



Reaching Across Borders

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Historically, labour movements have built alliances across borders. As corporations and organizations rapidly go global, there is a new and increasing urgency for these union movements to forge new bonds and form global unions.

"In this global economy, what role do unions play and what role can unions play in regulating an economy that discards the needs of workers?" asks Luis L.M. Aguiar, Associate Professor of Sociology. For most of his research career, Aguiar's research has been centred on labour, building cleaners and the intensification of work. Recently, Aguiar's labour research has expanded to include looking at the organization of cleaners, particularly into unions, to improve their working conditions.

Co-Editor of the book *The Dirty Work of Neoliberalism: Cleaners in the Global Economy*, Aguiar considers the impacts of legislative change on workers. "All workers are affected by these changes, but I think the vulnerable are much more deeply affected when regressive changes are made," he says.

Aguiar has undergone a global movement himself in terms of research methodology. His current Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant, "The Great Jump Forward: The Labour Movement Goes Global," involves establishing a global network of researchers examining global unionism in its rise to the forefront for union politics.

"What's exciting for us as a research network is that we have found this niche that no one is collectively researching, and it is very timely. As we speak, this globalizing effect is taking place."

Global unions are exciting, but challenging, notes Aguiar. "The expansion of unions across borders raises many concerns. As unions increase in size, can they maintain their democratic nature? What impact will these changes have on workers, in particular visible minorities? Crossing borders isn't easy," he says. "Countries have different industry relations, regimes and laws, among other things. How do you navigate these differences and who is ultimately responsible for overseeing the operations?"

Social justice is a strong thread woven through Aguiar's research. In the Okanagan, Aguiar is looking at the federal-provincial Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), established to address shortages in the labour market by importing "guest workers" from abroad. The research team, which includes UBC Okanagan's Patricia Tomic and Ricardo Trumper, considers the implications of the SAWP program and its impacts, particularly in the Okanagan Valley with the arrival of nearly 600 Mexican migrant agricultural workers.

With a labour shortage and housing scarcity in the Okanagan Valley, their research is pressing, says Aguiar. "The goal is for our recommendations to have policy implications that address some of the concerns regarding the quality, standards and consistency of these workers' accommodations."