



The Forum: Celebrating the Work of Sebastião Salgado: A Sociological Lens on Salgado's Documentary Photography

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Sebastião Salgado, the internationally renowned Brazilian photojournalist, is the 2010 recipient of the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Award for Excellence in the Reporting of Social Issues. This award honors individuals for their promotion of sociological knowledge and a broader vision of sociology. Each year since 2007, the ASA has recognized the contributions of journalists, filmmakers, and other professionals who have been especially effective in disseminating sociological perspectives and research. Salgado is the fourth distinguished recipient of the award, and was preceded by Malcolm Gladwell, Michael Apted, and Barbara Ehrenreich.

Salgado is recognized for his exquisite photographic works that delve into social issues including inequality, development, urbanization, labor, migration, and globalization (Singer, 2010). The award committee, chaired by Deborah Carr (Rutgers University) and Abigail Saguy (University of California–Los Angeles), praised Salgado's body of work, which spans nearly three decades, and noted strong parallels to the discipline of sociology. In *Workers: An Archaeology of the Industrial Age* (1993), Salgado documented manual labor in 26 countries, and in *Migrations* (2000) he took on the topic of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons in 40 countries. Salgado's current project, *Genesis*, an eight-year project that is now more than half completed, focuses on remote areas that have been untouched by human development. Rather than document the effects of environmental threats such as pollution or global warming directly, he is photographing natural subjects that he believes have somehow "escaped or recovered from" such changes. *Genesis* features images of landscapes, seascapes, animals, and indigenous tribes that represent an earlier, more "pristine" state of nature (Singer, 2010).

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To celebrate Salgado's work and introduce his distinguished contributions to the sociological community, the ASA held a special symposium entitled "Celebrating the Work of Sebastião Salgado: A Sociological Lens on Salgado's Documentary Photography" at its 2010 annual meeting. The panel brought together five eminent scholars working in areas of sociology that are germane to Salgado's work; the papers presented at the symposium are featured in this special section of *Sociological Forum*. Steven J. Gold (2011) of Michigan State University provides a thoughtful history of visual sociology, and describes how Salgado's work exemplifies this tradition. Tamara Kay (2011) of Harvard University analyzes the complex relationship between documentarians and sociologists, and conveys how documentarians like Salgado may inform public opinion and support political and social movements.

Thomas K. Rudel (2011) of Rutgers University offers an in-depth analysis of Salgado's *Genesis* project, and reveals its importance both to environmental sociology and to social praxis. Saskia Sassen (2011) of Columbia University explores the particular ways Salgado's photography produces knowledge beyond the actual visual content in his photographs. Wendy Wolford (2011) of Cornell University offers a fascinating personal account of her experiences in Brazil working with the Movement of Rural Landless Workers, and describes the ways that Salgado's work "made a difference" for the movement's goals. Taken together, these sophisticated and thought-provoking papers raise important questions about the complex interplay between sociology and documentary, between research and practice, and between scholarship and activism. Salgado's work—especially for those who are not yet acquainted with his photography—becomes all the more compelling and profound when interpreted and reinterpreted by members of this distinguished panel.

REFERENCES

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