



Alain Morice and Jacqueline Martinez, May 1980



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*Labour Studies  
Then and Now*

## RÉSUMÉ

### **Re-conceptualiser le travail à l'ère de la globalisation : De l'étude du travail et des pays en voie de développement, à celle du travail et de la globalisation?**

Ronaldo Munck

*De façon à souligner le 25e anniversaire de Travail, capital et société, cet article examine la manière dont les études internationales du travail ont changé depuis 1979. L'évolution des paradigmes, passant d'une emphase sur le développement à des questions reliées à la globalisation, forme le cadre théorique de cet article. Pour plusieurs spécialistes, il semble que les dynamiques de développement national, qui constituèrent longtemps le contexte dans lequel se situaient la formation et les luttes des mouvements ouvriers, ne sont plus aussi importantes que le contexte global. Quelles sont les implications de ce changement? Dans quel état se trouvent les études du travail aujourd'hui? Est-ce que tous les « vieux » intérêts de recherche ont perdu leur importance, ou sont-ils plus cruciaux que jamais? Cet article propose une évaluation personnelle de ces questions, sur la base des travaux de l'auteur ainsi que de l'évolution du journal.*

## **Reconceptualizing Labour in the Era of Globalization: From Labour and ‘Developing-Area Studies’ to Globalization and Labour?**

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### **Introduction**

*LABOUR, Capital and Society*/TRAVAIL, *capital et societe* (*LCS/TCS*) has in its twenty-five years of publishing and networking under Rosalind Boyd promoted the critical study of labour and development and provided a platform for many scholar activists from the global South. This period has also seen, I would argue, a paradigm shift from ‘labour and development’ to ‘labour and globalization’. I am not in a position, from the ‘outside’ to carry out an exhaustive ‘internal’ archaeology of this transition as reflected in the pages of *LCS/TCS*, but I can provide a personal ‘then’ and ‘now’ perspective, based on the transition from my own *The New International Labour Studies* (Munck 1988) to *Globalisation and Labour: The New ‘Great Transformation’* (Munck 2002). All journals are a product of their times and location — Montreal, developing-area studies, language debates, particular disciplinary mix, specific international linkages and influences — and, of course, the role of individuals. Notwithstanding these particular factors, we might find some general patterns in the ‘young’ *LCS/TCS* and *LCS/TCS* today. We also need to trace the interaction between the journal and the broad changes in the global political economy and labour studies in particular. To be perfectly clear, this is a personal view or ‘opinion piece’ I am advancing, not necessarily shared by those involved in the journal. It is also a

political argument I am making and I am quite aware that this may be contested.

## **Labour and Development**

Back in 1979, as part of a year-long seminar series on the mapping of international labour studies held at McGill's Centre for Developing Area Studies (CDAS) in Montreal, Robin Cohen advanced a bold programmatic call for a 'new international labour studies' (NILS) paradigm (Cohen, 1980). Methodologically the NILS was seen to stand in opposition to previously established approaches such as industrial relations (IR), trade union studies, labour history and what Cohen called 'technicist' labour studies, referring to the work of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). To the traditional concerns of mainstream 'labour and development' studies (hitherto dominated by economists), we could now add issues such as class formation and proletarianization, the overt but also hidden forms of workers struggles and the role of casual employment and the urban poor more generally. Cohen stressed the need to engage in the study of 'trade union imperialism' (a growing if peripheral area), and international labour solidarity (dominated then by the rise of the multinational corporation to prominence) but, perhaps, more on potential 'bridging themes' such as labour migration and the feminist-inspired debates on the domestic mode of production and reproduction (see *LCS/TCS* special issue guest edited by Gavin Smith and Jonathan Barker "Petty Commodity Production" 19:1, April 1986). But in the end the NILS — from this pre-globalisation perspective — did not achieve the status of new paradigm as Cohen hoped it would.

A parallel call for a 'new international labour studies' came from Peter Waterman who seemed to define the NILS much more in terms of the politics of the project. For Waterman: "By the 'new international labour studies' I mean studies that not only look at labour as an international phenomenon, but which consider it as the political force capable of transforming an exploitative, wasteful, racist, patriarchal world order. I mean studies that are labour-orientated and ultimately related to labour and social struggles, and which are also essentially internationalist" (Waterman 1983: 2). Waterman is thus far less concerned with the academic setting and

the deficiencies of area-studies or traditional labour studies. He claims an explicit Marxist project and rejects the vague label of 'radical'. Where this approach scores is in its single-minded pursuit of labour internationalism, particularly through electronic communication means. However, in terms of building NILS as a new paradigm that might provide a global optic or paradigm for labour-studies worldwide, Waterman did not pursue this objective, rather 'jumping ship' to study the "new social movements" and globalisation (Waterman 1998) in a somewhat visionary style.

My own contribution to NILS came in the form of a book-length introduction to the field (Munck 1988) that tried to bring together existing empirical studies under a common theoretical umbrella. It covered employment patterns, the labour process, the working classes, trade unions, labour relations, industrial democracy and labour's political dimension. Revealingly, the 'international dimension' was given a separate chapter rather than being seen as an overarching element. I seemed particularly keen to draw my distance from the world system theorists who were then actively publishing in this area (Wallerstein 1983; and Bergquist 1984). Explicitly I argued that "Labour is formed, exploited and struggles in a given national context" (Munck 1998: 18). In the era of globalization, we might not be so categorical. Where the book is also decidedly dated is in its hesitant embrace of information technology (circa 1985) as a tool for building labour internationalism. Where it probably did a better job was in bridging the gap between studies of labour at the centre (Edward Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, etc) and workers in the 'developing world' that had hitherto been treated as separate domains.

*LCS/TCS* in the 1980s carved out a particular niche for itself, based on its history, its location and the politics of its leading lights. To get a flavour of *LCS/TCS* in the 1980s we can turn more or less at random to Vol 15 No. 1 (1982) where we find an article in labour migration in the Arab World (Fred Halliday), one on collective bargaining in Brazil (Tavares de Almeida), the economic structure of the West Bank (M. K. Buder), Sri Lanka's plantation economy (Sudatta Ranasingue) and a review article on a 'people's history' of the Witwaterstand by the ubiquitous Peter Gutkind. What I see running across these contributions — apart from a uniformly high level of analysis — is a mixed theoretical discourse that is at one

and the same time, taking up new issues but often within fairly conventional categories. Yet, this is natural enough and is the way Kuhn describes the development of new paradigms, where only at a certain point do the new facts burst asunder the constraints of prevailing theories and call for the development of new ones.

In 1985, *LCS/TCS* published a special issue on South African Labour (Vol 18: 2) edited by Roger Southall. The broader significance of this work in South Africa is taken up elsewhere (see Eddie Webster in this anniversary issue), but for my own understanding of what NILS meant, it had particular significance. The Latin American labour studies paradigm I operated within had its own reference points in global sociology, but these did not include South-South comparisons. From the work of Robin Cohen, Peter Waterman and others, I had gained some familiarity with the development of labour in Nigeria. Now, through our common meeting point in Montreal and *LCS/TCS*, I was introduced to the vibrant developing and innovative struggle against apartheid by South Africa's independent 'black' unions. This was to lead me to a time in South Africa in 1992 and then in 1994 until 1996. The South African trade union movement COSATU was, for its part, to develop an ongoing relationship with the Brazilian trade unions that later went on to form the Workers' Party. Gay Seidman (1994) has documented the vital comparative study of labour politics in Brazil and South Africa, a form of lateral interaction that is all too rare in a global sociology still dominated by North-South interactions and dependencies.

If we turn to a late 1980s issue we find in Vol 21 No.1 of April 1988, a fairly disparate set of contributions. There is, in first place, a debate on the 'transition to socialism?' in Ghana between Don Robotham and Eme Ndu. In many ways, this debate is symptomatic of long-standing Western debates on Tanzania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Cuba and many other experiences of 'socialist transformation in Third World societies' (Editorial introduction). While informative and engaged, it takes the critical report from Ndu for us to learn that the Ghanaian political party in question, did not even consider itself socialist or "in transition to" socialism. While this debate arguably harked back to a past of 'solidarity with' so-called socialist regimes, another contribution on Japan's re-industrialization (by Bernard Bernier) is seen as a new departure,

because it was not dealing with a ‘developing country’ (as conventionally understood) but also (I would add) because it begins to introduce the theme of globalization. This issue is also significant because it marks fifteen years of publication and, as Rosalind Boyd put it: “It is important as researchers and teachers to step back from time to time and reflect about the labour studies material we are producing...to ask ‘why’?”

Journals, like any cultural product, can be evaluated as much (if not more) by what they do not cover as much as by what they do deal with. The 1970s obsession with theory in Marxist circles seems to have passed the journal by. There are no fierce debates on modes of production / social formations, young Marx / mature Marx, levels of abstraction / mediation, etc. Perhaps this was a good thing and there are worse sins than empiricism. However one could argue there is a quite conventional theoretical universe at play here reflected in a rather mainstream understanding of ‘developing-area studies’. While insisting on a labour focus or a focus on the labouring poor for the journal was designed to dislodge the central place of economic models and the limitations of economics as the mainstream view in development studies and work, there was still a belief that labour research and the journal was situated within international development studies.

A cumulative index for the period 1986 to 1995 is indicative perhaps of the way in which *LCS/TCS* stayed within conventional categories when all around were engaged in ‘theoretical practice’ and the ‘deconstruction’ of ‘bourgeois categories’. Thus the subjects covered by the index included the usual categories of ‘agriculture’, ‘development’, ‘employment’, ‘health and safety’, etc and then country listings. Globalization has its entry in the index, and we find a few articles dealing with China, child labour (with a major special issue on the topic, Vol. 27: 2, November 1994), indigenous peoples and multinationals from a globalization perspective. Likewise, while there is, surprisingly, no entry for ‘gender’ there is, of course, one for ‘women’ with nine articles dealing with such issues as women and micro-enterprise, women migrants survival strategies and so on, as well as special issue on *Women Workers in South Asia* ( Vol. 29: 1 & 2, 1996) guest edited by Dolores Chew.

My point is not that these issues were not covered but that we could expect a much more sustained critical theoretical treatment of



both globalization and gender precisely because they are contested. Likewise globalization seems to have been viewed as a cover word for imperialism and the ongoing development of capitalism. These are legitimate views but may have led to a downplaying of the fierce conceptual and ideological struggles around the terms that shaped other scholar activists.

In retrospect then, can we say that the project to create a new international labour studies (NILS) paradigm as articulated in 1980 failed? For one critic the NILS was marginalized due to a “sectarian presentism” and “a penchant for cavalier generalisation” but also “since the early 1980s, of course, the rightward shift in world politics has further undermined the urgency and appeal of the NILS project...” (French 2000: 196). Leaving aside the first two points that surely do not apply to all NILS practitioners, it is certainly the case that the 1980s became a cold climate for any endeavour in a socialist spirit, however reflexive and self-critical it might have been. My own attempt to systematize and theorize the new international labour studies (Munck 1988) could certainly not have appeared at a worse time, on the very brink of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and all that came down with it. In that sense, if NILS was related at all to the socialist project (and it was, if to very variable degrees) then it was too late. This was a 1968 type project, appearing twenty years later as the capitalist counter-offensive was coming to a successful conclusion. The ‘end of history’ was about to be proclaimed.

However, I would now argue in retrospect that the NILS project came into the world too early. Had NILS emerged in the mid-1990s rather than the mid-1980s it might well have ‘piggybacked’ on the emerging wave of globalization studies. To see the world of labour as one rather than the ‘three worlds’ of modernization theory and orthodox communists alike, was now common sense. The post-modernism wave had also successfully demolished many of the disciplinary boundaries that also conspired against the NILS project *in my opinion*. Just by way of example to back up this analysis, I would take the concept of ‘social movement unionism’ a core concept for NILS pointing towards a ‘third way’ beyond economic and political unionism. While it ‘took off’ in South Africa, it made no impact whatsoever in Northern labour studies. That is until the publication by U.S. labour scholar/activist Kim Moody of a book

with premiere left publishers Verso in the late 1990s (Moody 1997). At that point the concept of ‘social movement unionism’ became mainstreamed as many labour leaders sought for inspiration outside of conventional approaches. By then ‘social movement unionism’ was making an appearance in an ILO volume (Bezuidenhout 2002) albeit sitting ill at ease with its traditional ‘technicist’ labour studies approach.

Before moving on to labour and *LCS/TCS* in the era of globalization, we should consider the very real gains of the earlier period. Over and beyond the many successful monographs and the influence they exerted in different ‘area studies’, we have a real advance in the comparative study of international labour. We can trace this in two collections, one published in 1979 (Cohen, Gutkind and Brazier, eds, 1979) and one in 1987 (Boyd, Cohen and Gutkind, eds, 1987). The first collection focuses on early forms of labour resistance, workers on the land, strategies of working-class action. None of these issues have gone away in the era of globalization. There is even a section on migrant workers and advanced capitalism (with authors such as Manuel Castells) that has a most contemporary ring to it.

The second volume (Boyd et al, eds. 1987), nearly a decade later, and the result of another conference in Montreal, continued to stress the element of the subtitle, namely “The Making of a New Working Class”. It showed a definitive move beyond the narrow confines of ‘industrial relations’ orthodoxy, alert to culture, politics and the ‘non-work’ element of working class formation. The text also reflected the contemporary concerns with the development of a ‘new international division of labour’ as the once-colonized world, or at least parts of it, entered a vigorous period of industrialization.

## **Labour and Globalization**

In 2002 I belatedly joined the new wave of ‘global social movements’ literature (see Waterman 1998 and Cohen and Rai, eds. 2000) with a book on *Globalisation and Labour* (Munck 2002), which took its inspiration from Karl Polanyi and his study of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century ‘Great Transformation’ (Polanyi 2001). The underlying social reality was that the global proletariat had doubled in numbers between 1975 and 1995. Was there now a global labour market emerging? Was the traditional Marxist

agenda of capital confronting a growing proletariat now coming to fruition on a global scale?

Certainly my text was set in an optimistic register with the protests against the WTO in Seattle in 1999 marking the end of the retreat — social and discursive — since the collapse of the Berlin Wall a decade earlier. Key issues were the ‘informalization’ and ‘feminization’ of this emerging global working class. The Northern obsession with ‘new’ technology and the ‘new’ capitalism was set in the context of a global development of capitalism in a very ‘traditional’ mould, not least in China. To the already present theme of ‘deterritorialization’ (decline of the nation-state), I added a certain ‘Thirdworldization’ (some called it ‘Brazilianization’), with a perverse and divisive pattern of ‘developing world’ capitalism became a global pattern.

‘Brazilianization’ referred to the pattern whereby ‘non-standard’ employment patterns became the norm. For example, in the 1990s — eight out of ten new jobs in Latin America were in the informal sector. The well-established, permanent secure employment with generous social benefits and entitlements was something of the past. Not only in the Third World but also in the advanced capitalist societies where ‘flexibilization’ was the watchword for the new capitalism’s relationship with labour.

These were themes very familiar to the reader of *LCS/TCS* which had published a number of significant contributions early on (see especially Senghaas-Knobloch “Informal Sector and Peripheral Capitalism: A critique of a prevailing concept of development” in Vol. 10:2, November 1977) but now they were becoming a recognized global pattern. But all was not capital doing unto labour unspeakable things. I was swimming against the left current that saw globalization as the new bogeyman, arguing instead that while it closed some doors for labour, it also opened others. For many women the transformations of capitalism over the last twenty-five years have arguably represented an opportunity for social advancement even if most women who have entered the workforce are in the lowest paying and most insecure jobs (see the article by Nirmala Banerjee in this issue for a more considered analysis). Women working worldwide have also been at the centre of innovative trade-union/social movement responses to globalization in the South, but increasingly on a global level, not least due to the

success and visibility of the international women's movement. In making these points I am resisting the 'necessitarian' claims of some on the left who seem to view things as always 'for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds' always and everywhere.

A major debate that *Globalisation and Labour* took up was a 1970s theme around the nature and prospects for labour internationalism. When this debate played out the first time around, it centred on the notion that the 'objective' development of transnational capitalism (through the multinational corporations) would create the conditions for 'subjective' consciousness developing transnational labour solidarity.

Now there was a new 'global justice' movement out there, taking on globalization with its own counter-globalization 'from below', from the very start. The labour movement, it seemed, was slowly catching up with the change in objective circumstances and developing a transnational response. Polanyi's notion of a social counter-movement to the development of free-market capitalism seemed useful in conceptualizing this response. But many unresolved questions remained for me. What are the challenges posed by globalization and how can a viable alternative social agenda be developed? How can labour interact with the 'new' social movements around gender, environmental and human-rights issues in constructing global solidarity? To what extent can history help us answer these questions, or are the issues new ones altogether?

*Labour, Capital and Society/Travail, capital et societe* was also in the late 1990s and early 2000s tackling the question of globalization head-on. In 1997 there was a special issue on *Confronting Neoliberalism / Defier le Neo-liberalisme* (Vol 30 No.2) dealing with Latin America, South Africa, Nigeria and Guyana. The underlying theme was common across the international left at the time (see Saad-Filho and Johnston eds. 2000), namely the manner in which the international capitalist institutions were seeking to 'adjust' labour to the requirements of the new world order. From a similar orthodox left position, we had "Globalizacion: mitos realidades desde una perspectiva cubana" (Vol. 31 No. 1/2, 1998 in the special issue on *Workers and Borders in the Context of Regional Blocs*) by Antonio Romero Gomez of Cuba's Centre for Research in the International Economy. A less orthodox contribution in the same issue in 1998 carried a piece by

long-time *LCS/TCS* collaborator Myron Frankman, calling for a 'planet-wide citizen's income'. As Frankman (and does so again in this anniversary issue) argued eloquently: "the human rights agenda ... remains narrowly defined and incomplete if global rights and obligations are not developed" (p.177). The current moves towards a concept and practice of global citizenships need, from this renovated political economy perspective, at a minimum a global system of guaranteed entitlements to income, goods and services to realise human capabilities.

The turn of century saw an acceleration of *LCS/TCS* production on globalization from different perspectives. In 1999 Nicoli Natrass contributed on 'globalisation and social accords' (Vol 32 No.2), where she examined South Africa's experience and prospects in the light of Sweden's and Australia's various social pacts or compromises. What was unusual about this contribution was not so much its coverage of a country like Sweden (although that was certainly a new departure) but that its conclusions on the advisability of a 'social accord' on South Africa based on wage restraints was rather 'heretical' in terms of previous *LCS/TCS* coverage of South African trade unions and their struggles from a clearly leftist perspective. Then in 2000 (Vol 33 No.1) and again in 2002 (Vol 35 No.1) Bernard Bernier published on the Japanese labour regime in the era of globalization. Nothing unusual about that we could say, except that *LCS/TCS* had always explicitly restricted its remit to what we called the 'Third World'. It was a welcome departure from the old 'Thirdworldism' tendency that still seemed to cling to *LCS/TCS*. Globalization was integrating the world economy to such an extent, that its impact on the workers of the world had to be analyzed in an integrated fashion as well.

Undoubtedly *LCS/TCS* has engaged actively with neo-liberalism at a global and regional scale, as well as with the 'structural adjustment programs' that so harmed social development in the majority of the world. The overall perspective is congruent with the 'Thirdworldist' history of the journal and the fairly orthodox Marxism of many key contributors. Thus Sam Noumoff in a 'programmatic' 2001 statement on "globalization and the marginalized" argues characteristically that "globalization is a mere euphemism for the totalisation of capitalism on a global scale" (Vol 34:1, p.50). I believe it was/is healthy to reject the more

impressionistic 'gee-whizz' views of globalization as an Internet-driven promised land. But is the whole of globalization studies to be dismissed as 'globaloney' as many in the *Monthly Review* 'school' do? Can we not see this phase of expanded capitalist reproduction on a global scale as something qualitatively new in some ways without succumbing to neo-liberalism and the 'concession of defeat' that the *Monthly Review* authors see there reflected? Likewise, I wonder whether the questions Noumoff asks himself (and us) in conclusion "Can a new alliance be established between the workers in the First and Third Worlds?...As capitalism expands globally, is there space for an authentic patriotic national bourgeoisie...?...Are we duty-bound to promote the survival [of the five remaining socialist countries] in order to maintain a systemic alternative?..." (pp.90-91) are really the key issues of the day. To refuse the latest theoretical fad may be a healthy reaction but if the world is changing rapidly, as most acknowledge, then our conceptual categories must also develop.

In terms of global labour studies, the picture in 2005 is very different from that of 1980 regarding what our analytical problematic is (see James 2000). The whole notion of national and epochal analysis has a lot less purchase now. We are much more conscious of divides and tensions such as those between work/home, public/private, workplace/community. There can be no effective or critical labour studies that does not foreground gender relations. An emphasis on the material conditions under which people work, is conjoined on a new emphasis on language and culture. We are more attuned to the diversity of experience and consciousness, and refer less than we did to 'Third World workers' or 'women workers' as though these categories were self-explanatory and self-sufficient. We are less prone to economic or sociological reductionism and are aware of the perils of structural determinism. We understand better the complexity of social identity and that its different facets may well be contradictory. Globalization studies and, to be more specific, the Subaltern Studies approach, has taught us to 'provincialise Europe' and to take a properly historical and critical approach to modernity, colonialism and the still unfolding story of imperialism.

If we stand back from the globalization and labour debates, we can note a global transformation of the social sciences over the last

decade. For a whole historical period — indeed since the conjoint rise of the nation-state and modern social sciences — we have simply taken for granted that social boundaries coincided with state boundaries. Culture meant national culture and social action invariably occurred within the logic and parameters of the nation-state. What passed as universal ideas — such as capitalism, modernity, socialism, civil society, etc — were in fact Western European ideas. The social sciences nationalized these ideas, but the dominant imperial powers often assumed their universality. British notions of ‘civilization’ and U.S. conceptions of ‘modernization’ are irredeemably linked to the power of empire and the violence of conquest. Today, the social science disciplines have to grapple with a social reality, where globality is a determinant condition of economic development, political action, cultural expression and social action. As Martin Shaw puts it “the challenges of global social science parallel, and often intersect with, those of global civil society, and civil society needs the theoretical clarification to underpin its own development” (Shaw 2003: 37).

There is ferment across the social sciences today — and *LCS/TCS* is clearly not immune to it — as old paradigms are found wanting and new paradigms sometimes pop up prematurely. The ‘new’ social movements from the 1970s onwards had already encouraged the development of interdisciplinarity. The new condition of globality moved us towards a genuine transdisciplinarity as Enlightenment boundaries were transcended. Many of those involved with *LCS/TSC* had already moved on to this terrain as reflected in the 1990s conference with Latin American researchers on these issues and the publication of its proceedings entitled *Social Sciences and Transdisciplinarity: Latin American and Canadian Experiences* (Boyd and Florez-Malagnon). That interdisciplinarity and internationalization went hand in hand, should not surprise us in-so-far as “the tendencies towards integration of society and knowledge naturally accompanied each other” (Shaw 2003: 42). The accelerated social and economic integration of the world led to the politics of internationalization, while the integration of knowledge — not least the move beyond natural/social science divides — led inevitably towards interdisciplinarity. The complexity of social relations in the era of globalization — not least the inter-relationship between labour,

capital and society — requires an equally complex analytical lens attuned to the politics of scale (from the global to the body level, through regional, national and local scales) and the need for ‘joined-up thinking’ that does not rely on the inherited legitimacy of Western epistemologies.

Globality, as a new social condition, challenges the social sciences and all critical enquiry to move beyond methodological nationalism and traditional disciplinary boundaries alike. We are witnessing new social and political phenomena and our paradigms must develop accordingly. Boaventura de Sousa Santos raises, in the context of the World Social Forum / Forum Social Mundial, the question of knowledge and whether our understanding of globalization is yet as global as globalization itself (Sousa Santos 2003). While neo-liberal globalization is founded and legitimized by Western technical and scientific knowledge and enlightenment epistemologies, what is the great counter-movement going to base its knowledge on? Western rational scientific knowledge is not the same as a feminist epistemology or what counts as rationality in another cultural universe. Hegemonic criteria of what counts as truth and efficiency are under fire. Alternative forms of knowledge are everywhere flourishing. Confronted with this situation, the World Social Forum, but also the international labour movement, probably needs to develop an epistemological alternative, which recognizes that “there is no global or *social* justice without global *cognitive* justice” (Sousa Santos 2003: 238). The role of academics, intellectuals and teachers seems clear.

### **A Way Forward?**

While the above periodization may be heuristically necessary it does not necessarily help us move forward. We certainly cannot simply think in terms of a steady advance of knowledge to meet changing conditions. Nor, in reality, can we simply posit a ‘new’ labour studies and ‘new’ social movements as against their ‘old’ (and by implication defunct) counterparts. What I am suggesting, is that we cannot simply drop traditional concerns of labour and development studies because, since the turn of century, something called ‘globalization’ has dominated our concerns. For one thing, globalization is not something entirely ‘new’, since the world has experienced previous waves of internationalization. While it has led



to a greater degree of interconnectedness, it has not simply superseded all the concerns of national era capitalism to call it that. While globalization has, indeed, changed the parameters within which development takes place (or does not) and within which labour is shaped and becomes an active social agent, it has done so on a pre-existing terrain. I explore briefly now the globalization/development and globalization/labour interactions to draw some general conclusions for the ongoing study of 'labour, capital and society'.

In terms of an area for academic research and critical enquiry 'development studies' is no longer as central as it was when *Labour, Capital and Society* began to appear twenty-five years ago even though Kari Levitt makes a spirited and persuasive case for the continued relevance of the classic development paradigm (Levitt 2005 reviewed in this anniversary issue). I would argue that the terrain of academic debate has shifted overwhelmingly to globalization studies as the main parameter and paradigm for the study of development in what we used to call the 'Third World' or 'developing' countries. The lack of a viable and 'actually existing' socialist alternative since the 1990s (if not earlier of course) also means that any radical potential of the dependency or other critical approaches has also disappeared. Alternatives today do not take traditional nationalist-statist-socialist form but are, rather, articulated around a counter or alter-globalization axis. But in such a dramatic paradigm shift has something not been lost? Certainly we have lost much of the language with which to articulate a critique of the existing order. To remain on the development studies terrain, while the world around us is becoming globalized, is to risk irrelevance and our concerns would tend to look very much like a rearranging of the deck chairs on the Titanic. Yet development as a challenge has not disappeared and therein lies the paradox.

A cursory examination of any university bookshop will show that today, globalization studies has largely superseded development studies. Does this mean that development is no longer an issue? No one, not even the most fervent supporters of neo-liberal globalization would argue that was the case. What it does mean, is that the development project as conceived in the period following the Second World War, is no longer viable or valid. During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s even, development was

conceived as national level, state-led economic advancement. In these terms there was little to separate Walt Rostow's conservative modernization manifesto from the most radical dependency framework. Development would occur within the parameters of a given nation-state, with protectionism *vis-à-vis* the world market being a natural means to achieve this.

Since the 1980s and particularly the 1990s a veritable revolution has occurred within development economics, with 'reform' being equated with an open-door policy *vis-à-vis* the world market and a removal of the state from all areas of 'interference' with the workings of the free market. Development was subsumed by marketization and national development by global development. Many of the concerns and debates of the 1970s are now being played out within the broad globalization debates. What is interesting is to see how much the debate has moved to the right, if that is the correct term. Thus, we find Jagdish Bhagwati, once the epitome of the conservative modernization theorist, taking a quite critical stance towards many sacred tenets of neo-liberalism on a global scale, such as financial liberalization. Bhagwati even lets slip, that "when I read about interdependence, a red light goes on inside my head that flashes *dependence*" (Bhagwati 2004: 227). The World Bank, one time scourge of left development writers, is now in the vanguard of 'socially responsible' critics of neo-liberalism. What does this mean for critical development / globalization theorists? Certainly the "problem of underdevelopment" has not gone away to put it that way. What has happened, is that it has been redefined in the era of globalization and old answers will not suffice to address new questions. Development discourses have been reinvented — not least in the post-development and various feminist approaches — and reconfigured to deal more adequately with the new world order.

If we move along the shelves in our ideal type (Western) university bookshop, we will also find a wide array of titles on the 'global justice movement' and the 'multitude' where once the international labour movement and the working-class held pride of place. When *LCS/TCS* began to appear, the 'new social movements' around women, environmental and peace issues were only just beginning to attract the attention of researchers. Then in the 1980s, much attention began to focus on these movements often under

the banner of ‘identity’ rather than ‘class’ based movements. A new paradigm emerged based on a firm rejection of what Laclau and Mouffe called ‘class essentialism’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). The study of workers, peasants, artisans, informal sector workers and the other range of social actors central to the concerns of *LCS/TCS*, tended to suffer from this overarching critique. The distinction between the ‘old’ class-based movements and the ‘new’ ones was always overstated, ignoring elements of continuity and falling rather under the spell of ‘new’ being the same as better. Twenty years on, we can look back with a more balanced perspective and recognize the value of the *LCS/TCS* research agenda more.

For one thing, the international labour movement has been revitalized and is, however unevenly, taking on the challenge of neo-liberal globalization. But also, we might recognize with Cecelia Lynch, that the rejection of class-based issues and politics by the ‘new’ social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, led to a “discursive demobilisation of movements on questions of economic praxis” (Lynch 1998: 149). At the heart of today’s broad ‘global justice’ movement we see precisely those social sectors once dismissed as particularistic and economistic. Workers, peasants and the self-employed are as active as the descendants of the ‘new’ social movements which assumed they were the true ‘universalistic’ and value-oriented movements. We even find the 1970s concern with ‘marginality’ — those who were not just employed but surplus to requirements of capitalist development — being revived in the 1990s in the guise of ‘social exclusion’ discourse. Castells in fact, in his three volume *magnum opus* on contemporary capitalism has as a central concern, the tendency of globalization to make whole social sectors and geographical regions redundant, or as he calls them ‘black holes’ (Castells 2001).

One of the most questionable and questioned elements in Hardt and Negri’s inspirational mood-capturing text *Empire* (2000) is precisely the adoption of the category ‘multitude’ to symbolize the new resurgence of the subaltern classes in the era of globalization. There is much to commend Negri’s old 1970s *operaismo* (workerism) reborn as counter-globalization for the new century. We have labour as a transnational actor, as hybrid and mobile, and the basis for global democracy. But its gender-blindness and

conceptual fuzziness is a step backwards in my opinion. Resistance to capitalist globalization is ill-defined and the dynamics of a counter-movement are under-specified. What we are witnessing is maybe not totally unprecedented or so new.

Polanyi-inspired accounts of resistance to neo-liberalism show how society reacts to the spread of free-market economics in a myriad defensive ways as free market encroachment or marketization is resisted. And Marx is far from superseded when we turn to the emergence of new working classes, such as in China — very much part of a global historical tendency to proletarianization with all its social, economic, political and cultural implications. A Polanyi/Marx approach (see Silver 2003) may well capture some of the contradictory dynamics of globalization in relation to the world's workers today.

Finally, I carried out another exercise, which was a quick examination of a 'random sample' of *LCS/TCS* published between 1982 and 2002. I found Labour/Travail to be a central theme running as a red thread, continuous and unbroken. Capital was also there in the shape of 'neo-liberalism', 'industrial relations' and the 'structural adjustment programmes'. What I perhaps did not find quite so central or explicit running through the pages, was a sustained theoretical concern with 'society/societe' Maybe it was the obvious sea in which both capitalists and workers swim in? Maybe it was just the sensitivities of a lapsed sociologist and not a general concern for the wider range of disciplines contributing to *LCS/TCS*? Whatever the case might be (and this is not meant as a criticism at all) it did start me thinking that a revitalized global labour studies needed to concern itself more with the nature of contemporary society. It was not irrelevant that sociology had been defined by its founders as the 'science of society'. Nor was it irrelevant that many neo-liberal ideologies and post-modern theorists have, since the 1980s, been arguing that "there is no such thing as society". For me, it seemed like a basic task of theoretical practice for a critical labour studies, to be clear on key concepts of which 'society' and the 'social' (for which see Donzelot 1979) seemed an obvious and major example.

While the notion of the 'global' has been insufficiently theorized, it has clearly had a major impact on the way we

understand society. Many of the dichotomies that have dominated social science debates — such as the social structure/ human agency relationship and the social science / physical sciences divide — have been decisively disrupted by globalization. As John Urry puts it: “‘Sociology’ will not be able to sustain itself as a specific and coherent discourse focused upon the study of given, bounded or ‘organised’ capitalism societies. It is irreversibly changed” (Urry 2003: 3). We can no longer operate a critical analysis on the basis of a ‘methodological nationalism’ that has a taken-for-granted and self-referential nation-state framework. We cannot discuss capital and labour either separately or together (as they presumably should be taken in a critical analysis) in the context of ‘society’ in its inherited national/coherent/bounded sense. Society is today more complex, more inter-penetrated, more diverse, more international than it ever was. If this, indeed, is a qualitative break, a journal dedicated to the study of labour, capital and society needs to be theorizing the paradigm shift explicitly and reflecting on its implications for labour studies.

The social has been rethought and decentred not only by globalization, but also by post-structuralism, a current of thought not much in evidence in the pages of *LCS/TCS*. From this perspective, society should not be conceived as a natural unity akin to a body where there is a central antagonism or fundamental relation (such as the capital-labour relation) that rules or governs it. Rather, we need to conceive of society in a more open, fluid and transient manner. Social identities are “open, incomplete, multiple, shifting...identity is hybridised and nomadic” (Gibson-Graham 2000: 12). In brief, we are moving towards a more pluralist vision of society and social identity. As *LCS/TCS* moves into a second phase, it could maybe engage more with these debates that are not necessarily the preserve of obscurantist social theorists and what more structuralist labour studies scholars, might dismiss as mere ‘cultural studies’. There is perhaps no need to be always (re)inventing social theory, but it does have a crucial role in critical social research, in forcing us to question accepted paradigms, and thus to better understand the rapidly changing social world in which both capital and labour must operate. This is also likely to be a much more transnational enterprise than it was, and our work is more likely to be more transdisciplinary than it was.

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