

Informal Labor, Formal Politics, and Dignified Discontent in India. By Rina Agarwala. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xx+250. \$29.99 (paper).

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Rina Agarwala's exciting volume *Informal Labor, Formal Politics, and Dignified Discontent in India* presents itself to the reader as a tale of informal workers' strategies to organize and attain welfare benefits from the Indian state in a context of rapid economic growth and of progressive increase in inequalities. The author uses a broad definition of informal workers that takes into account both their employment status and the characteristics of the company they work in—thus including those who work as unregulated contractors for formal companies, as well as regular workers in informal enterprises and those working at home or in multiple locations. What is striking is the fact that informal work, which is performed by 93% of the labor force in India, not only has no formal protection but also has been considered by official analyses only since the beginning of the 1990s.

The perspective Agarwala adopts on this widespread, as well as neglected, phenomenon is particularly interesting, both for those who deal with changes of labor and of state-labor relations and for those interested in political participation. The author's research question, in fact, is not only concerned with how feasible is it for informal workers to hold the state responsible in the era of neoliberalism, but also with the way in which political conditions from above may influence the effectiveness of informal workers' movements.

The research is based on a brilliant fourfold ideal typology that analyzes four states chosen due to their positioning with respect to two dimensions that are relevant for the success or failure of informal workers' movements: whether a state is liberalizing and whether it is engaging in propoor competitive elections. Among many interesting research results, what emerges is the fact that the precise electoral context is particularly meaningful, insofar as in the states in which there is competition between parties to obtain votes from the poor, informal workers' movements succeed in carrying forward the greatest claims, both in states that have been historically governed by communist parties and in contexts characterized by a growing (as well as worrying) mass-based populism. A state's tendency (or lack thereof) to liberalization, on the contrary, is not a feature that alone seems to influence the capability of informal workers to act and organize. Also the kind of industry has been taken into account, through a sample constructed within two particular industries: one among those experiencing the most rapid growth (the construction industry) and, vice versa, one in progressive decline (the tobacco/bidi industry).

Agarwala studies informal labor and formal politics in India—describing the current situation and, at the same time, offering a brilliant and ef-

ficacious historical reconstruction—mainly through two sets of interviews. She interviewed, between 2003 and 2008, 140 women members of informal worker organizations and government officials across three cities (Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata) of the four states that compose her typology: Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala. The author states that Kerala is not included in the study since its case is already well known in the literature and it differs from her three other states along several characteristics that would make a formal comparison fairly complicated. Although the focus on three out of four states is acceptable and reasonable, in following the narrative thread of the book, one would want to read a further chapter focusing also on the case of Kerala, which completes the state-based ideal typology. Though much information on Kerala is already provided, this doesn't completely fill the absence of experiences gathered through interviews. The volume is still a brilliant example of the admixture of empirical materials, from qualitative interviews to descriptions of the places in which interviews have taken place, to photographs, to a wide variety of secondary sources, including newspapers, norms, statistics, and so on—juxtaposed with a uncommon empathy for the subjects at the center of the research.

Agarwala's analysis is thus multifaceted, sophisticated, and rich with insightful findings. Yet, in my view, the most intriguing contribution of this book is how informal workers—contrary to what purported by the existing mainstream labor literature—can (auto)organize and give birth to innovative labor movements, notwithstanding the structure of informal production and the absence of an established employer, a single workplace, or a legal employment contract.

There are three main changes in the working lives of the informal workers that Agarwala examines. These shifts are at the center of the transformations that most workers' collective action strategies are encountering at a global level, and they ought to be evaluated with a renewed attention to labor movements. First, informal workers, since they do not have stable employment or job security, prefer to hold the state responsible for their well-being instead of employers. Second, they have shifted their primary demands from workers' rights to welfare issues and reproductive needs (such as education, housing, and health care). Third, their identity is constructed more as citizens than as workers.

Precarious, nonstandard, post-Fordist, flexible, informal workers have, in Western as well as in Eastern countries, a minimal or nonexistent ability to access social protection compared to formal workers with regular, dependent, and full-time contracts, for whom full rights are recognized and guaranteed. In order to address this issue, unions have only partially revised their traditional practices of representation and their ways of organizing workers. Reflection is thus necessary on how it is possible to construct cooperative and political forms of action despite the apparent non-organizable features of this precarious, informal universe. And will leftist parties and unions be capable of understanding and providing answers,

thus rethinking the basis of their own electorate and avoiding populist drift?

Finally, among the most relevant factors that the book highlights, which is certainly not limited to Agarwala's chosen geopolitical context, are gender relations and the interconnections between public and private spheres and between productive and reproductive work. In such case, the crucial question is: Will contemporary labor movements be able to oppose the patriarchal model that has insofar dominated the labor market?

The challenge seems to be, at a global level, that of constructing (and examining) new forms of organization and mobilization that are able to claim the same rights for formal and informal workers, in the public and working sphere as well as in the private one. Agarwala's research brilliantly enters this emerging debate and undoubtedly contributes to the development of interesting reflections in this direction.

Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities. By Anna Sun. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. xxii+244. \$35.00.

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Confucianism as a World Religion is destined to become a classic, especially in Confucian studies and comparative religion. Anna Sun readdresses the tired question of whether Confucianism is a religion or a philosophy to yield an abundance of insights; this is discourse analysis at the right place—and at exactly the right time, given the increasing importance of Confucianism in China.

After emigration to the United States, Sun was surprised to find Confucianism routinely trotted out as an example of Chinese *religion*. Few Chinese see it this way, in part due to China's official definition of religion, which includes only Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam. Following Nietzsche's dictum that "only something that has no history can be defined," Sun sidesteps common definitional entanglements to trudge through the historical/political swamp in which discourses over Confucianism are mired. A thoughtful exploration of this terrain has been long overdue.

The opening chapters center on Sun's meticulous archival research of four key historical phases of controversy. The first of these, the Chinese rites and terms controversy, pitted Jesuit missionaries against Catholic hardliners. The Jesuits, who lost the debate, had argued that Confucian ancestor worship is not a religion. A similar debate surfaced at the end of the 19th century; what Sun calls "the term controversy" was settled in favor of James Legge and Friedrich Max Müller, the latter being especially influential through his pioneering work in comparative religions. After