablume, 2002; Hector Ricardo Leis, Ilse Scherer-Warren and Sérgio Costa (eds.), *Modernidade crítica e modernidade acrítica*, Florianópolis, Editora Cidadefutura, 2001; Jessé Souza (ed.), *Democracia hoje*, Brasília, Editora UnB, 2001; Sérgio Costa, José Maurício Domingues, Wolfgang Knöbl, and Josué P. Silva (eds.), *The Plurality of Modernity: Decentering Sociology*, München, Reiner Hampf Verlag, 2006.

[6] Examples are the following books: Leopoldo Waizbort, *As Aventuras de Georg Simmel*, São Paulo, Editora 34, 2000; José Maurício Domingues, *A sociologia de Talcott Parsons*, Niterói, EDUFF, 2001; Josué Pereira da Silva, *André Gorz: Trabalho e Política*, São Paulo, Ed. Annablume/Fapesp, 2002; Antônio Flávio Pierucci, *O desencantamento do mundo*, São Paulo, Editora 34, 2003.

[7] Examples are Leonardo Avritzer, *A moralidade da democracia*, Belo Horizonte, Ed. UFMG/Ed. Perspectiva, 1996; Jessé Souza, *A modernização seletiva*, Brasília, Ed. UnB, 2000; Sérgio Costa, *Dois Atlânticos: teoria social, anti-racismo, cosmopolitismo*, Belo Horizonte, Ed. UFMG, 2006; Leonardo Avritzer, *Democracy and the Public Space in Latin America*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002.

[8] Examples are José Maurício Domingues, *Sociological Theory and Collective Subjectivity*, London, Macmillan and New York: St Martin's Press, 1995; *Social Creativity, Collective Subjectivity and Contemporary Modernity*, London: Macmillan and New York: St Martin's Press, 2000; *Modernity Reconstructed*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006; Sérgio Costa, *As cores de Ercília*, Belo

Horizonte, Ed. UFMG, 2002; Jessé Souza, *A construção social da subcidadania*, Belo Horizonte, Ed. UFMG, 2003; Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos, *Memória coletiva e teoria social*, São Paulo, Ed. Annablume, 2003.

^[9] For the titles fitting these branches, see footnote 5.

Political Sociology after Democratization

A considerable portion of sociological research that was and is being undertaken in Brazil is a direct inheritance of modernization theory and repeats the defects and weaknesses of this theory. In general, these studies consider the development models found in Western European and North American societies to be the single valid standard of modernity. This causes the social structures, ways of life and cultural values found in Brazilian society to be characterized as indicators of a lack of modernity and as obstacles to development. It is true that dependency theory in its time broke with the methodological nationalism of modernization theory, revealing the relationships of cause and effect between the underdevelopment of the poor countries and the overdevelopment of the industrialized nations. Nevertheless, Brazilian dependency thinkers continued to treat European and U.S. societies as the sole model of modernity towards which all the world's societies should converge (see Cardoso and Faletto, 1979).

In the 1980's and 1990's a new generation of studies about democratization began to rise and effectively broke with the historicist tendencies of Brazilian sociology. These studies no longer treated political actors and the structures of local actions as late copies of the similar figures found in the Northern Hemisphere. To the contrary: they sought to study the developments

observed in Brazil in the context in which they appeared and to consider the semantic structures that gives them meaning (see for instance, Reis, 1998).

This new sociology of democratization has become one of the most lively fields in the Brazilian social sciences. Unlike traditional political sociology, which aimed at the study of parties and of institutional politics, the new political sociology is interested, above all, in the transformation underway in politics, dedicating great attention to new forms of political action and non-conventional political actors such as social movements and non-governmental organizations. This new sociology of politics promises to overcome some of the limits of the theories of democratic transition that failed when they postulated that social democratization would flow immediately from the construction of democracy in the institutional plane. After all, non-democratic values and forms of social relations remain prevalent in Brazil in spite of the complete consolidation of democratic institutions. The new sociology of democratization focuses precisely on the tensions and connections between politics, state and society, and presents tools for interpreting current deficits of Brazilian democracy (see articles in Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998).

From a conceptual point of view, in its first years, the new political sociology had a strong descriptive character, without explicit theoretical developments. In recent years, however, the discipline has assimilated a broad array of theoretical influences from Antonio Gramsci to Jürgen Habermas, from Hannah Arendt to Claude Lefort and feminist political theory. Although the reception of this eclectic range of theoretical orientations has obviously not led to the formation of a coherent and homogeneous theoretical field, we can nevertheless observe a consolidation of a set of issues and theoretical lines. As

examples, we can mention the discussions around concepts of civil society, citizenship and the public sphere. The way these concepts have been adapted to fit the democratization observed in Brazil points to a reconstruction that goes far beyond the mere application of existing theory. It represents an important extension and complementation of the sociological debate around these issues (see Dagnino et al. 2006; Avritzer, 2002; Costa, 2002).

Although innovative, Brazilian sociology of democratization has obvious deficiencies. There are still very few studies that compare the developments observed in Brazil and other Latin American countries with those in other regions of the world. Conceptual rigor is often lacking in the analyses, as well as adequate consideration of bibliographies from other countries. There are also few works that study, through a dialogue with disciplines such as law and political science, difficult issues such as the “unrule” of law, corruption, and political violence. If it is able to overcome these limits, the new Brazilian political sociology can offer an essential contribution to the international debate about the formation of a sociological theory of democratization.

Sérgio Costa

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The Reception of Habermas's Work by Brazilian Social Theory

Jürgen Habermas's work has been influential in Brazil since the early 1980's when his work was first introduced in the country (Freitag and Rouanet, 1980). The first area study in which Habermas's work has been employed was philosophy (a strain of critical theory with very little empirical concern). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has been available in Brazil earlier than in the English speaking world. Other works, such as *Legitimation Crisis* and *Between Facts and Norms*, have been available for more than ten years. However, it was only in the 1990's that Habermas's work started to be used as a theoretical and empirical tool to deal with Brazilian social reality.

The adaptation of Habermas's theoretical framework to Brazil involves serious revisions. After all, Habermas himself has claimed that he wrote a work on the developed world, i.e. Europe and North America, and that he doubts his work could be applied outside of it. Brazilian sociologists and social theorists have applied his work mainly to two issues: a theory of Brazilian democratization with special emphasis on social movements; and a theory of civil society and the public sphere in Brazil. Working in the field of social movements, Krischke (1990) was the first to suggest that Habermas could be used to deal with urban actors making radical claims based on needs. He connected social action to the capacity to acquire knowledge on everyday life conditions. His argument was that social actors challenged systemic aspects within the state. Avritzer (1994; 1996) took over the idea of radical needs and proposed the idea that social actors who occupied the

public space during the democratization process challenged the elitist forms of understanding democracy that prevailed in Brazil up to that point. These were the first frameworks used to understand Brazil based on Habermas. They involved broadening the idea that social movements were only post-materialist social movements. They also paid more attention to how social movements create proposals for new ways of practicing democracy.

The second strain of studies based on Habermasian social theory was more empirical. It proposed an investigation of civil society and the public sphere in Brazil. Traditionally, Brazilian sociologists and political scientists used to work with a Gramscian conception of civil society (Weffort, 1989; Dagnino, 1994). Authors inspired by Habermas helped to identify an empirical dimension of civil society, namely voluntary associations. They analyzed specific associations in Brazil, in particular neighborhood and other grassroots associations, and their role in the construction of an autonomous civil society. The studies were later criticized for establishing an anti-state and anti-party dimension (Dagnino and Alvarez, 1998). However, this demarcation followed the self-conception of social actors at that time. There is also a second strain of empirical studies based on Habermas in Brazil that analyzes the public sphere. Costa (1994) used Habermas to analyze the impeachment of Collor de Mello in Brazil. Later studies also employed Habermas to analyze aspects of the public space involving gender (Pinto, 2000).

Leonardo Avritzer

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Sociological Theory and the Historical Reconfiguration of Solidarities

As has been widely pointed out, the reconfiguration of collective identities is part and parcel of the global processes of recent decades. Local, national, and global as reference terms

for framing solidarity experience significant changes that bring new life and new meanings to the discussions on nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Even though the issue of where to place the contours of community is a perennial one, the present poses a challenging research agenda for the changing meanings, structures, and consequences of solidarity. While, until recently, most sociological theories assumed the nation-state to be the natural realm for framing “we-feelings”, the historical character of the fusion between nation and state becomes more and more evident, leading theorists to bring into question conventional ways of looking at social loyalty.

Starting from the observation that the global processes in course open up the possibility of multiple loyalties and identities, many analysts have focused on the forces at play that may expand the scope of solidarity. From their perspective, globalization will make it possible to advance universal causes to the extent that supporters across nation-states unite to advance common goals. Looking from a different angle, the same processes may uncover the false commonality of interests holding together people, who, within a single nation, share little or nothing in terms of life chances, interests and ideals. None of these developments though precludes the possibility of persisting, and perhaps even strengthening, parochial feelings, intolerance of neighbors, and disregard for human rights as a reaction to global trends. We need to expand the scope of our research questions in order to enhance our understanding of the possibilities and limits of enlarged solidarity.

Approaching the theme from a Brazilian perspective, one wonders what has been the impact of recent economic and cultural changes on the ways Brazilians relate to the old national development project, and how such changes affect the definition of

“us”. In the past, the ideal of a great future for all played a key role in holding together a collectivity marked by acute inequalities. Nationalism and developmentalism, the ideology of a planned national progress, contributed to creating the image of unlimited goods to be distributed among all in the future.

As the myth of Brazil’s spectacular future becomes less powerful, while multiple identities share or compete for loyalty, what sort of reconfiguration may take place in civil society? We must investigate the possible consequences of multiple foci of loyalty, and examine the conditions for reassembling solidarity on a new basis. It is important to decipher the signs of more inclusive or more exclusive collective identities. To accomplish this task with success, theoretical and empirical sociology must sustain meaningful conversations. To the extent that we succeed in promoting this dialogue, our prospects for shedding light on the question of the scope of solidarity will not be confined to the parochial limits of a national society.

Brazilian sociology played an important role in making sense of the country’s nation-building process. Nowadays, to the extent that sociologists in Brazil and elsewhere seek to understand the changing parameters of identity and solidarity, one may venture the optimistic idea that sociological theory has renewed opportunities to make sense of ongoing projects for enlarged solidarity. Sociological theory provides the maps that make it possible for us to venture into these new territories.

Elisa P. Reis

Letter from the Chairs: Call for Papers for the RC16 2008 Interim Conference

Dear RC16 Member,

As you may already know, the ISA's Research Committee on Sociological Theory holds an interim conference during the mid-term period between each World Congress of Sociology. These events are usually small scale, intimate, informal and intense, providing a sense of continuity about the ongoing activities of the Research Committee and offering outstanding opportunities to find out about current theoretical developments, share ideas and research, establish networks with an international community of sociological theorists, and cultivate friendships with other participants. Indeed, because of their size and informality, past interim conferences have proved to be distinctive and memorable events.

We are delighted to announce that the next interim conference will be held at Pusan National University in Pusan, South Korea, between **23-25 June 2008**. Located in the Southwestern part of the Korean peninsula, Pusan is South Korea's second largest city (with a population of over 3.5 million residents). As a coastal city, it is surrounded by many beaches and boasts numerous options for visitors, in addition to serving as a gateway for further travel in Asia for members who would like to extend their trip. Furthermore, given that this will be the first RC16 conference on the Asian continent, the setting itself will undoubtedly generate unprecedented insights about sociological theory in the global age.

The local organizers are led by RC16 Associate Board Member Professor Seung Kuk Kim of the Department of Sociology at Pusan National University. They have arranged for a range of attractive accommodation options during the conference, the

prices of which range from about US\$50 to US\$150. Further details about venues and reservation arrangements will be provided at a later date. Moreover, in conjunction with the Korean Sociological Association, the local organizers will be hosting dinners during the conference, promising to make it an exceptional event.

The conference is open to papers on all topics and from all theoretical traditions. We welcome both pure theory and empirical work informed by theoretical concerns. If you are interested in participating, please send a title and short abstract (200-300 words) to us by **1 September 2007**.

In conjunction with the local organizers, we have nominated four thematic sessions on topics of current theoretical relevance. These are:

- global civil society;
- technology/information society;
- multiple modernities;
- East-West cultural reciprocation.

We particularly invite contributions that are pertinent to these themes. Hence, if you believe that your paper is suitable for such a session, please indicate as such when submitting your title and abstract to us. If we cannot accommodate all requests for papers to be placed in these four sessions, we will allocate such papers to regular sessions.

Contact details are given below. We look forward to hearing back from you, and to an exciting conference in Pusan.

Best Wishes,
Phil Smith and Fuyuki Kurasawa

Contact details

Please send your title and abstract to:
philip.smith@yale.edu
kurasawa@yorku.ca

For information about Pusan, South Korea, and the conference setting:
skkim21@chol.com