

# IN THE FIELD

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## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the newest installment of the newsletter sponsored by the GSSA and the PSA. Hoping to bring you coverage and convergence of all that is cool and hip in the daily doings of sociology graduate life at George Mason University.

In this issue we have PhD student Sahar Haghghat engaging in a one-on-one chat with Dr. John Dale about his new book, *Free Burma*. Dr. Dale's book is fresh off the presses and sparks for an engaging read, focusing on how social movements create and appropriate legal mechanisms for generating

new transnational political opportunities.

Information on what some of our current students have been up to, and some upcoming opportunities are also listed.

Most importantly, we ask that incoming (and current) grad students to the program get involved with our groups. Check out our [website](#) and get in touch with us if you want to learn more. (gmusocgrads@gmail.com) Also, we have our first conference this fall and invite you to participate or attend.

### Ways to contribute

**Reflections**—Discuss a short experience you've had while being at Mason

**Articles**—Short pieces on anything from personal engagement with the field to politics

**Reviews**—Read a recent piece of scholarship that pushes our sociological thinking into a new realm? Share it with us!

**Student Bios**—Check out the members section of the website and feel free to email us your bio, cv, and photo

**Individual News**—Anything happen between newsletters? Ranging from the personal to the academic, feel free to share

The Graduate Student Sociological Association and the Public Sociology Association remind you to attend our

### *1st Annual Public Sociology Graduate Conference*

**When:** October 22, 2011  
**Where:** GMU Campus  
Research Hall  
**Why:** Because its PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY (duh)

We have a great program lined up with a keynote address from Dr. Gregory Squires (GWU), tentatively titled *"Fox TV, Cybersegregation, and Public Sociology: Is Neil a More Desirable Tenant than Tyrone or Jorge?"* As well as featuring presentations from graduate students from across the nation.

## FREE BURMA! A CHAT WITH DR. JOHN DALE



*Interview by Sahar Haghighat*

In his newly published book, [Free Burma: Transnational Legal Action and Corporate Accountability](#), George Mason professor, John Dale, explores the transnational legal mechanisms used by the Free Burma movement. Facing some of the most violent forms of repression by Burma's military ruling party, the Burmese pro-democracy movement found a path for their movement by looking transnationally. Recognizing the support given to Burma's military regime through contracts signed with transnational corporations, the pro-democracy movement targeted these corporations. Focusing on human rights issues, the pro-democracy movement challenged the legal and moral obligations of these transnational corporations.



Soon the Free Burma movement had enlisted a network of activists, particularly in the United States, who were demanding corporate accountability from all transnational corporations working with the military regime. As Dale explains, this transnational movement produced three significant models for demanding corporate accountability, each of which was situated in the United States legal system. The first of these models focused on spreading public awareness in the United States; as people became more aware of the issues they began to pressure their local governments to hold these corporations accountable. What is known as the selective purchasing law, or the "Free Burma" law, was passed in a number of states restricting the availability of goods or services from companies that conduct business with the Burmese regime. The second campaign narrowed in on the state of California in an effort to force the state to de-charter the Unocal Corporation as a result of human rights abuses. The final campaign involved the first-ever use of the Alien Tort Claims Act; in *Doe/Roe v Unocal* campaign, Burmese peasants sued a transnational corporation within the U.S.

legal system for human rights abuses committed abroad.

In *Free Burma*, Dale demonstrates how globalization may be used "from below" to develop mechanisms for combating the increasing power of corporations while recognizing the macro-structural influences at play. Dale thoroughly examines the battle between a transnational advocacy network and transnational corporations who have rallied behind free-trade policies. While exploring issues around corporate accountability, Dale discovers how transnational social movements are creating new mechanisms by which to combat more powerful global entities. In fact, an ongoing message in this book is that we, as people, find opportunities to collectively combat the oppressive regimes in our lives; "As this book explains, his [a novice monk] struggle is connected to our own. Our young novice has joined the march to teach us about how we can make a better world for ourselves. Listen to the lessons that he has for us." I recommend that everyone pick up this book and listen.

While completing this review I had the opportunity to sit down with our own Associate Professor, John Dale, to talk about his newly published book. Here is what John had to say:

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**Sahar Haghighat:** Could you please tell us how you first became interested in the Free Burma movement?

**John Dale:** In 1996 when I was at UC Davis finishing my degree the city I was living in, Berkeley, California had passed the selective purchasing resolution. It was this action that first sparked my interest and I decided to take a trip to Burma to explore how these selective purchasing campaigns were being organized. Specifically, was campaign the brainchild of Western activists or were these activists coordinating with people in Burma. If it was the latter, then how were these individuals transferring information in a country without

## FREE BURMA! (CON'T)

the accessibility of the web, the ability to congregate in public, and with very little freedom for movement.

In 1997, when I first arrived in Burma I realized pretty early that the Free Burma movement had a well-organized method of passing information and that my original question was not very interesting. What I did discover was an established transnational movement that was developing actual legal mechanisms by which to demand corporate accountability; it was a case of transnationalism from below.

By 2003, I had collected enough information to complete my dissertation but the legal mechanisms I was exploring were still being decided and I didn't want to complete the book until I could bring it up to date. Soon after the court decisions had been made, the Saffron Revolution took place which was a direct challenge to my work. To understand the Saffron Revolution I had to further explore this transnational relationship and how the Free Burma movement was using this relationship to not develop new mechanisms but to reinvent old social movement tactics, such as that of "people power". After the Saffron Revolution I decided it was time to wrap up the book and that I would have to develop Burma's internal politics as part of a follow up project.

**SH:** I know that you took a few trips to Burma while writing this book, when was your last trip to the region and what was your specific research interest at the time?

**JD:** I was in Burma during the summer of 2010. On that trip I was specifically looking at media focuses used by human rights organizations to educate and train civilians on different human rights monitoring practices, particularly supporting them in documenting everyday human rights abuses. These campaigns are driven primarily by Western NGOs because of their ability to launch such programs. This is

problematic because it brings up concerns about cultural recolonization of the global South by the global North through the application of a hegemonic concept of human rights. These campaigns treat human rights as international law; they universalize the language and concepts, recruit everyday citizens as research assistants, and attempt to develop legal mechanisms. I am interested in whether global South actors can influence the turn of human rights independently or must they call on support from global North NGOs? Can these relationships be more equal?

**SH:** Is this the research question you are currently working on as a follow up to *Free Burma*?

**JD:** In some form, yes. Currently in Burma there are two competing opinions on how to tackle human rights. The first is based on a Western philosophy of human rights and incorporates legal mechanisms, international law, and the reporting of every day civilians. The second is more of a community based understanding of human rights. This tactic is based on a communal enforcement of human rights, like restorative justice. I am working on a grant now to expand my work throughout Burma to determine whether these community based teachings of human rights can compete with a more dominant understanding of the concept and under what conditions is this possible. Eventually I would like to look at a variety of authoritarian states to determine why some are able to maintain this alternative understanding of human rights while others are not.

**SH:** I'm sure I speak for many people when I say that I'm looking forward to reading more about it.

*What I did discover was an established transnational movement that was developing actual legal mechanisms by which to demand corporate accountability...*

## STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD CHECK US OUT!

### PUBLICATIONS

Shannon N. Davis and **Sara B. Moore**. 2010. "Bearing Children, Becoming Mothers: The Influence of Child bearing on Unmarried Women's Gender Ideologies." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 36(2).

Edward Gaier and **Jason Smith**. 2011. "Improving Governance Through Symbiotic Media Structures." *Democracy & Society*, 8(2).

**Jason Smith**. 2011. "Media is Growing More White. What's the FCC Doing About it?" *Colorlines*, August 11.

### PRESENTATIONS

**Marisa Allison** presented the paper "The Feminization of Higher Education Consumption: Transitional Experiences of Female Doctoral Students" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Julie Anderson** presented the paper "Invisible Identities: Veterans Transition to Higher Education" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Marcus Boyd** and **Katie Kerstetter** presented the paper "The Development and Persistence of U.S. Welfare Policy: An Intersectionalist Approach" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society. **Katie** also presented the papers "Will They Come? Eliminating Welfare Benefits for Families of Truant Children" at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society and "Constructing Identities, Managing Stigma: Conversations with TANF Mothers in a Post-Welfare Reform Era" at the annual meeting of the Sociologists for Women in Society.

**Randy Lynn** and James Witte presented the papers "Social Network Sites, Social Ties, and Social Capital" at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, and "Repaired Is Broken: Newsgroup Commodification, Prosumption, and Rebellion" at the annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. Randy also presented a paper with **Jeff Johnson**, entitled "'Bitches Love' Ambiguous Sexism: Gender, 'Karma,' and the Limits of Male Progressivism in Online Communities" at the 2011 Theorizing the Web conference, hosted at the University of Maryland.

**Caroline Pendry** presented the paper "The Politics of Style: Fashioning the Student Body" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Sara Moore** presented the paper "Brains, Bodies, and Babies: Experiencing Pregnancy on a University Campus" at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

**Abby Reiter** presented the paper "Students and Alumni Reflections and Lessons" at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Sociological Association.

**Jason Smith** presented the paper "Learning from a 'Teachable Moment?' Local Boston Newspapers and Framing Race in the Henry Louis Gates Arrest" at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Jason also presented "Mutant Minorities and (Re)Framing Whiteness in Popular Culture" at the Eastern Sociological Society annual meeting.

## STUDENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD (CON'T)

### CHECK US OUT!

#### AWARDS HONORS AND ACCOLADES

**Sahar Haghghat** was recognized by the Office of the Provost for her "exceptionally high" teaching evaluations from her "Globalization and Society" course, for the Spring 2011 semester.

**Jeff Johnson** was awarded the 2011 Irene B. Taeuber Graduate Student Paper Award from the District of Columbia Sociological Society. Jeff was also the department's Outstanding Graduate Student award winner for the 2010-11 academic year.

**Katie Kerstetter** was awarded a grant from the Foundation for Community Association Research to explore barriers and advantages to tenant participation in Reston, VA's community association.

**Randy Lynn** was chosen as a participant for the *Summer Social Webshop*, at the University of Maryland this summer—Support from NSF, Google, and Intel brought 40 top doctoral students to the UMD for presentations from leading researchers, workshops on social network analysis tools, and intense discussions about how social media can be applied to national priorities.

**Jason Smith** served as a COMPASS Summer Fellow at the Media Policy Initiative of the New America Foundation, sponsored by the Consortium on Media Policy Studies.

#### OTHER WORKS

**Katie Kerstetter** completed an evaluation of "Health and Development in the Mississippi Delta Workshop Series" (a workshop series for community practitioners and graduate students focused on research capacity-building for program planning and evaluation) for the Institute for Community-Based Research at the University of Mississippi.

**Abby Reiter** began teaching at Cape Fear Community College in Wilmington, NC this summer and fall.

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## UPCOMING EVENTS/DEADLINES

#### GSSA/PSA EVENTS

Oct 22 First Annual Graduate Public Sociology Conference, George Mason University.

#### CONFERENCE DEADLINES

- Oct 1 Submission deadline, ["33rd Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum,"](#) University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (February 24-25, 2012).
- Oct 15 Submission deadline, ["Storied Lives: Culture, Structure, and Narrative,"](#) Eastern Sociological Society, New York, NY (February 23-26, 2012).
- Oct 17 Submission deadline, ["Shifting Social Contracts,"](#) Southern Sociological Society, New Orleans, LA (March 21-24, 2012).
- Dec 1 Submission deadline, ["Renewing Sociology: Living Traditions and Creative Beginnings,"](#) North Central Sociological Association, Pittsburgh, PA (April 12-15, 2012).

## ADDITIONAL SHOUTOUTS!!

### NEW BABY!!

PhD Student Sara Moore and her husband Zeke Holt welcomed their daughter *Emerson Louise Holt* on April 2, 2011



### CONGRATS TO COMPLETING COMPREHENSIVES!!

Adrienne Hinds—Winter 2011

Sara Moore—Winter 2011



Jeff Johnson—Summer 2011

Randy Lynn—Summer 2011



Vicki Watson—Summer 2011



## JOURNAL SPOTLIGHT AND ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

### Journal Spotlight

[Global Social Policy](#) is a fully peer-reviewed journal that advances the understanding of the transnational dimensions of social policy, social development, and social governance. The Journal publishes scholarly, policy-oriented articles that focus on aspects of social policy and social governance broadly defined in both contemporary and historical contexts. The Journal is multidisciplinary and welcomes contributions from a wide range of theoretical and political perspectives across all disciplines and fields of study that address social issues, governance, politics and policies at various levels or scales, using a global and/or transnational analytical framework.

**Research in the Sociology of Health Care.** Papers are being sought for volume 30 of *Research in the Sociology of Health Care* published by Emerald Press. The major theme for this volume is issues in health and health care related to race/ethnicity, immigration, SES, and gender, especially papers dealing with macro-level system issues and micro-level issues. Papers that focus on linkages to policy, population concerns and either patients or providers of care as ways to meet health care needs of people both in the United States and in other countries are welcome. For papers examining issues in health and health care in countries other than the United States, the focus could be on issues of delivery systems in those countries and ways in which revisions and changes impact health or health care. The volume will contain 10 to 14 papers, generally between 20 and 40 pages in length. Deadline: **February 1, 2012**. Contact: Jennie Jacobs Kronenfeld, Sociology Program, School of Social and Family Dynamics, Box 873701, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-3701; (480) 965-8053; Jennie.Kronenfeld@asu.edu.

**The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice** is seeking articles related to "Race and Urban Space: A Discourse on Power, Struggle, and Change" for the summer of 2012, Volume 6, Issue 1. Teaching in the 21st century has brought on new and renewed discussions on the construction of race and how it interacts with urban spaces. We invite scholars to present research that weaves local, national, and international events and concepts. This journal is particularly concerned with reframing the discussion on race as a lens to magnify important issues relating to urban environments. For information, complete guidelines, or to submit email Guest Editor Kellie Carter Jackson at jacksonk@gonzaga.edu. Deadline for submission is **Jan. 15, 2012**.

[This Week in Sociology](#) is beginning its second volume of on-line print and seeks submissions on current and news worthy affairs from a sociological point of view and that can be read jargon-free for general audiences. Two ways to contribute are through (1) writing op-ed style pieces of 500-800 words and (2) proposing to be a special section editor for the week—which includes picking a theme for the week's issue, finding 3-5 people to contribute pieces based on the theme (this can include you if you'd like), responsibility for making sure authors turn articles in on time and editing the pieces, writing an intro to the articles that summarizes them and states why its important to address these areas. Submissions and inquiries should be sent to Jason Smith, managing editor, jsm5@gmu.edu