



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR  
THIRD-SECTOR RESEARCH



## **"Contesting Citizenship and Civil Society in a Divided World"**

Ryerson University and York University, Toronto, Canada

July 11-14, 2004

*ISTR Sixth International Conference*

### **6th International Conference in Toronto**

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ISTR's 6th International Conference met its goal of providing a space for academics and practitioners from 52 countries to have stimulating intellectual exchanges in a congenial environment. Ryerson University proved to be an excellent meeting space with a lovely outdoor patio and courtyard. Approximately 415 participants explored this year's conference theme, "Contesting Citizenship and Civil Society in a Divided World," which followed the eleven conference theme tracks.

Our local host, Ryerson University, provided a great venue and a warm welcome at the opening night reception in the Quad. Perfect weather, a steel drum band, and delicious hors d'oeuvres and desserts made for a memorable evening. Other local universities providing support included York University, University of Toronto, Queen's University, and Carleton University. A second reception took place at Hart House at the University of Toronto, a beautiful space with an open air patio. A jazz quartet entertained many conference participants, who enjoyed the fabulous atmosphere and dancing. Comments about the receptions included "receptions are a great opportunity to meet people, and everyone was there!" and "receptions are an essential component of the conference and they were wonderful."

A new members reception was held on Sunday to provide an opportunity for the ISTR board of directors to welcome the Society's newest members. This reception was very well received and will become a regular event at all future conferences. A small reception was also held in appreciation for ISTR's ten year members. As long time supporters and dedicated members it was a pleasure to celebrate this milestone.

### **Professional Development Workshops**

The conference began with a series of well attended workshops that explored a range of topics. The session "Gender and Development" included presentations about community based women centers promoting small businesses for women (Japan), male organizational culture undermining affirmative action programs for women (Germany), the need for specifically adjusted gender models in different countries and world regions (India), the different meanings—and often the misuse—of 'empowerment' (Canada/India), and the emerging transnational female identity (USA/India).

The workshop "Social Economy and the Third Sector" enabled the participants to enhance their understanding of the debates regarding the interfaces between the concepts of social economy and third sector. A view was presented that, during the last 15 years, the international research on the third sector found in venues such as ISTR conferences and in the journal *Voluntas* has been marked by a "US legacy" rather than by a "European legacy." The key difference is that, in the European tradition, more than in the American perspective, the concept of third sector covers not only the activities of non-profit organizations such as charities, but also those of mutual and cooperative organizations that are identified as components of the social economy or solidarity-based economy in many European countries.

Other workshops included “Canada’s Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations,” “Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability,” “Giving and Volunteering,” and “Community Development: Dilemmas of Research and Practice.”

## **Plenary Sessions**

The conference plenary featured Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, an internationally renowned sociologist and advocate of democracy and human rights. The focus of his speech was Democratization and Islamic Reformation. Dr. Saad spoke about the cataclysmic events of 9/11 and their aftermath which have thrust Islam and Muslims into the world focus. He noted that, in the last ten years, Muslim militants killed thirty times more fellow Muslims than non-Muslims and that the wrath of Islamic zealots is more directed against other Muslims, whom they consider “corrupt” or “decadent.” He then posed a question about what are the roots of this madness and whether something can be done about it.

Dr. Saad began his research on Muslim militancy in 1975 and his fieldwork aspect of his research involved observing and interviewing Muslim militants outside and inside prison. As fate would have it, he frequented one particular prison, on three different occasions in three vastly different capacities: as a researcher in the 1970s, as a human rights investigator and defender in the 1980s, and finally as a prison inmate himself in the 2000–2003 period. He spoke of numerous militants and one in particular who, when asked, “What does it take to give up violence?” responded succinctly and to the point: “A decent opportunity for a dignified life.”

Dr. Saad’s efforts have focused on convincing Islamic militants to give up violence both inside and outside prison. He stressed the need for an enlightened version of Reformative Islam to be presented to both Muslims and non-Muslims if the world is to avert further calamities. He noted, that equally compelling is the future of some thirty million Muslims living in Western Europe, North America, and Australia, the vast majority of whom are naturalized citizens of these respective democracies. Among their civil rights is to learn the language, culture, and religion of their forefathers. Giving the conference participants much to contemplate, Dr. Saad posed the question, “Which version of Islam are they to learn?”

The conference’s second plenary focused on Third Sector Legitimacy and Accountability: Why and To Whom?—two concepts which have gained enormous political currency in recent years. The conversation got under way with two stimulating reflective presentations by Srilatha Batliwala and Simon Burall. Batliwala, a renowned Indian activist and researcher with significant experience in the international gender movement, located her presentation in an understanding of the global context defined by the dominance of a single economic paradigm, an inequitable financial and trade structure, US unilateralism, and the weakening of multilateralism. But she was also quick to note positive features in this new order which include, among others, an associational revolution, the presence of social justice movements, the emergence of a global communication system, and a set of democratic global values, all of which advance the struggle for legitimacy and accountability.

Batliwala’s essential thesis was that accountability can take multiple forms and can be directed to a diverse set of stakeholders, some of whom could make conflicting demands. She identified external stakeholders as donors, corporations, political movements and elected representatives, and internal stakeholders as poor and marginalised communities, far sighted NGO leaders, and civil society supporters like progressive academics who have an interest in strengthening lines of accountability. Batliwala’s presentation was very much aware of the power differentials that enable accountability to some stakeholders to take precedence over others, and she concluded her intervention with a list of conceptual challenges that need to be confronted in the debate on accountability. These include, among others, universalizing the discourse that has until now remained largely northern and corporate governed, excluding many actors, and is not cognizant and reflective of the diversity of contexts and third sectors.

Simon Burall’s presentation was in a very different vein. Executive Director of the One World Trust, he provided a reflective account of the Global Accountability Project of which he is involved. Distinguishing between different components of accountability through a discussion of transparency, participation, evaluation, complaints and redress, he analyses the state of accountability in the civil society sector. Concluding that the state of accountability in NGOs is better than in MNCs and IGOs, he nevertheless notes the weaknesses in the quality of this accountability. This, he

maintains, is reflected in the fact that very few national and international NGOs provide audited reports including financial statements, their governing resolutions are not easily available, and their evaluation procedures are often simply focused on donors to the exclusion of other stakeholders. Burall concludes by reflecting on the methodological problems involved.

Both presentations usefully complemented each other and provoked a deep, thoughtful and vibrant conversation from the floor. Of course, consensus on the issues was not realized. But, then, that was never the aim. After all, debate in the ISTR plenary is meant to provoke rather than resolve. And that is precisely what these presentations achieved.

The final plenary examined the Role of the Third Sector in Reconciliation. "This plenary session will be one of the most memorable," was how one ISTR veteran characterized the content and drama of the panel, after the two fire alarms and evacuations caused the session to conclude early. "The past will not release us," began Alan Cairns, an eminent Canadian constitutional scholar.

The ubiquitousness of the past is revealed in the attention that reparations, reconciliation, apologies and redress are receiving in government policy agendas. Why now? Cairns outlined the barbarism of the twentieth century: the genocides, surveillance culture, unprecedented numbers of victims and dead soldiers, the maltreated within societies and across borders. He disagreed with critics who decry the obsession with the past and instead presented it as an extremely positive development in history reflecting a change in human sensibility and morality that will prepare us for a better future. This need for retrospective accountability is a means of democratizing the past and offers a path towards healing and ultimately moving forward in a more humane way.

In her account of the struggles of South Africa, Yasmin Sooka, a human rights lawyer and member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, picked up on the theme that reconciliation is about the struggle for accountability. She recounted the risks that South Africa had taken in granting amnesty for those who had committed atrocities, inviting criticism from human rights groups, victims and civil activists. Sooka explained that reconciliation must bring together all members of society, victims and perpetrators both, in a dialogue of accountability if society is to heal and move forward. Amnesty was a costly price to pay, especially for victims who relinquished rights and civil claims, but it was necessary for each to recognize the humanity of the other and accept the blame and hurt together. The deep engagement between the state and civil society in the post-1994 period has resulted in institutional reform and laws and policies that are transforming society and creating the means for a fuller participation of all people than ever before. Reparations and reconciliation offer an acknowledgement of past wrongdoing and an opportunity for social justice but it must be realized that full political reconciliation and participation will take time.

Speaking on behalf of the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Canada, Chief of Staff Bob Watts joined Cairns and Sooka in calling for a balance between the past, present and future. Acknowledging that you "cannot walk backwards into the future," he defined statements of reconciliation as symbols of respect and mutual recognition that provided a basis for moving forward together. While he praised the federal government for its Statement of Reconciliation in 1994 and the creation of an Aboriginal Healing Foundation, he regretted the limited nature of the response. He argued that for healing to occur, Canada requires a process built on respect, consent, equality and inclusiveness.

Meenaz Kassam, of the University of Toronto, rounded out the panel with her account of the challenges facing the Dalits of India as they contest the caste system in India and press for full participation in society. The constitution of India in 1950 reflected a spirit of reconciliation, containing various provisions to deal with the inclusion of the Dalits in the political, economic and social institutions. However, while the constitution and subsequent pieces of legislation represent one step forward for the Dalits (or untouchables, as they were once known), they have travelled two steps back. Like Sooka, Kassam suggested that true reconciliation cannot take place without the full participation of previously victimized groups in political, economic and social life and noted that the Dalits were languishing in poverty. The third sector provides a beacon of hope by tending to the welfare of Dalits and leading international efforts for the end of discrimination based on caste.

The panel was sobering in its reflections on the past treatment of peoples within their own states and on the work yet to be done. But it was encouraging in its reflections on the promise of reconciliation in building a better future. The third sector is an important player in this pursuit of healing, transformation and social justice.

### **Paper, Panel and Poster Sessions**

The program included 68 paper and panel sessions. Papers were organized into sessions by theme and list of sessions by theme track was a new addition to the program. Thirty-four posters were displayed during the entire conference. A prize for the best poster was awarded for the first time based on quality of scholarship, visual presentation, contribution to knowledge, originality, and creativity. The conference abstracts can be found on the ISTR website and a CD Rom was distributed to all of the participants. Many of the papers presented in Toronto will be reviewed for Volume 4 of the *Conference Working Paper Series*.

### **Conference Evaluation**

The evaluations continue to provide the conference committee with needed feedback on all conference issues both academic and logistic. Attendees liked the way the program outlined the various 'tracks'—something we will continue in future programs. The ability to have on-site duplicating was also praised and we will do our best to have a duplication available in Bangkok.

Suggestion was also made to have more papers on-line.

Concern regarding abstracts that were submitted as papers, but were invited to present as posters will also be evaluated.

Many participants enjoyed the opportunity to hear from both north and south researchers and their comparative approaches. They found the high number of young scholars to be very inspiring.

To enable this group of scholars to attend, we must note the generous contribution by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Social Science Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Atlantic Philanthropies, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation and W.K. Kellogg Foundation which made possible scholarships to both postgraduate recipients and researchers from the developing world.

The Conference Academic committee will review the evaluations in depth to make sure that all of the issues are addressed to make Bangkok, July 2006, a rewarding experience. We thank our Toronto hosts for their extraordinary efforts and the wonderful community of colleagues celebrating this dynamic academic and social experience. ISTR now looks ahead to the 7th International conference where we hope again to have a "very interesting range of papers from a truly international range of contributors."