

# SECTION CULTURE



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## Editors:

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## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Photo: Terence E. McDonnell, University of Notre Dame

Research disrupted. That extra labor to hone that zoom pedagogy. An unthinkable job market. The stress of (surprise!) homeschooling your kids. The looming cloud of pestilence. Threats to our democracy. The ongoing crisis of racial injustice. And. And. And.

With all this going on, I expected to hear crickets when I asked for volunteers to serve on committees for the section. Instead I was *overwhelmed* by offers to help. When it would just be easier to hygge up, shut out the outside world, and watch *Tiger King* again, section members stepped up. When the section sought to start a mentorship program this summer, section members rose to the occasion. At a time when self-preservation is a reasonable response, you’ve responded with generosity of time and spirit. *Thank you.*

One of the pleasures as chair is seeing our members give their time to help our section thrive. I’m so appreciative of your selflessness because

everyone could use a little help right now. As a section and scholarly community, we face numerous challenges. How do we engage in conversation about ongoing research when ASA is online only? How can we support section members who face research or career disruptions due to COVID? How can the section amplify the excellent work of scholars of color and make the section more equitable and inclusive? As a section we adapt, endure, and rise to the moment through your commitment and energy.

I'd like to update you with some of the good work going on in the section.

This year we're breaking the Culture section out of the "meetings-only" model of interaction. With all that is going on in the world, we need to make visible how our research and expertise help us make sense of current events. Our new "Culture and Contemporary Life" series brings to the section membership expert panel discussions of issues of the day over Zoom. The committee is hard at work planning these events. Our first will be a post-election panel with section members Mabel Berezin, Corey Fields, and Bart Bonikowski, moderated by Ruth Braunstein. Be on the lookout in my announcements for details about our January panel on anti-Blackness and culture of poverty, and more throughout 2021. If you have suggestions for timely topics the committee might consider, please reach out to the Culture and Contemporary Life committee chair Hannah Wohl.

Last year's membership committee established a Culture Section Mentorship program. This program matched graduate students, post docs, and young faculty mentees with faculty mentors. I've had a wonderful experience working with my three mentees over the last few months. It offers an excellent opportunity to expand networks and conversations across the section, and allows for mentees to get frank career guidance beyond their own institutions. Speaking from my own experience mentoring, this program has been a wonderful way to connect with colleagues, especially as we all struggle with the disruptions COVID brings. We've had excellent

conversations about how to position your work, building a reputation without being pigeon-holed. We've also talked about managing workloads and research pipelines. From my conversations with other participants in the program, it has been an invaluable way to help young scholars learn about how to make it as cultural sociologists. Former section chair Jenn Lena had a great idea to pool this collected knowledge in the newsletter. We'll ask current participants to report on what they've learned in a "Cultivating a Culture of Mentorship" series. The editors welcome submissions for future issues. We plan to open the mentorship program up again this year--look for announcements about this in the future. Many thanks to our membership committees (past and current) for all their work.

Over the past year under Allison Pugh and council's leadership, the Culture Section has made a commitment to supporting and amplifying the contributions of our section's scholars of color. Following through on this commitment, we've established a Diversity and Inclusion committee (co-chaired by Ali R Chaudhary and Anya Degenshein, with Nino Bariola as the council liaison). They are leading a council's charge to help the section rethink the canon of culture. This committee is devising ways to maintain a bibliography to promote the work of Black and Brown scholars, and also creating a syllabus clearinghouse that can offer syllabi that model how to teach culture in more inclusive and representative ways. More on this initiative soon. In addition, I've tasked the publications committee with profiling the scholarship of graduate students of color in the section through the newsletter, website, and social media presence. If you'd like to have your work profiled, please send a note of interest to [asaculturenews@gmail.com](mailto:asaculturenews@gmail.com).

Now that ASA is online for 2021, council, reception, and membership committees will be hard at work devising ways to make our section activities as lively, engaging, and accessible as possible. I'm open to hearing suggestions for how to make a virtual ASA as useful as possible for our members, so please send me your ideas. Ann

Mische has organized a series of exciting panels for ASA 2021. As you start thinking about submitting papers for ASA (abstracts only, due Feb 3) here's a list of the panels with their organizers:

**Culture and Morality in Times of Crisis**  
(Aliza Luft)

**Cultures of Computation in Theory and Practice** (Anna Skarpelis and Marshall Taylor)

**New Perspectives in Sociology of Art and Music: BIPOC Artists and Creative Agency** (Patricia Banks and Fiona Greenland)

**Between Collapse and Utopia: Foresight, Imagination and Social Change** (Ann Mische)

Thanks to everyone who attended ASA 2020 "Zoom Edition." Amidst the jokes about pants-free conference presentations and the anxieties of overzealous kids zoom bombing, the culture section hosted a number of excellent panels. For those of you who couldn't make as many sessions as you would like, here are recordings of a few of these sessions:

[Culture and Technology after Inequality](#)

[Mind and Materiality](#)

[Articulations of Globalizing Knowledge Cultures in Sociology](#) (Co-Sponsored with Global and Transnational Sociology Section)

We also held our annual business meeting, where we discussed a number of section initiatives and the section bestowed the paper, book, and travel awards upon the winners. Here is a link if you want to watch the 2020 [business meeting](#).

In this issue we have a conversation with Alvaro Santana-Acuña on his new book *Ascent to Glory*, which explores the consecration of Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. We also have a book review of Shai Dromi's *Above the Fray*, an account of the origins of the Red Cross and the field of humanitarian NGOs. We highlight culture scholars on the job market with a series of profiles (HIRE THEM!) and also celebrate last year's Geertz, Douglas, and Peterson Prize winners. Thanks to the newsletter editorial team Yu Ching Cheng, Johnnie Anne Lotesta, AJ Young, and our media guru Bambang Trihadmojo for all their work putting the issue together. Thanks also to AJ for his service as he steps down from his post as co-editor.

Finally, I'd like to thank the tireless work and steady hands of outgoing chair Allison Pugh and COO Ruth Braunstein. The section has made great leaps forward under their leadership. They have done a tremendous job guiding the section and we all owe them a debt of gratitude. Thanks also to outgoing council members Patricia Banks and Ming-Cheng Lo, and all who served the section over the past year on various committees and initiatives.

And with that, I raise a glass to the Culture Section, and hope for an auspicious 2021!

## JOB MARKET PROFILES

### **Jun Fang**

**Northwestern University**

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**Email:** [junfang2015@u.northwestern.edu](mailto:junfang2015@u.northwestern.edu)

### **Dissertation Title:**

When China Meets Hollywood: Global Collaboration and State Intervention in a Creative Industry

As a sociologist of culture, markets, and globalization studying China's engagement with the West, Fang broadly addresses how the contrasting forces of nationalism and globalization shape processes of creative production. His dissertation is an ethnography of how Chinese conglomerates and Hollywood studios co-produce films and navigate state censorship. It argues that the intertwined relationship between culture, markets, and the state has led to a new model of global production of culture, shaping both what gets made in the global film industry and how they are made. Combining data from two-year ethnographic fieldwork within film studios in Beijing and Los Angeles and interviews with rarely accessed industry insiders, it offers a micro-sociological account of how global cultural production occurs at every stage within specific national contexts, set against a background of difficult geopolitics. His research has been published in *Poetics*, *Qualitative Sociology*, and *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, and has been supported by the Mellon Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies.

### **Prabhdeep Singh Kehal**

**Brown University**

**Website:** <https://www.pskehal.com/>

**Email:** [prabhdeep\\_kehal@brown.edu](mailto:prabhdeep_kehal@brown.edu)

### **Dissertation title:**

Racializing Meritocracy: Ideas of Excellence and Exclusion in Faculty Diversity

Prabhdeep is a Sociology PhD Candidate and a Graduate Fellow in Community Engaged Scholarship at Brown University, and will receive their degree in May 2021. Their work bridges the fields of culture, education, and Du Boisian sociology, situating inequality as linked to historic, global, and relational processes of domination. Using ethnographic and archival methodologies, with relevant quantitative methods, prabhdeep explores how academic workers, such as faculty and staff, make cultural meanings of merit, diversity, and racism when distributing resources within an elite organizational field. prabhdeep's dissertation is an institutional ethnographic study of how 88 faculty at four elite institutions define and use ideas of merit for faculty hiring and promotion. Their future research considers how universities are sites for maintaining structural racism and colonialism, with a focus on university-neighborhood relations (libraries, mutual aid, gentrification) and desegregating sociology.

**Marta Soligo**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**  
**Email:** [marta.soligo@unlv.edu](mailto:marta.soligo@unlv.edu)

**Dissertation title:**

From the Renaissance to Postmodernity: Representations of Italian Culture in Las Vegas

Marta Soligo is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), where she teaches Sociology of Leisure. Her areas of specialization are cultural studies, sociology of tourism, urban sociology, and environmental sociology. Soligo's most recent research interests center around two main topics: immigrant workers' labor in hospitality and sustainable tourism in cultural landscapes. A research assistant at the UNLV International Gaming Institute, she received her Master's in Planning and Management of Tourism Systems from the Università di Bergamo (Italy) in 2012, where she now (remotely) teaches Film Studies and Visual Communication. In 2013, she was a visiting scholar for the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), conducting a critical study on tourism phenomena related to the Hollywood industry. She has presented her works at several conferences by professional associations and international institutions, such as the American Sociological Association (ASA) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

**Luis Antonio Vila-Henninger**  
**University of Louvain (UCLouvain)**

**Website:** <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=jxO9GJcAAAAJ&hl=en>

**E-mail:** [luis.vila@uclouvain.be](mailto:luis.vila@uclouvain.be)

**Dissertation title:**

Social Justification and Political Legitimacy: How Voters Rationalize Direct Democratic Economic Policy in America

Luis' research focuses on socialization, political legitimacy, and the connection between the two. In particular, Luis studies political, economic, and cultural socialization—with an emphasis on American political values and neoliberal ideology. First, to understand socialization, he contributes to work on the “sociological dual-process model” from the sociology of culture by using findings from neuroscience. Second, drawing upon the Weberian conceptualization of legitimate power as power that is accepted on a normative basis, Luis investigates the norms and values upon which political legitimacy is based by studying voters' political legitimations and the factors that affect these legitimations. Specifically, he studies American political values, neoliberal ideology, and norms of self-interest. Third, Luis uses the sociological dual-process model to theorize how the norms and values that voters use in their political legitimations are learned through political, economic, and cultural socialization. Finally, Luis has expertise in both primary and secondary qualitative analysis.

**Kristopher Velasco**  
**University of Texas at Austin**  
**Website:** [krisvelasco.com](http://krisvelasco.com)  
**Email:** [krisvelasco@utexas.edu](mailto:krisvelasco@utexas.edu)

**Dissertation:**

My present dissertation project examines how the interaction between organizations and culture within the international arena determines LGBT policy adoption. Instead of focusing primarily on processes of conformity through the expansion of LGBT rights, however, my dissertation places a greater emphasis on defiance to normative pressures by understanding policy restrictions, or backlash. Since the 1990s, a new, understudied actor has risen in the international arena: transnational anti-LGBT networks anchored within organizations like World Congress of Families, Focus on the Family, the Vatican, and the Russian Orthodox Church. Therefore, I theorize that to understand how a country will respond to international pressure, we must consider how a country is simultaneously embedded within both pro- and anti-LGBT transnational networks as these actors will differ in how they frame calls for expanding LGBT rights. For example, using text analysis on an original dataset of over 200,000 newspaper articles from 161 countries and across multiple languages, I find that greater embeddedness within one network over the other, using network analysis, predicts how LGBT issues are presented to local populations (i.e., a positive call for equality and human rights or a negative threat to the “natural” family and national sovereignty). The resulting valence of discourse directly affects government policy responses and moderates the influence of international norms by changing the cultural meaning such norms carry to domestic audiences. My research has been published in *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *International Studies Quarterly*, among others. See [krisvelasco.com](http://krisvelasco.com) for more information.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Above the Fray: The Red Cross and the Making of the Humanitarian NGO Sector**  
**by Shai Dromi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020**

**Tad Skotnicki**  
**University of North Carolina at Greensboro**

In a world lousy with crises from the spectacular to the mundane, we often glimpse an immense infrastructure of humanitarian nongovernmental organizations seeking to relieve human suffering. But as Shai Dromi reveals in *Above the Fray* – an intricate sociological history of the Red Cross – the organization’s astounding success in the second half of the nineteenth century contains the secret to understanding crucial features of contemporary

humanitarianism. Any account of this contemporary humanitarian infrastructure, he argues, must reckon with a cultural logic grounded in the nineteenth-century Swiss Calvinist Réveil (“Awakening”). For it is out of this Réveil that the organizational principles characterizing permanent aid societies emerged – autonomy, impartiality, and neutrality – principles that continue to structure humanitarian work to this day (p. 5).

The Red Cross arose out of the wreckage of Solferino in 1859, a battle in the Second Italian War of Independence – just one of many violent clashes over nation, empire, and capital in the middle of the nineteenth century. But Henry Dunant, a businessman with a struggling enterprise in colonial Algeria, happened to witness firsthand the immediate aftermath of Solferino. Distressed, he organized local townspeople to provide succor to the many thousands of wounded and maimed soldiers. In 1862, Dunant published a memoir, which tied the senseless suffering and death at Solferino to the insufficiency of medical care for soldiers and a nascent human capacity for charity (p. 33). Yet while the memoir spurred the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1864, Dromi locates the distinct ideals that animated Dunant’s humanitarian project in a broader cultural context. After all, Dunant’s program – of permanent, independent aid societies – was not the only effort to address the horrors of war. Peace activists sought to render war unimaginable while others worried that permanent, independent charitable projects would disincentivize state and military reform efforts.

Several questions thus emerge. First: what gave Dunant’s proposal and the Red Cross its unique ideals and form? Dromi argues that the Calvinist Réveil, centered in nineteenth century Geneva, made possible the Red Cross proposals for a permanent, neutral, and independent humanitarian aid society. This revival promoted “adamant orthodoxy, a sharp critique of modernity...a strong drive for social activism and communal discipline, and a suspicious stance toward the state[.]” (p. 45) Dunant and other early Red Cross founders, Dromi shows, would have taken in such teachings as they attended lectures by Réveil theologians in 1840s Geneva and participated in evangelical relief organizations in the 1850s. Through careful readings of early publications and conference proceedings, Dromi traces the principles underlying the Red Cross back to the Réveil. The demand for an aid society independent of the state, for instance, resonated with the

attitude that the state was an impure, corrupted actor. But the Red Cross did not simply transcribe such principles from the Réveil, the project also grappled with the harsh realities of war in the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, Dunant and others arrived at a novel formulation – a permanent aid society that would remain aloof from these impure state actors.

Second: how did this novel formulation become an international phenomenon in the late nineteenth century? Dromi reveals that the Red Cross’s decentralized international structure played a decisive role in its global diffusion. The Red Cross encouraged a common organizational identity through international conferences, while simultaneously affirming distinct national initiatives. International leaders celebrated the “primarily national” character of Red Cross societies, each “born under the joint inspiration of charity and patriotism.” (p. 70) This allowed the Red Cross to tap into groundswells of nationalist sentiment toward the end of the nineteenth century. Humanitarian competition between national Red Cross societies from the United States and France to the Ottoman Empire and Japan – all seeking to embody Red Cross principles – actually increased their global prestige. These principles received further ballast as churches, nurses, journalists, and international lawyers recognized and shared them. By the close of the nineteenth century, Red Cross principles and practices anchored an emergent “humanitarian field.” (p. 115)

Third: how did the Red Cross’s role change across the twentieth century? Dromi makes a compelling case that, in spite of a “turbulent” century, the humanitarian logic originating with the Red Cross continues to define the humanitarian field (p. 117). After questionable efforts to sustain impartiality during the Second World War and the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960s, “new humanitarians” insisted that aid workers should publicize suffering, not merely treat it. While a direct challenge the Red Cross’s avowed approach to humanitarian aid, Dromi illustrates that this new humanitarianism

shares with it “an underlying belief in the virtues of independence, neutrality, and impartiality” (p. 131) – the very terms established by the Red Cross over a century earlier.

It is a testament to the book’s thoughtful construction that even subtle ambiguities invite serious analysis. Take the question of the Red Cross’s cultural novelty and its dissemination. Dromi claims that this “new institutional arrangement caused new actors to emerge and to lay claim to the humanitarian ‘capital’ that the Red Cross espoused.” (p. 60, italics added) How should we understand such a claim? After all, Dromi acknowledges the significance of empire-building around the world and modern state formation (pp. 82-85) to global humanitarianism. Does the precise novelty of Red Cross principles necessarily account for their diffusion? Or should we understand cause, in this instance, as referring only to the particular actors and responses that these novel humanitarian principles made possible? But

even so, could one not suggest, just as plausibly, that the emergence of modern nation-states made possible grassroots social activism that sought to create permanent, independent, national aid societies? To be clear, the question is not whether the modern nation-state is or is not cultural. Rather, the question is, how should we ground and demonstrate claims like Dromi’s about the causal role that culture plays in social life? Above the Fray offers an indispensable contribution to such inquiries, as well as to our understanding of a world that still stumbles along in the shadow of the Red Cross.

“Purchase *Above the Fray: The Red Cross and the Making of the Humanitarian NGO Sector* at the [University of Chicago Press](#)”. **30% off** with discount code **ASA30** (valid through **June 30, 2021**)

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## AWARD SUMMARIES

### **Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book**

#### **Committee members:**

Gabriel Abend (Chair), Fabien Accominotti, Karida Brown, Meredith Hall, Gemma Mangione, Amy Singer, Michael Vaughn

#### **Co-winners:**

#### **The New Noir: Race, Identity, and Diaspora in Black Suburbia by Orly Clergé**

The New Noir is an excellently researched and exquisitely rendered work. Coupling detailed socio-historical analysis and ethnographic study of black diasporic suburbs of New York City, Orly Clergé challenges the idea that black

culture is an internally homogeneous entity. She does so by examining the largest black groups, Black Americans, Jamaicans, and Haitians, and introducing a “racial consciousness spectrum”—“a paradigm of how the Black diaspora comes to understand, negotiate, and challenge constructions of Blackness across time and space.”

The New Noir brings the sociology of culture into fruitful conversations with the sociology of race, class, and gender, as well as with research on migration and diaspora. It shows how suburban, middle-class residents make sense of their diasporic past, and how they engage

socially and politically with a larger sense of black culture and identity.

Clergé has a strong, passionate writing voice, which captivates the reader and draws them into the narrative. The book is both a scholarly powerhouse and a joy to read.

### **Values at the End of Life: The Logic of Palliative Care by Roi Livne**

Weaving together historical, interview, and ethnographic data, *Values at the End of Life* shows how a “new economy of dying” emerged as a result of diverse attempts to respond to the cultural and moral question of what constitutes a good death. Roi Livne offers an analytically robust, yet deeply humane, portrait of people’s articulations of their moral intuitions about dying. The institutionalization of palliative care introduced a new “subject of death,” who’s considered an author of their own lives, capable of exercising some control over their destiny.

Livne’s skilled ethnographic voice reveals, at times in heart-wrenching detail, how the idea of a good death is far from universal. The view that “less is better” is more common among more privileged people. But it’s often not shared by socially marginalized people, whose experience with healthcare might be characterized by shortage and difficult access.

Throughout, Livne’s accounts are insightful and his arguments are compelling. He makes good use of the idea of economization, which enables him to explore how actors have differently conceived the management of resources going to end-of-life care. That is, their different conceptions of the “economy” of end-of-life care, in the original sense of the word.

## **Clifford Geertz Prize for Best Article**

### **Committee members:**

Mariana Craciun (Chair), Susan Dumais, Nicolette Manglos-Weber, Greggor Mattson, Cassidy Puckett, Hajar Yazdiha

### **Winner:**

### **“Public Ideas: Their Varieties and Careers” by Tim Hallett, Orla Stapleton, and Michael Sauder**

The article addresses important and timely questions with innovative methods and data, and a compelling theoretical and analytical scaffolding. The authors make a case for, as they put it, a “sociology of public social science” in which social science ideas are treated as cultural objects whose public impact is worthy of study. Sociologists have long been interested in entanglements between social scientific knowledge and nation-building, policy making, and the construction of modern selves, as we see, for example, in the work of Marion Fourcade, Nikolas Rose, and George Steinmetz.

Yet we knew less about the particular mechanisms by which social scientific ideas enter and shape the public sphere. Hallett, Stapleton, and Sauder move us in this direction. They examine the public lives of seven social science ideas as they were lived in twelve high-circulation and geographically diverse U.S. newspapers. They look, for example, at how concepts such as Hochschild’s “second shift,” Schor’s “overworked American,” Glassner’s “culture of fear,” or Putnam’s “bowling alone,” entered the public arena either by, as the authors put it, being the news themselves or by helping make sense of the news. The authors propose the concept of “applicative flexibility” to signal the ways in which ideas can be used to understand new events or phenomena without losing their original meaning.

The article’s nuanced analysis and clear writing will ensure its own broader and enduring appeal. The Geertz award committee as well as the article’s nominators believe strongly in its

ability to shape ongoing conversations about the public relevance of sociological research.

### **Richard A. Peterson Award for Best Student Paper**

#### **Committee members:**

Michaela DeSoucey, Jacqui Frost, Isabel Jijon, Ming-Cheng Lo (Chair), Rachel Rinaldo

#### **Winner:**

**“The Passion Paradigm: Professional Adherence to and Consequences of the Ideology of ‘Do What You Love” by Lindsay J. DePalma**

With its lucid prose, rigorous conceptualization, and thoughtful research design, this paper skillfully argues that the “passion paradigm,” namely, the pursuit of enthusiasm for work, not only constitutes the dominant discourse of work ethic for professionals in the new economy but functions as a mechanism of social control. Drawing on a rich set of interviews that compare precarious and less precarious workers from the fields of engineering, nursing, and graphic design, DePalma demonstrates overwhelming adherence across groups to the passion paradigm, with its individualist ethos

servicing to obstruct systemic critiques and draw attention away from the increasingly precarious conditions of many professionals. This timely and well-executed paper showcases how cultural approaches help generate important insights for studies of professional work, the new economy, and the sociology of emotions.

#### **Honorable Mention:**

**“Pathways of Global Cultural Diffusion: Media and Attitudes about Violence against Women” by Jeffrey Swindle**

This intriguing paper studies first, how transnational NGOs and foreign media organizations produce different cultural scripts on violence against women, and second, how these scripts then reach and influence the beliefs of local audiences in Malawi. The article is well-written, well-argued, and methodologically impressive. Swindle leverages extensive surveys, interviews, newspaper data, and “shocks” to the system that work as natural experiments, making for a fascinating case study. This paper will undoubtedly contribute to cultural sociology, media sociology, and research on global cultural diffusion. It also points to an exciting “global turn” in cultural sociology more broadly.

# AWARD NOMINATION CALLS FOR 2021

## The Sociology of Culture Section's Mary Douglas Prize for Best Book

Book authors may nominate a book published in calendar year 2020. Authors must be section members to be eligible. Each member of the committee requires:

1. a copy of the book, with e-books/digital copies strongly preferred (see book distribution details below)
2. a two paragraphs-long self-nomination letter written by the author providing a synopsis and outlining the book's contributions to the sociology of culture/cultural sociology.

The deadline is March 15, 2021. To be considered, all the committee members must receive self-nomination and the books must arrive by this deadline. Please direct any inquiries to committee chair Larissa Bucholz at the email address below.

- Larissa Bucholz (Chair - [larissa.buchholz@northwestern.edu](mailto:larissa.buchholz@northwestern.edu))
- Orly Clerge ([oclerge@ucdavis.edu](mailto:oclerge@ucdavis.edu))
- Julia Sonnevend ([jsonnevend@newschool.edu](mailto:jsonnevend@newschool.edu))
- Roi Livne ([rlivne@umich.edu](mailto:rlivne@umich.edu))
- Derron Wallace ([dwallace@brandeis.edu](mailto:dwallace@brandeis.edu))
- Christina Simko ([cs9@williams.edu](mailto:cs9@williams.edu))

### Book distribution instructions

**E-BOOK/DIGITAL COPY:** please email a link to an e-book version of your book, or send a digital copy as an attachment, to each of the committee members at the addresses above.

**HARDCOPY:** If an e-book is unavailable, please submit six hardcopies of your book to Terence McDonnell at this address:

**Terence McDonnell**  
Department of Sociology  
University of Notre Dame  
4060 Jenkins Nanovic Hall  
Notre Dame, IN 46556

## The Sociology of Culture Section's Clifford Geertz Prize for Best Article

Section members may nominate articles and original chapters of edited collections published in calendar years 2019-2020. Self-nominations are preferred. Authors must be members of the Culture Section. Please send the following to all members of the prize committee: 1) a very brief nominating email, including a paragraph long description of the article and its significance to culture, and 2) an electronic copy of the manuscript. Articles that are not accompanied by a nomination letter will not be considered for the prize. The deadline for receipt of nominations and articles is March 15, 2021. Please direct any inquiries to committee chair Omar Lizardo at the email address below.

- Omar Lizardo (Chair - [olizardo@soc.ucla.edu](mailto:olizardo@soc.ucla.edu))
- Tim Hallett ([hallett9@indiana.edu](mailto:hallett9@indiana.edu))
- Xiaohong Xu ([socxu@umich.edu](mailto:socxu@umich.edu))
- Andrea Voyer ([andrea.voyer@sociology.su.se](mailto:andrea.voyer@sociology.su.se))
- Yongren Shi ([yongren-shi@uiowa.edu](mailto:yongren-shi@uiowa.edu))
- Beth Gharrity Gardner ([gardnerb@hu-berlin.de](mailto:gardnerb@hu-berlin.de))

## The Sociology of Culture Section's Richard A. Peterson Award for Best Student Paper

Section members may nominate any work (published or unpublished), written by someone who is a student at the time of submission. Self-nominations are welcome. Authors must be members of the Culture Section. The award recipient will receive a \$500 prize to reimburse part of the cost of attending the 2020 ASA Annual Meeting. Any paper that receives an honorable mention will be awarded \$100. Email an electronic copy of the paper to each member

of the award committee. The Deadline for receipt of nominations and articles is March 15, 2021. Please direct any inquiries to committee chair Carly Knight at the email address below.

- Carly Knight (Chair - [carly.knight@nyu.edu](mailto:carly.knight@nyu.edu))
- Rachel Skaggs ([skaggs.131@osu.edu](mailto:skaggs.131@osu.edu))
- Marshall Taylor ([mtaylor2@nmsu.edu](mailto:mtaylor2@nmsu.edu))
- Jeff Swindle ([jswindle@umich.edu](mailto:jswindle@umich.edu))
- Erin Johnston ([erin.johnston1@duke.edu](mailto:erin.johnston1@duke.edu))
- Jaleh Jalili ([jaleh.jalili@rice.edu](mailto:jaleh.jalili@rice.edu))

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## CULTURE SECTION OFFICERS

Chair: **Terence Emmett McDonnell**, University of Notre Dame 2021

Past Chair: **Allison Pugh**, University of Virginia 2021

Chair-Elect: **Ann Mische**, Univ. of Notre Dame 2021

Chief Operating Officer: **Clayton Childress**, University of Toronto 2023

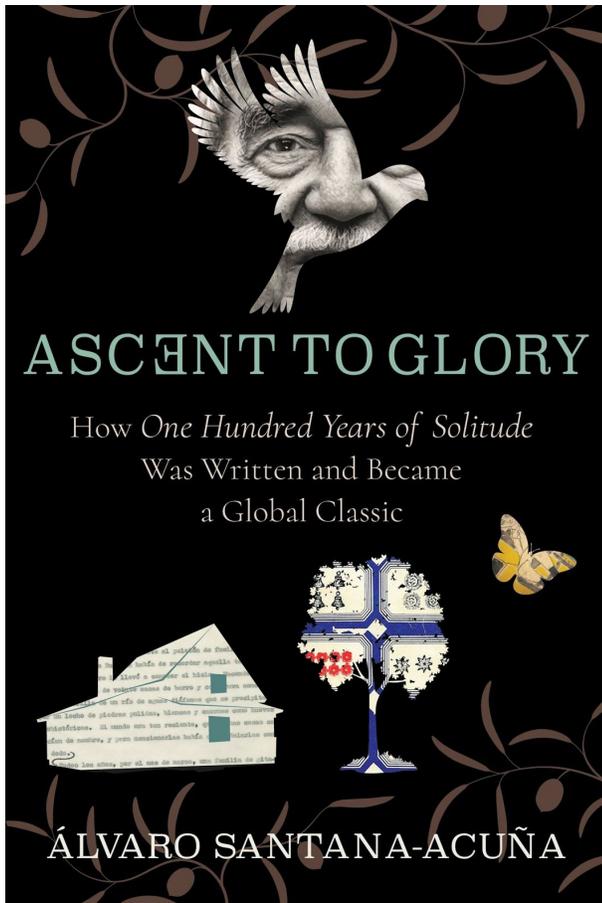
Student Representative: **Samantha Leonard**, Brandeis University 2021

Student Representative: **Nino Bariola**, The University of Texas at Austin 2022

# "A DIALOGUE ON ASCENT TO GLORY, IMAGINATION, AND GLOBAL CONSECRATION"

## Jun Fang and Alvaro Santana-Acuña

Jun Fang (Northwestern University) interviews Alvaro Santana-Acuña (Whitman College) on *Ascent to Glory: How One Hundred Years of Solitude Was Written and Became a Global Classic* (Columbia University Press, 2020).



**Jun Fang: Congratulations! How does it feel to publish your book during a pandemic?**

**Alvaro Santana-Acuña:** Thank you. Publishing a book in the middle of a global pandemic is truly an unforgettable experience. I am happy it is out after eleven years of research. In a nutshell, *Ascent to Glory* is an in-depth analysis of the making and consecration of one of the most influential cultural goods of the last fifty years, Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*OHYS*). Its influence has further expanded lately. When Covid-19 started spreading, I revised the manuscript to explain that readers around the world

were reading the novel as if it were a book of prophecies about pandemics. I later wrote an Op-Ed for the [New York Times](#) on the surge of interest in this novel during the pandemic.

**JF: Who are the primary audiences of *Ascent to Glory*?**

**ASA:** *Ascent* is written for academic and non-academic readers. Keeping that balance was challenging and time-consuming. But both audiences seem to be enjoying it so far and coming up with their own ways of reading it. For cultural sociologists, *OHYS* is a superb case to interrogate major questions such as value and cultural brokerage. This case also contributes to key issues in the fields of literary studies and the history of the book.

**JF: Could you elaborate on *Ascent's* theoretical intervention, especially its engagement with Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu? How does your concept of "networked creativity" contribute to the existing literature on the collaborative nature of creative production?**

**ASA:** *Ascent* builds mainly on the production of culture approach, art worlds, and field theory. It aligns with Becker's art worlds by emphasizing the role of collaboration, especially in the earliest stages of making an artwork. Yet *Ascent* introduces the concept of "networked creativity" to analyze something that is unclear in Becker's approach: how do professional conventions travel across art worlds, especially in a transnational setting? To answer this question, I use insights from the production of culture and field approaches to theorize the role of collaborators in the stages of imagination and production (especially collaborators

outside tightly knit collaborative circles) and of cultural brokers in the stage of circulation.

**JF: I am surprised by your emphasis on “imagination,” since cultural sociologists often focus on the stages of production and circulation. What is the sociological significance of studying cultural imagination?**

**ASA:** In his *Questions de sociologie*, Bourdieu made a point that struck me the first time I read it. He criticized “the received idea” that sociology could only “give an account of cultural consumption but not of production.” His book on Gustave Flaubert’s classic novel *Sentimental Education*, which compellingly studies consumption and production, proved that sociology is indeed fully equipped to explain both stages and how they overlap. Scores of research have proved this point ever since. Clayton Childress’s *Under the Cover* is a recent, brilliant example.

In *Ascent*, I seek to criticize another received idea that still lingers, namely, sociology cannot give an account of cultural imagination. What I mean by this is that when artists are thinking about potential projects, they do not do so in the void or solitude. As *Ascent* shows, imagination takes the form of traceable rules, values, ideas, experiences, people, organizations, and objects that furnish an artist’s creativity before s/he undertakes the production of the work. For this reason, imagination is not located only in the creator’s mind. Collaborators play an important creative role. They help the creator imagine the work and push it into the stage of production. This is why I argue that imagination is the first (and understudied) “gatekeeper” and that cultural production starts once social filters in place in the stage of imagination are overcome.

**JF: Your account of imagination draws our attention to the creative stage before production, which is challenging to study sociologically. But I like that your conceptualization foregrounds the role of collaborators – both inside and outside the proximate collaborative circles – in the early stage of creativity. How do you analyze cultural imagination with historical and literary data?**

**ASA:** In the case of *OHYS*, to flesh out the stage of imagination, I had to understand García Márquez’s professionalization and worldview as much as the

ones of those who accompanied him in his journey to write the novel. Tracing this trajectory was difficult because he was working on that novel for fifteen years in seven countries and the experiences that nurture the story go back to his childhood. Thus, one third of *Ascent* maps out and analyzes the norms, values, beliefs, emotions, people, organizations, and objects that shaped the world in which García Márquez could imagine a novel such as *OHYS*. I found that neither his imagination nor his story for the novel were unique. Around 1950, author Jorge Luis Borges was writing a short story about a family saga that shared structural similarities with *OHYS*. Borges and García Márquez never met. Borges neither finished nor talked about that short story in public. But García Márquez read other fiction by Borges, who was among the authors, like Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, James Joyce, and Franz Kafka, whose professional writing structured the imagination of the budding writer García Márquez at the time he started thinking about a story that evolved into *OHYS*. Inspiration and imitation are key strategies of action in the stage of imagination.

**JF: I wonder why you chose the specific word of “imagination” in this case, a word that some may see as “not sociological enough.” Many cultural sociologists use “creation” to refer to developing and evaluating ideas; in my research, I interchangeably use “development” to describe the collective creation of film scripts among creatives. What were your considerations?**

**ASA:** I think imagination is completely sociological. In many introductory sociology courses around the world, one of the lessons students first learn is that sociology and imagination are related. I am referring here to Charles Wright Mills’ classic idea of the sociological imagination. Furthermore, we humans are imaginative creatures. And I take the act of imagining something as a form of social action. Émile Durkheim’s “collective representations” or Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard’s “social imaginaries” also remind us that imagining is at its core a collective social process.

For me, the word “creation” is too close to “production” and, hence, “creation” does not convey the sense of a different creative stage with its own social dynamics such as imagination. I considered

the word “inception,” but it implies a specific point in time, an origin. We know that creativity is not an event; it is a process punctuated by crystallization peaks aka eureka moments. No single point in the imagination of *OHYS* was an inception; unless we understand his fifteen-year-long imagining of the novel as a single moment. I needed a more processual concept and thus I chose imagination. Its relevance is not confined to art making. We, scholars, have projects in the stage of imagination (“in the pipeline”) for years. Sometimes these projects die. Sometimes they come back to us: when we take a shower, browse a new publication, run into “collaborators” at conferences... And we do these and more things without sometimes having written a single word about that project. These social dynamics that shape a project before it is put on paper belong to the stage of social making that I call imagination. What I try to show in *Ascent* is how and why a project moves from the tray of imagination to the tray of production, from an “interesting idea” into something worth writing and publishing. Like artists, scholars are not just producers and consumers, but also are *imagineros* (this Spanish word would translate into English as *imagers*). The truth is that many a paper does not get passed the stage of imagination; as we all know that happens to a paper in the stage of production (many of them never get published after several rounds of peer-reviewed rejections) and the stage of circulation (many published papers die the unpleasant death of no citations).

**FJ: I am overwhelmed by your rich data and all those primary sources you present in *Ascent*. What are the pros and cons of this strategy?**

**ASA:** As commonly said, the devil is in the detail. Since *Ascent* talks to audiences beyond sociology, I wanted to make sure that the empirical demonstration relied heavily on primary sources, rather than secondary ones. This was a time-consuming strategy for I had to spend months in the archives of García Márquez doing lots of fact-checking. But this strategy was also important to understand the making and consecration of *OHYS*. A key finding in *Ascent* is that works become classics because legends and myths end up surrounding them. In other words, it is very hard to think of a classic that is not connected to a myth or legend of some sort. By now, many legends are used

to explain the making and consecration of *OHYS*. And, of course, if one of the goals of my book is to understand how such legends help to create the novel’s classic status, relying on legendary facts that are common in secondary sources would have been a serious methodological mistake. On page one, *Ascent* opens by giving the impression of making this mistake and then turns the story upside down.

**JF: Cultural sociologists have been criticized for not paying enough attention to the content of art in their analyses. I am glad that your examination of global consecration incorporates the content, which is especially salient in Chapter 7 on indexing a classic. It reminds me of the works of Wendy Griswold, and I think you even take a step further to bring content and cultural brokers together.**

**ASA:** Yes, Griswold’s “The Fabrication of Meaning” is a classic example of how sociologists can and need to engage with the content of works effectively. *Ascent*’s theoretical and empirical contribution is to redefine the concept of “indexical,” by which I mean small units of significance, such as the one mentioned above (“the devil is in the detail”), that different kinds of people are familiar with, use, or come across in all sorts of situations (conversations on public transportation, social media... at bars, airports...). I first theorized what indexicals do for classics in an award-winning article in the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*. In “How a Literary Work Becomes a Classic,” I showed that classics have the unusual capacity of creating indexicals (e.g., *Hamlet*’s omnipresent “To be or not to be”). I also found that indexicals associated with classics create social patterns. In *Ascent*, I gathered data in forty-five languages encompassing more than fifty years and ninety countries to show how different parts of the novel (sentences, events, characters, locations...) have become indexicals that have helped to create its classic status globally. Fortunately, this analysis in *Ascent*, which connects readers to a text, has been well received by readers who are suspicious of sociologists: literary critics and fiction writers.

**JF: Your analysis of censorship goes beyond the traditional understanding of censors as simply ideological watchdogs. It echoes my findings on the role of Chinese censors in China-Hollywood**

**co-productions: they are cultural gatekeepers who shape aesthetics.**

**ASA:** Indeed, censors are ideological watchdogs that police artworks, looking for cases of insubordinate politics, pornography, and dubious morality. Their role on this front is well known and studied. Less known is that censors can also act as “aesthetic tastemakers.” In publishing, this role is typical of peer writers, agents, and publishers. In *Ascent*, I show that censors dealing with manuscripts of Latin American novels in the 1960s became *sui generis* collaborators in the creation of literary works. For example, writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante submitted the manuscript of his novel *Three Trapped Tigers* four times to censors in Spain. Later, he acknowledged that their feedback helped him improve the text. The practice of resubmitting the manuscript to reviewers is common among book editors and publishers. But it is unheard of among censors. And yet in the 1960s in Spain, this practice had a major effect on the commercial success of Latin American literature, because this country was the largest producer and consumer of Spanish-language books and the largest exporter of such books to Latin America. These censors not only policed morality and politics, but also shaped the aesthetics of what consumers read. Spain’s case is not unique. Censors were active in most developed countries until the 1950s, including the United States, United Kingdom, and France, or today in China, as you show in your research. So, censors’ role in promoting cultural products that become commercial hits and even classics deserves further sociological research.

**FJ: I must admit that I have never finished reading *OHYS*. But as you suggest, people still can talk about classics even without having read them. How does it contribute to consecration?**

**ASA:** Well, I must admit that social experiences such as yours inspired me to write *Ascent*. Broadly speaking, social theories tend to highlight that the action that matters, the one that has long-term structural effects, is performed by actors fully embedded in a specific social situation. In the case of literature, we have superb theories to explain how the opinion of critics and scholars help consecrate artworks. But I also came across examples of many people who readily admitted that a cultural product has high value without firsthand knowledge of it and, in so doing, their opinions help with the artwork’s consecration as classic, too. Thus, in *Ascent* I argue that non-reading (and more generally non-action) is an underappreciated type of social action. In my analysis, I vindicate the role in consecration of what I call non-readers, that is, people who have not read or seen the artwork, say *Don Quixote* or *The Mona Lisa*, and yet can agree that it is a classic and even engage in a meaningful conversation about it. As I was studying this social practice, I realized that we all are non-readers (or non-actors) of sorts, and our non-actions belong to that “surface of agreement,” to use Erving Goffman’s terms, that keeps the rhythm of social life going and ultimately ensures the reproduction of social orders.

**Concluding remark:** There are other themes we do not have space to get into. *Ascent* touches on the differences between the canonical and the classic, the concepts of niche and disembedding, the distinction between meaning and “meaningfulness,” or the role of cultural counterfactuals. We hope this dialogue gets readers (and non-readers) interested in what *Ascent* has to offer to cultural sociologists.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## NEW ARTICLES

Cheng, Julia. Forthcoming. "How Long-Distance Nationalism Shapes 'Us' Preferences of First-Generation Taiwanese Americans." *Current Sociology*

Fang, Jun, and Gary Alan Fine. 2020. "[Names and Selves: Transnational Identities and Self-Presentation among Elite Chinese International Students.](#)" *Qualitative Sociology*.

Menchik, Daniel. 2020. "Authority Beyond Institutions: The Expert's Multivocal Process of Gaining and Sustaining Authoritativeness." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-020-00100-3>

Lo, M.M. and Hsieh, H. 2020. The "Societalization" of pandemic unpreparedness: lessons from Taiwan's COVID response. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-020-00113-y>

Sauder, Michael E. 2020. "A Sociology of Luck." *Sociological Theory*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275120941178>

## NEW BOOKS

Penny Edgell and Grace Yukich. 2020. *Religion is Raced: Understanding American Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. NYU Press.

Mueller, Jason C., John McCollum, and Steven Schmidt. 2020. "COVID-19, the Vanishing Mediator, and Postcapitalist Possibilities." Pp. 181-192 in *Pandemic and the Crisis of Capitalism: A Rethinking Marxism Dossier*. The Editorial Collective of Rethinking Marxism (Eds.). Brighton, MA: ReMarx Books. Chapter accessible at:  
[http://www.rethinkingmarxism.org/Dossier2020/19\\_MuellerCollumSchmidt.pdf](http://www.rethinkingmarxism.org/Dossier2020/19_MuellerCollumSchmidt.pdf)

Oberlin, Kathleen. 2020. *Creating the Creation Museum*. NYU Press.

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

2021 Junior Theorists Symposium  
Held over Zoom on August 6th (additional dates TBD)

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: Friday, February 19, 2021

We invite submissions of précis for the 15<sup>th</sup> Junior Theorists Symposium ([JTS](#)). The symposium will be held over Zoom on August 6th (additional dates TBD) prior to the 2021 ASA Virtual Annual Meeting. The JTS is a conference featuring the work of up-and-coming sociologists, sponsored in part by the Theory Section of the ASA. Since 2005, the conference has brought together early career sociologists who engage in theoretical work, broadly defined.

It is our honor to announce that Jean Beaman (University of California, Santa Barbara), Gil Eyal (Columbia University), and Frederick Wherry (Princeton University) will serve as discussants for this year's symposium. Kyle Green (SUNY Brockport) and Daniel Winchester (Purdue), winners of the 2019 Junior Theorist Award, and Neil Gong (University of Michigan and University of California, San Diego), winner of the 2020 Junior Theorist Award will deliver keynote addresses. Finally, the symposium will include an after-panel titled "Theorizing for Troubled Times," with panelists Javier Auyero (University of Texas, Austin), Jennifer Carlson (University of Arizona), Harvey Molotch (New York University), Christina Simko (Williams), and Howard Winant (University of California, Santa Barbara).

We invite all ABD graduate students, recent PhDs, postdocs, and assistant professors who received their PhDs from 2017 onwards to submit up to a three-page précis (800-1000 words). The précis should include the key theoretical contribution of the paper and a general outline of the argument. Successful précis from last year's symposium can be viewed [here](#). Please note that the précis must be for a paper that is *not* under review or forthcoming at a journal.

As in previous years, there is no pre-specified theme for the conference. Papers will be grouped into sessions based on emergent themes and discussants' areas of interest and expertise. We invite submissions from all substantive areas of sociology, we especially encourage papers that are works-in-progress and would benefit from the discussions at JTS.

Please remove all identifying information from your précis and submit it via [this Google form](#). Sarah Brothers (Yale) and Laura Halcomb (University of California, Santa Barbara) will review the anonymized submissions. You can also contact them at [juniortheorists@gmail.com](mailto:juniortheorists@gmail.com) with any questions. The deadline is Friday, February 19th. By mid-March, we will extend up to 12 invitations to present at JTS 2021. Please plan to share a full paper by July 6, 2021. Presenters will be asked to attend the symposium in its entirety in order to hear fellow scholars' work. Please plan accordingly.

# CULTURE SECTION COUNCIL

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## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: CULTURE SECTION NEWSLETTER

Calling all members! The editors of the Culture Section Newsletter invite you to submit content for inclusion in future issues. We especially welcome proposals for essays, articles, forums, and book reviews. Proposals for newsletter content may be submitted at any time, and we are happy to talk with you about your ideas! Please email your contributions and thoughts to [asaculturenews@gmail.com](mailto:asaculturenews@gmail.com). We look forward to hearing from you!

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