

alter-globalist movement in the breathless and unproblematic manner that characterizes the overwhelming majority of its publicists. It certainly enunciates an interpellation, a challenge that studies of alter-globalization to come will have to take account of.—ARMANDO MALAY JR., PROFESSORIAL LECTURER, ASIAN CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN.

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Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor, eds. 2010. *Learning from the Ground Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production*. New York: Macmillan Palgrave. 256 pp.

In this book, Choudry and Kapoor have collected thirteen studies written by twenty authors and coauthors. All contributors—academics, media workers, movement activists and campaigners—have worked with social movements and, together, their essays make the point that knowledge about social movements is produced at different sites and in different spaces. The main argument of the collection is that knowledge production—conventionally associated with academic scholarship—does in fact take place in social movement mobilization, activism, and community work.

In their introductory chapter, Choudry and Kapoor review the literature that has observed the “inadequate attention to the significance of low-key, long-haul political education and community organizing work, which goes on underneath the radar” (citing McMichael 2010); that “caution[s] against uncritically applying and overextending theories and concepts developed in Western contexts to third world and indigenous communities” (citing Smith 1999); and literature that has proposed paying attention to the divide between academic theories of social movements and theorizing by movement activists and organizers, emphasizing reflexivity as the source of value of the latter.

The book argues that knowledge produced by social movement participants on the ground is legitimate knowledge and must be acknowledged and valued as such. Why is it important to make this point? Is it a different point from that made by anthropologists who recognize “emic” knowledge as different from “etic” knowledge? Is it a different point from that made by philosophers of social science and sociological theorists who have proposed the “social construction of

reality” perspective as a rival to the behaviorist-positivist approach to knowledge production? For whom is it important to have made this point? Is it largely for the benefit of academic snobs who persist in privileging academe-produced knowledge, to educate them about other valid sites of knowledge production? Or, perhaps, for academics who appropriate the subjective, socially constructed realities of the societies they study? Is it for the benefit of those in the social movements who are puzzled by the “disjuncture” between their experience in the movement and the representation of movements in academic theorizing?

The argument of this book appears to address two issues. The first issue is epistemological: the privileging of knowledge produced by academics, as opposed to the knowledge produced by participants, organizers, and activists in civil society and social movements. The second issue is ontological: even granting that knowledge by movement organizers and participants is legitimate, there remains the issue of privileging of “expert” knowledge produced by “professionalized” civil society and NGOs as against the knowledge produced by social movement participants on the ground, the grassroots, indicating a confusion about the constitutive element (or the site of the “reality”) of social movements.

In addressing these two issues, the book uncovers hierarchies and/or progression of power struggles and tensions: first, academic expertise versus social movement practical experience; and second, among social movement actors, professional civil society and NGOs versus social movement grassroots. The aphorism “knowledge is power,” which implies that people who produce knowledge wield power, appears to be at the root of this project of Choudry and Kapoor, in which they have put together insights from “significant and diverse movement actors and sites of knowledge production” to bring to the fore the value of knowledge of social movements that is produced “from the ground up.”

In part 1 of the book, the main target of criticism is “civil society,” consisting of the NGOs that had been originally organized to confront the power of the state. The tendency to “hegemonic NGO politics” (Choudry, 20) and NGO “gatekeeping” in relation to the struggles of the political South are raised as issues against civil society. Five chapters hammer on the theme that activists and movements “on the ground” have been marginalized once more as “professionalization” and “vanguardism” by NGOs and “civil society” have overtaken the advocacies

of antiglobalization (Choudry) and counter-globalization (Hudig and Dowling), anti-xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa (Desai and Walsh), labor migrants (Rodriguez), and the Palestine movement against apartheid in Israel (Ziadah and Hanieh). Ironically, civil society and NGOs have caused the remarginalization of people below—the grassroots, for whom and in whose behalf they had originally organized. Among the keen insights on the roots of this remarginalization shared in this section of the book are the following: the “privatization of public interest” (Choudry, 18, citing Kamat 2004) when civil society organizations emphasize individual rights instead of collective rights; the focus on a nationalist project in post-apartheid South Africa has led to the marginalization of African migrants (Desai and Walsh); civil society “expertise” (Rodriguez) and “professionalization” and “vanguardism” (Hudig and Dowling); and falling into the traps of old narratives—for example, victimization, sectarianism, leftism (Ziadah and Hanieh). A thread that runs through the critique of civil society and NGOs is their failure to transcend the context of neoliberal policy and politics; instead of providing true alternative perspectives, civil society and NGOs have mirrored the neoliberal values (for instance, in commercialized methods like the use of wristbands and celebrities for popularizing support); in seeking participation in global summits of establishment institutions or organizing parallel summits or counter-summits (e.g., for APEC, World Economic Forum, G8 meetings) that mirror the efficiency of institutional summits.

Parts 2 and 3 focus on particular areas of social movement knowledge production. The four essays in part 2 look at knowledge production and learning in the “old” social movements of “unions, worker alliances, and left party political activism” while the three essays in part 3 look at “new” social movements of peasant and indigenous people struggles.

Part 2 includes a case study of strategic learning through praxis in the case of workers protesting privatization of the public services company in Cali, Colombia (Novelli); an illustration of the development of an empowering, alternative model of worker education, radically unlike the conventional union education that targeted labor-management relations and politicalization of labor through party politics (Bleakney and Morrill); a case study of collaborative knowledge production (termed “collective ethnographies”) by organizers and activists of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance on one hand and the taxi drivers whom they represented on the other, as they both fought

the implementation of technology enhancement through GPS (Mathew); and finally, a case study of the role of “messianic faith in Marxist-Leninist theory and ... blind dependence on vanguard politics” in the failed Grenada Revolution (Austin).

In part 3, the case studies of knowledge production in peasant and indigenous peoples’ struggles to retain or regain access to resources of land, such as among the Adivasi (indigenous peoples) and Dalit (untouchable caste) in South Orissa, India (Prasant and Kapoor), and tenant farmers in the Punjab region of Pakistan (Sayeed and Haider); and access to fishing waters by the Bear River First Nation on the Atlantic coast of Canada (Stiegman and Pictou). All three case studies document and narrate the strategies discovered and developed by the indigenous peoples and lowest classes themselves, demonstrating the production of knowledge of social mobilization by people “on the ground” as they faced situations like factionalism among the leadership, and division along class, caste, and religion by the divide-and-rule tactics of the authorities.

The most interesting chapters are those that make the point of the book by giving extensive accounts of this process of knowledge production “from the ground.” Hsia-Chuan Hsia (chapter 6 in part 1) narrates and then presents a conceptual map of the iterative process in which foreign brides of Taiwanese farmers are transformed from “personal subject” to “communal subject” then to “historical subject” as they go through literacy programs that on the surface teach these foreign brides the Chinese language, but in ways that reach more deeply to helping the women find their voice as subjects with human rights. Mathew (chapter 10 in part 2) gives a firsthand account of the learning experienced by him and co-activists of a taxi workers alliance. Processing their daily field experience as organizers and activists, Mathew and his associates were producing knowledge that took shape from questions and concerns raised by taxi drivers as the latter processed their own daily experience, picking up information from their casual exchanges with passengers who worked in the fields of technology, finance, business, etc. Together, organizers-activists and taxi drivers developed an understanding of the ramifications of a program to authorize taxicab operators to install GPS (geographic positioning system) in their taxi units. Sayeed and Haider (chapter 13 in part 3) detail how the Punjab tenants association conducted their struggle on different fronts: legal research, media solidarity, and most significantly, mobilization of different sectors (youth, women) at the village level. Having women

bang their cooking vessels to alert villages to the approach of state forces, and putting women wielding their *thappas* (laundry-washing clubs) at the frontline of protests to beat back the police rangers, are examples of grassroots knowledge of mobilization provided by Sayeed and Haider's chapter. These extensive accounts allow the reader to see the process of "from the ground" knowledge production as it is ongoing, thus better illustrating the point the book wishes to make.

"Learning from the ground up" is an important lesson as well as reminder for well-meaning academics and civil society organizations, and this volume succeeds in articulating it.—ATHENA LYDIA CASAMBRE, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN.