

Editors' Introduction

“Um outro mundo é possível!” “Another world is possible!” The slogan of the World Social Forum (WSF), which first met in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001 as an alternative to the annual meetings of the elite World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, has inspired millions of people in the global South and North who reject the notion that there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the American invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, there is also widespread yearning for radical democratic political and social change that breaks the binary with-us-or-against-us logic shared by al Qaeda and the U.S. government. Unequal power relations play out in the imaginative as well as material realms; the dominated must struggle even to think and dream differently. As Cynthia Kaufman argues, “A vision of the world that includes the possibility for change requires a major reorientation in how we see the world. The biggest reorientation that we need is one that enables us to see the ways that ordinary people, when they work together, can make huge changes in their society.”¹ The WSF and the regional and local forums following its example have created, first and foremost, an open process of dialogue among activists from a range of social movements in which they can share experiences, elaborate perspectives, and begin to imagine popular, sustainable alternatives to an increasingly chaotic world system.²

We can say, moreover, that another world *was* possible, not in the sense that the future has been foreclosed but in the sense that many movements in the past have also been inspired by visions of peace and justice, freedom and equality, sometimes on a world scale. Historically, the relentless effort to deny the possibility of alternative political and social forms has been matched by determined struggles to recognize and realize such possibilities. Of course, the marks of this contest are visible in their often bloody and disappointing outcomes. We can see this mix of possibility and constraints if we go back a century and return by way of twenty-five year

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intervals. Challenges to the world system were already apparent in the intertwined beginning of the Russian and Iranian revolutions, the nationalist Swadeshi cause in colonial India and the anti-American boycott in imperial China, and the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905 (the International Woman Suffrage Alliance was founded a year earlier). Gandhi's Salt March, the Yen Bai uprising in Vietnam, and the protests of the unemployed and dispossessed at the outset of the Depression helped form waves of unrest that swept the overlapping industrial, colonial, and semicolonial worlds in 1930. The Bandung conference of nonaligned third world leaders, the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, the African National Congress's Freedom Charter campaign in South Africa, and the Algerian war of independence signaled a new phase in the struggle against imperialism and white supremacy in 1955. Nearing our own time, Solidarity's shipyard strikes against the deformations of actually existing socialism, the transfer of power from the Rhodesian white minority regime to the Zimbabwean Patriotic Front, and the ongoing revolutionary processes in Central America and Iran in 1980 remind us of the high hopes of only a generation ago. As Galileo reputedly said after his capitulation to the Inquisition, "But still it moves."

Of course, such timelines are arbitrary constructions that highlight singular events at the expense of everyday efforts and emphasize dramatic turning points rather than underlying tendencies and trajectories. From her vantage point in the 1960s, Hannah Arendt echoed Lenin by sharply and clearly summing up the twentieth century as "a century of wars and revolutions."³ Since then, *rollback*, *restructuring*, and *restoration* have altered and even reversed the once seemingly transparent meaning, content, and practice of *revolution*. Indeed, as Michael Denning argues in an extremely thought-provoking essay, the "liberation movements of '1968'" have given way to a new type of movement that has spread from the global South to the global North and produced "twenty years of popular insurrections against the global enclosure of the commons."⁴

We now understand that contesting and transforming exclusionary and exploitative political and social arrangements are enormously complex and protracted projects. Their success will depend on grassroots participation, global as well as local alliances, and a radical democratic vision of the irreducible heterogeneity of another, better world. From our vantage point, then, it makes more sense to speak of a century of movements, whose significance we must interrogate and debate in the light of our own present. Our specific task is to historicize the global, inter- and transnational, and diasporic dimensions of these movements.⁵ *Movements* makes for a capacious term, one that can encompass the great variety of forms of popular struggle and configure the creative political, intellectual, and cultural openings they have produced and continue to produce. Sometimes visible, sometimes virtually invisible, overlapping and changing shape, movements have the added attraction

for radical historians like us of conveying the unfolding (and closing) of struggles in time and space, without the often mistaken sense of coherence and control implied by bounded and inward notions of political identity and organization.

We are excited to present three feature articles that recover interconnected and interactive histories from this global century of movements. Maia Ramnath surveys the diasporic politics of South Asians involved in the anticolonial Ghadar movement that fought against British imperial rule during the First World War across a wide geographical front from India and Japan to North America and Europe. Christopher Lee explores the ways in which the writing and interpretation of world history by antiracist activists in South Africa served as a political critique of the intensifying racial oppression leading to the establishment of apartheid in the late 1940s and 1950s. Besenia Rodriguez demonstrates the connections—both intellectual and political—that many African Americans forged with revolutionary Cuba as part of their arsenal against racism in the United States during the 1960s.

The clearest parallel among the articles is their reconstruction of the critiques of disparate oppressed groups confronting imperialism and white supremacy. These were movements aimed simultaneously (if at times uneasily) against both racial hierarchies and economic exploitation. Well before most historians finally decided that race and class were interrelated categories of analysis, the historical actors described in these articles had drawn that conclusion in their own writings and practices.

Each of the articles also demonstrates the significance of print culture in creating an “imagined community” of transnational radicalisms, proving that the nation is not the only collectivity at play in the twentieth-century world.⁶ Ramnath, for example, shows how Ghadar’s various multilingual and multivocal newspapers, in circulating the call to resist empire, helped intellectuals, soldiers, and workers throughout the South Asian diaspora develop a common political language that could unite a socially and culturally diverse movement. Lee investigates the ways in which the South African newsletter titled *Bulletin* disseminated radical political messages in print to teachers and students, especially by propagating a heterogeneous understanding of world history from below. Finally, Rodriguez highlights the tricontinental ideology of a group of African American journalists in the United States, whose news reports and editorials linked the struggles against racism and imperialism throughout the Atlantic world.

The authors also share a common interest in troubling the facile distinction between radicals who were privileged intellectuals and those who directly experienced racial oppression and economic exploitation. Both Ramnath and Lee explicitly refer to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the “organic intellectual” to describe a third possibility—that the exploited and the oppressed are capable of articulating in their own words a sophisticated critique of the world in which they live. Although

Rodriguez does not cite Gramsci, she would no doubt agree with Lee and Ramnath and point to her own research findings as further evidence that alternative worlds are often most clearly envisioned by those who experience the heaviest weight of the current world order.

More generally, these three articles illuminate a long lineage of cosmopolitanism among radical thinkers and actors. We have become skeptical of a cosmopolitanism rooted in a liberal vision of empathy and intersubjectivity that only has meaning due to the material privileges of Western societies. European travelers, writers, and intellectuals, for example, could be cosmopolitan in their outlook because they could follow the flows of money and power within an imperialist world system. This skepticism is justified, but the possibility of a more radical cosmopolitanism does exist, one that would embody what Walter Dignolo has characterized as “border thinking.”⁷ Concepts like radical cosmopolitanism or border thinking suggest that speaking and acting from the so-called margins of global power can possess its own critical perspective, one that is actually superior to liberal cosmopolitanism.⁸ First, liberal cosmopolitanism is typically rooted in an individualistic model of consciousness, in which the ideal of a bourgeois and nationalist *Bildung* becomes projected onto the world through the West’s imperial imaginary.⁹ In contrast, a more radical cosmopolitanism emerges from a collective consciousness formed through shared experiences of struggle against colonialism and capitalism, racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and homophobia. Second, liberal cosmopolitanism transports with it a monolithic, linear, and ultimately static viewpoint situating Western civilization as its center of perception from which supposedly universal truths may be proclaimed and everywhere imposed.¹⁰ Radical cosmopolitanism, however, is born out of an awareness of the multiplicity of centers, the polyphony of voices, and the proliferation of identities that demand recognition in order to make another world possible.

In addition to these three stimulating lead articles, our regular journal sections also tie into this issue’s interest in transnational imaginaries and radical cosmopolitanisms as sites for conceiving creative alternatives to the traditional frameworks of nationalism, imperialism, and globalization from above. In “Reflections” we present an interview with Adelina Nicholls, an inspiring activist whose grassroots organizing work in the Latina/o and immigrant communities of Georgia exemplifies globalization from below. Our “Forum” section offers three essays originally read as papers at the 2003 World History Association annual meeting on the First Universal Races Congress of 1911, an extraordinary but now largely forgotten encounter in London of statesmen, intellectuals, reformers, and anticolonial critics from around the world. In “Teaching Radical History,” we publish two essays on courses about global and transnational social movements that challenge students (and teachers) to become radical cosmopolitans in their own right. In “(Re)Views,” Mansour Bonakdarian critically considers two recent and important books on Orientalism.

In addition, six of the coworkers who help produce *Radical Historians Newsletter* and *Radical History Review* contribute brief “notes and raves” on the monographs, novels, short stories, museum exhibits, movies, and music that they have enjoyed recently and that capture some of our ways of knowing the world and its history. In “The Abusable Past,” R. J. Lambrose shows us once again how to fight back and get the last laugh in the ongoing history wars.

Our thanks to Yaël Simpson Fletcher for the assemblage that appears on the front cover and to Abou Bamba for his timely advice and assistance. We are also grateful to our ever encouraging and resourceful managing editors, Chia Yin Hsu and Rachel Scharfman, to Rod Hemsell for a serendipitous conversation about Sri Aurobindo in Carbondale, Colorado, and to all the wonderful members of the Ideas for Action Book Club who keep it real for us.

—Duane J. Corpis and Ian Christopher Fletcher

Notes

1. Cynthia Kaufman, *Ideas for Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change* (Boston: South End, 2003), 4.
2. For a sample of the unfolding discussion, see Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney, eds., *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the Twenty-first Century Order* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); William F. Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, eds., *Another World Is Possible: Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum* (London: Zed, 2003); Tom Mertes, ed., *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (London: Verso, 2004); Notes from Nowhere, eds., *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London: Verso, 2003); Joel Schalit, *The Anti-capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition* (New York: Akashic, 2002); Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk, eds., *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization* (London: Verso, 2002); David Solnit, ed., *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2004); Neva Welton and Linda Wolf, eds., *Global Uprising: Confronting the Tyrannies of the Twenty-first Century: Stories from a New Generation of Activists* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society, 2001); Eddie Yuen, George Katsiaficas, and Daniel Burton Rose, eds., *The Battle of Seattle: The New Challenge to Capitalist Globalization* (New York: Soft Skull, 2002); Yuen, Burton Rose, and Katsiaficas, eds., *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches from a Global Movement* (New York: Soft Skull, 2004). Of course, see also Gopal Balakrishnan, ed., *Debating Empire* (London: Verso, 2003); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
3. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 11; and Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1970), 3.
4. Michael Denning, “A Global Left? Social Movements in the Age of Three Worlds,” in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004), 36.

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5. Significantly, sociologists and political scientists are now studying the global and transnational nature of contemporary social movements. For example, see John A. Guidry, Michael D. Kennedy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Globalizations and Social Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); and Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. chap. 11. For a helpful historical retrospect on transnational advocacy networks in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, chap. 2.
6. Indeed, taken together, the three lead articles suggest that we should continue to probe both the relevance and the limits of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).
7. See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).
8. Walter D. Mignolo speaks of a "critical and dialogic cosmopolitanism" in "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," *Public Culture* 12 (2000): 721–48. This essay appears in a fascinating issue of *Public Culture* dedicated to the critical reinterpretation of cosmopolitanism. It has subsequently appeared in book form: Carol A. Breckenridge, et al., eds., *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). See also Daniele Archibugi, ed., *Debating Cosmopolitics* (London: Verso, 2003); Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and Bruce Robbins, *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
9. On the varieties of cosmopolitanism and their relationship to individualism, nationalism, Orientalism, and *Bildung*, see Todd Kontje, *German Orientalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 78–79, 83–132.
10. Robert Holton acknowledges the criticisms of a liberal cosmopolitanism with universal claims based on Eurocentric worldviews. However, he attempts to rescue universalism as a useful and important analytic category—first, by pointing out the ways in which the universal and the particular or local are deeply intertwined and second, by demonstrating the ways in which differing visions of universality could and did emerge outside the context of the West. See Robert John Holton, "Cosmopolitanism or Cosmopolitanisms? The Universal Races Congress of 1911," *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs* vol. 2, no. 2 (2002): 153–70.