

On Knowledge Production, Learning and Research in Struggle

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[T]he most powerful, visionary dreams of a new society don't come from little think tanks of smart people or out of the atomized, individualistic world of consumer capitalism, where raging against the status quo is simply the hip thing to do. Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge (Robin Kelley, 2002, p. 8).

INTRODUCTION

In his book, *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*, historian Robin Kelley (2002) points out that social movements generate new knowledge, questions, and theory.² He also emphasizes the need for concrete and critical engagement with the movements confronting the problems of oppressed peoples. In this article I discuss the politics of learning, knowledge production and research “from the ground up”—that which takes place in social action/social movement contexts. While on the one hand, scholarship on social movements owes significant intellectual debts to the learning, knowledge production and theorizing which occur in the course of social struggles, on the other, the intellectual work, ideas and analysis which emerge from concrete engagement in these struggles are often overlooked and undervalued by the dominant theorizing practices of the academy. Further, drawing firstly from the author's involvement with research and activism around Montreal's

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Immigrant Workers Centre and wider struggles for immigration/labour justice, and secondly from global justice/anti-colonial organizing in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region, for this discussion, this paper argues that critical scholarship should strive to be engaged concretely with social struggles and the knowledge produced in these contexts for both political and intellectual reasons.

A growing interdisciplinary body of literature explores the politics and processes of knowledge production from within social movement and political activist milieus. In their article on “movement-relevant theory,” Doug Bevington and Chris Dixon (2005) note that just as few activists read social movement theory, important debates inside movement networks often do not enter the scholarly literature about social movements. They contend that social movement scholars do not have a monopoly on theory about movements. They call for recognition of existing movement-generated theory and of dynamic reciprocal engagement by theorists and movement activists in formulating, producing, refining and applying research. They hold that: “[m]ovement participants produce theory as well, although much of it may not be recognizable to conventional social movement studies. This kind of theory both ranges and traverses through multiple levels of abstraction, from everyday organizing to broad analysis” (p. 195). As Flacks (2004) asserts, much social movement theory is being driven by attempts to define and refine theoretical concepts which are likely to be “irrelevant or obvious to organizers” (p. 147). Kelley (2002) notes that “too often, our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they ‘succeeded’ in realizing their visions rather than on their merits or power of the visions themselves” (p. ix).

There are dominant tendencies—even among those on the left, within the university and outside—to make assumptions in relation to the relative value and significance of the location of intellectual work (in universities or in a myriad of everyday social action settings), what processes of knowledge production are recognized, and what counts as knowledge, theory or research. As Alan Sears (2005) puts it, deeper theoretical work is crucial, but “is not simply the property of specialized theorists with lots of formal education.” (p.151). The historian Staughton Lynd (2011) reminds us that “of the principal luminaries of ...Marxism, no one— not Marx, not Engels, not Plekhanov, not Lenin, not Trotsky, not Bukharin, not Rosa Luxemburg (who has a particular contempt for professors), not Antonio Gramsci, not Mao-Tse Tung—put bread on the table by university teaching...without exception the most significant contribu-

tions to Marxist thought have come from men and women who were not academics, who passed through the university but did not remain there" (p.144). In addition, there are many located outside of universities who, as Maori educationalist Linda Smith (1999) notes "are referred to as project workers, community activists or consultants, anything but 'researchers'. They search and record, they select and interpret, they organize and re-present, they make claims on the basis of what they assemble. This is research" (p.17).

The voices, ideas, and, indeed, theories produced by those engaged in social struggles are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized 'experts' or university-based intellectuals. In the realm of academic knowledge production, original, single authorship is highly valued, which can contribute to a tendency to fail to acknowledge the intellectual contributions of activism, or to recognize the lineages of ideas and theories that have been forged in struggles largely outside of universities, often incrementally, collectively, informally, and sometimes incidentally. An example of scholarly work which has explored the impact of anti-colonial struggles on an influential academic theoretical tradition is the attention that Tavares (1992) and Buck-Morss (2009) have brought to the way in which the Haitian revolution (the first and only successful slave revolution in the Americas) influenced Hegel's theorizing—in particular the master-slave dialectic. Marx (1984) rewrote his theory of the state under the impact of the Paris Commune. Raya Dunayevskaya (1958) points out that the spur to finishing the first volume of *Capital* came from the revival of the British working class movement in the context of the U.S. civil war. Many examples of feminist, anti-racist, and Indigenous scholarship have also arisen and benefited from mass mobilizations challenging patriarchal, racist, colonial—and often capitalist—relations. Yet within the university, there remains relatively little awareness of the many important debates and thinking occurring within those networks of activists, social movements, trade unions, community organizations and NGOs that take more critical stances in relation to state power and capital.

Further, we should be aware of the importance of drawing from those who have sought to extend Marx, firstly, in terms of thinkers who have emerged from, and been closely tied to anti-colonial and other left democratic struggles in the global south, such as Fanon (1968), Aijaz Ahmad (2000), C.L.R. James (1963), and many others. How, where and in which forms social struggles take place may differ greatly from context to context and challenge some of the dominant lenses applied to

typologizing/categorizing them as both Bayat (1997, 2010) and Eschle (2001) remind us. In thinking through the challenges of theorizing social relations and struggles in both global south and north, Himani Bannerji (2011) contends that “historical and social realities of the world are neither macro-spaces of free-floating imaginaries and abstractions nor bounded within micro-formations and spaces of geographically discrete cultural identities” (p.3). Equally, these diverse contexts can be important sites of knowledge production and conceptual tools for other struggles. Biju Mathew (2005) suggests that “[m]aybe our collective task ...is to look carefully as the resurgent left social movements all across Africa, Asia and Latin America and comprehend the ideas of justice that inhere within these movements and the historical memory they are rooted in” (203). David Austin (2009) describes theory as being “congealed experience, which, in a concentrated form, can bring years of accumulated knowledge to bear on a particular issue or cause and help to prevent strategic mishaps” (p.115), while Kelley (2002) also reminds us of the importance of drawing conceptual resources for contemporary struggles from critical readings of histories of older movements.

Theorizing social movements, NGOs, community organizations and ‘civil society’ at a level which is too abstracted from the very real differences, contradictions and particularities on the ground, especially the geo-historical context, has severe limitations. As adult educationalist Paula Allman (2001, p.165) puts it, “our action in and on the material world is the mediation or link between our consciousness and objective reality. Our consciousness develops from our active engagement with other people, nature, and the objects or processes we produce. In other words, it develops from the sensuous experiencing of reality from within the social relations in which we exist (Marx and Engels, 1846).”

Analysis of social movements need to be situated in social dynamics and concrete conditions. Bannerji (2011) reminds us that “all meaningful, useful generalizations need to be shown as having a material, a social/existential and an historical ontology. To think otherwise is to indulge in the absurdity of separating human consciousness from existing human beings and detaching both from lived time. Thus micro-histories are part of history or history’s mode of existence, they are inconceivable without each other, and subjugated knowledges are the pedestals of the dominant knowledge” (p.4). Thus, in order to understand social movements we need to carefully attend to the political, historical, cultural and economic forces that are at play in any one place, and explicate how they relate to the state, to capital, and to each other. The dominant strands

of social movement theory tend to be reductionist, Eurocentric, and disconnected from the social movements and organizations that are the objects of its study. Some movements are overlooked or ignored simply because they do not conform to a model or typology through which the researcher approaches the subject (Eschle, 2001). Inadequate attention is given to questions of geo-history, political economy, and to the politics of knowledge production, both in terms of constructing theory, and of the knowledge(s) emerging from movements. I suggest that a sounder analytical framework might draw from knowledge and theory arising from movements themselves. It would recognize the importance of “history from below” rather than seeking to only interpret movements and mobilizations solely through an imposed interpretative framework or set of variables. Close attention must be paid to analyzing the trends of bureaucratization and professionalization in these movement and NGO networks.

So theory is not merely created from above to be imposed on material conditions of struggle—it is also born out of practice. Just as D. Smith (1987, p. 80) notes “the basis for a political economy from the standpoint of labour, according to Marx, is precisely that it is grounded in the work and activity of actual individuals producing their existence under definite material conditions,” so too does theory and analysis about NGO and social movement networks require such a concrete grounding in our everyday activities in the world.

LEARNING FROM THE GROUND UP

In his work on social movements and radical adult education, John Holst (2002) refers to the “pedagogy of mobilization” to describe the learning inherent in the building and maintaining of a social movement and its organizations. Through participation in a social movement, people learn numerous skills and ways of thinking analytically and strategically as they struggle to understand their movement in motion.... Moreover, as coalitions are formed people’s understanding of the interconnectedness of relations within a social totality become increasingly sophisticated (Holst, 2002, pp. 87–88). Both Holst and Griff Foley’s (1999) work on learning in social action highlight and value the incremental learning and building of knowledge, which arises from actual and dialectical engagement in our everyday world.

Located in a historical materialist framework, Foley’s (1999) book, *Learning in Social Action: A Contribution to Understanding Informal Education* makes a vital contribution to theorizing and making explicit the

incidental learning processes arising from and contributing to engagement in a range of social struggles. Foley emphasizes the importance of “developing an understanding of learning in popular struggle” (p.140). His attention to documenting, making explicit, and valuing incidental forms of learning and knowledge production in social action is in keeping with others who understand that critical consciousness, rigorous research, and theory can and do emerge from engagement in action and organizing contexts, rather than as ideas developed elsewhere by movement elites and dropped down from “above” to “the people” (Smith, 1999; Shragge, 2003; Carroll, 2004; Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Kelley, 2002; Kinsman, 2006; Newman, 2006). In doing so, Foley cautions that although learning through involvement in social struggles can indeed transform power relations, it can also be contradictory and ambiguous.

Critical alternatives arise from struggle, active engagement, reflection and action. There remains much work to be done in thinking through what kinds of social relations, contexts and circumstances help people move from learning only to adapt to learning that supports resistance, and which can generate theoretical insights and more complex understandings about the world. For Foley (1999) this involves theorizing experience, standing back from it, and reordering it, using categories like power, conflict, structure, values and choice. Novelli (2010) highlights the dialectics of strategic learning through struggle and contestation which includes incidental, formal, informal, and non-formal education. This implies an engagement in “strategic analysis, which in turn leads to strategic action, and then to intended and unintended consequences of action, and to further reflection/analysis and action” (p.124). Foley suggests that we need to make case studies of learning in struggle which make explanatory connections “between learning and education on the one hand, and analysis of political economy, micropolitics, ideology and discourse (or ‘discursive practices’) on the other (p.9). He highlights the importance of embracing a broad conception of education and learning, the relationship between struggle and learning, and an analytical framework which connects learning to its context.

I turn now to discuss two examples of activist learning, knowledge production, research and theorizing in social action contexts to further illustrate the significance of these sites and their contributions to intellectual work. Firstly, I reflect upon questions of knowledge production, research and theorizing in the context of ‘global justice’ struggles against trade and investment liberalization in networks of NGOs, trade unions and social movements opposing the Asia Pacific Economic Coopera-

tion (APEC) forum during the 1990s. Secondly, I discuss aspects of the learning and knowledge production in contemporary immigrant and migrant workers' struggles. Finally, I share some critiques of NGOization which have emerged from within activist milieus engaged in struggles against global capitalism in recent decades.

RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND ACTIVISM

As noted earlier, social movements and activist milieus can be important sites of research which takes place outside of formal and/or professionalized research settings such as universities. Effective research can help move activist practice beyond reacting only to the immediate, and inform longer-term strategy and vision. This is not to claim that all 'activist research' is inherently progressive or rigorous - anymore than all university research can claim to be rigorous and immaculately constructed. Nor is it argued that academic and activist research necessarily exist in finite, separate worlds, although sometimes this might seem to be the case.

Much activist research of the kind that I have engaged in involves an ongoing process of research in which information has to serve a purpose, is ongoing, and not usually channeled towards the production of one particular research output. Taking the time to "get the research right" is crucial—whether in the case of adequately researching details of a meeting venue in order to mount an effective protest action, or in the more formal sense of research on a corporation, policy or practice, which, if poorly researched, can be easily, and publicly discredited by a far better-resourced protagonist and media outlets. This in turn can have serious effects on efforts to build a campaign through reaching and mobilizing a broader base of people. A central aspect of effective activist research is the relationship of trust and engagement built up with social struggles and movements. Articulating or explicating activist research methodologies from our own practices (and those of colleagues) is an interesting, and perhaps challenging task which falls outside of the scope of this article. But the notion that there is some kind of natural separation between what some have called the 'brain' and the 'brawn' of movement is to be challenged since intellectual work, knowledge production, and forms of investigation/research which take place within activism are often inextricably linked to action in many mobilizations, although sometimes overlooked or unrecognized (see Choudry and Kuyek, forthcoming, 2012). Kinsman (2006) warns: "Sometimes when we talk about research and activism in the academic world we replicate distinctions

around notions of consciousness and activity that are detrimental to our objectives. We can fall back on research as being an analysis, or a particular form of consciousness, and activism as about doing things “out there”, which leads to a divorce between consciousness and practice” (p.153). In turn, we should also be wary of replicating such dynamics in activist milieux.

Political activist ethnography, which builds on Dorothy Smith’s (1987) work on institutional ethnography, offers useful tools for activist research and knowledge production. George Smith (2006) suggests that for activist researchers, there is a wealth of research material and signposts derived from moments of confrontation to explore the way that power in our world is socially organized. He contends that being interrogated by insiders to a ruling regime, like a crown attorney for example, brings a researcher into direct contact with the conceptual relevancies and organizing principles of such regimes.

Moments of confrontation with ruling regimes were crucial to uncovering aspects of their social organization in global justice activism and research which I have been part of, before entering the university as a student, and, more recently, as faculty. During the 1990s, I was an organizer, educator and researcher for two small Aotearoa/New Zealand-based activist groups, GATT Watchdog and the Aotearoa/New Zealand APEC Monitoring Group which focused on building opposition to free trade and investment agreements, at domestic and regional (Asia-Pacific) levels. A major focus was the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process that included 21 governments in the region, with a goal to advance trade and investment liberalization. APEC’s highest profile event was a Leaders’ summit, which rotated among APEC member countries each year, and had become a target for mobilizations against neoliberal globalization. An important goal for anti-APEC activism has been to delegitimize the APEC forum and to expose APEC governments’ claims of ‘civil society’ involvement and consultation as a sham. Analysis of official texts was a key aspect of practice that informed strategy for the opposition to the hosting of APEC 1999 in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In 1998, well in advance of the start of New Zealand’s chairing of APEC the following year, I obtained a New Zealand Cabinet Strategy Committee paper “APEC 1999–Engagement With NGOs” (New Zealand Government, 1998) for GATT Watchdog under New Zealand’s Official Information Act (Access to Information Act). From analyzing this document, it became evident that government intentions were to co-opt NGOs and harness them to promote APEC domestically, and

also to project to international audiences an image of a democratic government which valued differing opinions. Deletions in the document clearly refer to managing the risks (militant opposition to APEC), since there are several references to risk management and preparedness for “a protest element”, but gave no specific details to what this entailed, corresponding to sections that have been withheld. What remains in the document is instructive. On the positive side, the Government has a real opportunity to develop a wider sense of ownership and participation. Ensuring constructive participation by NGOs in the APEC process will be a critical part of the overall strategy of communicating the what, why and how of APEC to the New Zealand community. It would serve to demonstrate to the international community New Zealand’s ability, as a participatory democracy, to accommodate debate and dissent among a variety of NGOs... On the other hand, as the experience of CHOGM and the MAI indicated, there is significant risk of disruption and protest at APEC events. In particular we are likely to see a protest element around the Leaders’ Meeting in Auckland in September (p.3).

The document also advised that “New Zealand’s chairing of APEC should reflect the values of an open and participatory democracy where NGOs have an opportunity freely to express their views” (p.5). “We propose a dual strategy of constructive engagement: [paragraph deleted]” and then:

The target audience in this strategy is not just NGOs per se, but also the wider group of “middle” New Zealand who will want to see NGO voices given a fair hearing. [Deletion] This will require engaging effectively with responsive groups and helping to meet, as far as possible, their own objectives of being seen to influence outcomes...the requirement for cost-effectiveness suggests there will be limits to the extent of outreach that may be possible. It will be important to avoid getting bogged down in long, resource-intensive consultations (p.6).

The strategy “involves building broad support for APEC and actively managing the risk of disruption” (my italics) (p.7). The New Zealand government’s NGO engagement strategy paper was a clear example of a document which operates in the state’s interest in drawing up a plan to contain dissent and manage the government’s image, rather than being a background paper to inform a dialogue among equals. By its use of the term “responsive groups”, the government assumed the right to determine who was in and who was out in New Zealand ‘civil society’. It also clearly sought to divide and rule NGOs (and other groups) into supposedly constructive and disruptive elements.

For GATT Watchdog and Aotearoa/New Zealand APEC Monitoring Group activists, our reading of the document was accomplished because of our own confrontation with the government over APEC, experience of being targeted by New Zealand state security forces for lawful dissent against APEC in 1996, involvement in previous years' anti-APEC mobilizations in several countries, and interactions with police at demonstrations and increased surveillance during 1999. Having these experiences and analysis was important, but collecting, analyzing and disseminating these documents was essential to building an effective strategy to counter the government's promotion of APEC to NGO networks and community organizations. Drawing from these documents, a key part of our anti-APEC strategy of 1999 was to explicitly and publicly denounce the New Zealand Government's APEC Taskforce communications strategy, and to politicize attempts to co-opt or silence critics through 'dialogue' in a similar fashion to that revealed in Canadian official documents relating to the Vancouver APEC summit.

This included a picket of the first dialogue on APEC 1999 with NGOs outside the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Wellington in January 1999, and a rejection of approaches made by the official APEC NGO Liaison officer (hired by the New Zealand Government's APEC Taskforce) to discuss APEC matters. Through media work and dissemination through NGO and community group mailings and meetings, we publicly revealed the government strategy of containment and propaganda through limited dialogue and state surveillance and harassment of the more radical critics. Our strategy involved politicizing the disjuncture between stated intentions for dialogue, the calculated actual rationale expressed by the official documents obtained under the Official Information Act, and past actual experience of state practice of criminalization of lawful dissenters who were critical of free trade and investment. After we circulated the Cabinet papers to a wide range of NGOs and trade unions, the government's plan to co-opt NGOs and harness them to do their work of selling APEC to "middle" New Zealand failed dismally, with few attending their NGO consultation sessions. The operation of the Official Information Act, and broader questions of transparency, state power and claims of democracy became politicized in this research activism work when various government ministries either refused to divulge or release information, or insisted on imposing expensive processing fees before even considering a request. In turn, we publicized this through mainstream and independent media, finding some journalists sympathetic on this issue for their own reasons of frustration over obstacles to accessing official information, and willing to write critical articles on the matter.

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN IM/MIGRANT WORKERS' STRUGGLES

I turn now to focus on aspects of the politics of learning and knowledge production in migrant and immigrant workers' struggles both in Canada and in international networks. DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge (2010) argue that for community organizations to be part of a broader longer-term movement for social change, social analysis and political education are vital. They argue that "[b]oth contribute to understanding that the specific gains made and the struggles organizations undertake are part of something larger, but so is the broader political economy that structures organizational choices" (p.177).

Montreal's Immigrant Workers' Centre (IWC) was set up in 2000 as a community-based workers' organization in the diverse, working-class neighbourhood of Côte-des-Neiges by some Filipino-Canadian union and former union organizers, and other activist and academic allies.³ The IWC engages in individual rights counseling and casework, as well as popular education and political campaigns that reflect the general issues facing immigrant and temporary foreign workers—dismissal, problems with employers, and sometimes inadequate representation by their unions. Often these arise from individual cases and form the basis for campaigns and demands which are expressed collectively. Labour education is a priority, targeting organizations in the community and increasing workers' skills and analysis. Workshops on themes such as the history of the labour movement, the Labour Standards Act and collective organizing processes have been presented in many organizations that work with immigrants as well as at the IWC itself. For example, the "Skills for Change" program teaches basic computer literacy, while incorporating workplace analysis and information on labour rights and supporting individuals in becoming more active in defending those rights in their workplaces. The IWC strives to develop leadership among immigrant workers in order to take action on their own behalf. Support for self-organizing, direct action, coalition-building and campaigning are used to win gains for workers and to build broader awareness of and support for systemic change in relation to their working conditions and, often, immigration status. As IWC organizer Mostafa Henaway (forthcoming 2012) puts it, the Centre:

tries to build from an organizing model that incorporates radical traditions, going back to basics, focusing on outreach, collective organizing, casework, and education. At times, there are many challenges faced in balancing all of these facets in the organization; but each facet

3 Immigrant Workers Centre Website: <http://iwc-cti.ca>

has proven to be critically important to the political work of the centre, such as weekly outreach outside Metro [subway] stations, building relationships with both communities and individual immigrant workers, or attempts to collectivize the casework and individual issues faced by workers, and to respond in a politicized way. The foundation of this organizing has come from these principal organizing methods, in addition to a flexibility in tactics and strategy, due to ever-changing economic conditions in Montreal, and globally.

Significantly, organizations such as the Immigrant Workers Centre, and the workers' struggles that they support can be key sites of informal and non-formal learning and knowledge production for labour justice struggles. This process occurs through workers' struggles and contestation of their conditions and rights and is important in winning gains for workers. A recent study on immigrant workers' struggles in Quebec, which conducted extensive interviews (Choudry et al. 2009, p. 112) notes:

Individuals that did eventually take action always did so with the support of others, who provided information and other resources to help them in a dispute with an employer. These others can be unions, community organizations or co-workers or friends with whom they have informal relationships. 'Street smarts' and small victories are shared between people: this in turn encourages others to take action. Such learning most often grows out of pre-existing relations with other individuals, peers or friends. However, organizations play a key role.

This study found that learning to question or to resist exists in tension with learning to cope, adapt or 'get by'—as indeed it does in workplace industrial relations since the emergence of capitalism. Sometimes, as Rodriguez (2010) notes, such knowledge forms contest not only the power (and knowledge) produced by governments, but also that of professionalized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which purport to speak on behalf of migrant workers. But building alliances with trade unions, through education and supporting internal debates occurring within organized labour to encourage unions to more meaningfully represent the needs and concerns of immigrant and migrant workers is an important aspect of these local and global struggles for justice. As Mathew (2005) and others note, migrant and immigrant workers can and do bring their own histories of struggle and organizing strategies from their countries of origin to the new countries in which they labour.

For those of us located in universities and engaged in research on im/migrant workers this work requires some careful reflection and political commitment. Commenting on the role of a growing number of NGOs

and think-tanks which purport to represent migrant workers' interests at national and international levels, yet exclude workers themselves, Rodriguez (2010) argues that it is vital to pay attention to the knowledge production of those excluded from official venues and who cannot participate in the circuits, virtual and otherwise, frequented by others in the 'global justice movement'. She says (p. 67),

In order to be able to document the kinds of struggles engaged in by migrant worker activists...requires some level of political investment on our part as scholars, for it is in spaces outside of the seats of power, like the space of the street, where migrants can come together not only to narrate their experiences, but also to articulate radical alternatives to the contemporary global order.

We must also be aware of the politics of which campaigns, organizations and movements are documented, and which are not. For, as Rahila Gupta (2004, p. 3) of Southall Black Sisters, a long-established organization supporting Asian and African-Caribbean women against violence in Britain notes, it is not easy for activists "to sit down and record their work, but in this age of information overload you need to record in order almost to prove that you exist." Indeed, for engaged academics working on immigration and labour issues, and for organizers on the frontlines of struggles for social justice, the analyses and knowledge produced in the course of such struggles can be seen as not only important intellectual contributions, but as rich conceptual resources for understanding and challenging the continued exploitation and commodification of migrant workers and immigrants, locally and internationally.

The politics of activist research are inevitably impacted by challenges related to mobilizing and maintaining support, continuity and accountability among (and between) activist researchers and broader social struggles. Funding and institutional recognition of movement research is not necessarily proportionate to the utility of such work, especially if it is disconnected from the task of building and supporting movements, but rather oriented towards outputs intended to influence decision-makers in government, private sectors or international organizations. Indeed, some NGO research is driven by project-centric cycles and/or compartmentalized logics that are disconnected from social struggles, and more reflective of tensions around funding priorities (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Bazan *et al.*, 2008). In the above examples, small activist groups which operated on a shoestring budget were able to uncover, analyze and disseminate their research through popular education and relationships with other organizations.

NGOS, NGOIZATION AND THE 'GLOBAL JUSTICE' MOVEMENT

The past decades have seen the ascendancy of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the widespread valorization of the notion of “civil society” at global and local levels. Fowler (2000) sees a number of factors which account for the growth of NGOs involved in Third World development, and their increased relationships with governments and the private sector. He sees the rightwards shift in Northern politics during the Reagan-Thatcher era as key to “the start of the rise in official finance to, and number of NGOs that continues today” (p. 2). This was due to the move away from government to the market as the engine of growth and progress, and “meant more responsibility to citizens and their organizations” (ibid). Although funds used to flow primarily from Northern governments or financial institutions to Southern governments, NGOs have increasingly become channels for, and direct recipients of this ‘development assistance’ (Hancock, 1989; Biel, 2000; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Wallace, 2003; Hewson, 2005). There has been an enormous amount of celebratory and triumphalist writing about “civil society”, and both development and advocacy NGOs as being inherently “good” - forces for progressive change. Such claims often fail to consider who is included in and excluded from “civil society”, and pay inadequate attention to the power and role of the state, private sector and international institutions in relation to NGO/community organization milieus which, many argue, are complicit with, and dependent upon the state. Even before the fiscal austerity and public sector cuts of the Reagan-Thatcher era, United Nations conferences, increasing intergovernmental forums, agreements, treaties and negotiations had been accompanied by a parallel process of international NGO meetings, campaigns and other activity. Besides the institutionalization of NGO involvement in the various arms of the United Nations, the policies and statements of intergovernmental organizations such as the World Bank (2008) and the Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank, 1998) and their representatives have also set parameters for which kinds of NGOs will be validated by dialogue or other forms of engagement.

Alongside this, for many years, a number of critiques of NGOs and “NGOization” have been advanced by feminist, Marxist, critical race and other critical scholars. These include Jad’s (2004) work on the NGOization, cooptation and undermining of the women’s movement and other parts of Palestinian “civil society”, Kamat’s (2002, 2004) work on the impacts of NGOization and the growth of NGOs on political space and development in India and internationally, and INCITE! Women of Color

Against Violence's (2007) recent analyses of the "non-profit industrial complex" in the Americas. For Petras and Veltmeyer, (2005), and others, the professionalization of community-based NGOs and their depoliticization works well for neoliberal regimes, keeping "the existing power structure (vis-à-vis the distribution of society's resources) intact while promoting a degree (and a local form) of change and development" (p.20). Indeed, neoliberal states have often downloaded, privatized and individualized responsibility for social welfare and 'development' via NGOs and community organizations. In turn, if we trace the lineage of existing scholarly critiques of NGOs and institutionalization/demobilization, such analyses of NGOization often owe a debt to collective forms of critical knowledge production, learning and debates emerging from within social movements and activist networks committed to progressive social change. Often these tensions and critiques are raised and even worked out in practice before being subjected to academic inquiry.

There is a relationship between the NGOization of social change and its impact on knowledge production, and the disciplining of dissent at national and global levels. Elsewhere (Choudry, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, Choudry and Shragge, 2011), I interrogate how, within supposedly 'alternative' global justice networks, a relatively small NGO elite attempts to claim positional superiority for forms of professionalized knowledge and advocacy that attempt to sideline, filter, or erase more critical positions opposed to capitalism and colonialism. While emphasizing the importance of context-specific approaches to understanding NGOs and social movements, I contend that the dominant tendency of NGOs is to compartmentalize the world into 'issues,' and 'projects,' and the practice of an "ideology of pragmatism" (Choudry, 2010b, p.20) which entails an unwillingness to name or confront capitalism. A form of colonial amnesia seems particularly entrenched in many social justice networks in settler colonial-states like Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada and Australia. A liberal "white economic progressive nationalist" (Choudry, 2010b, p.27) nostalgia underpins the framing of alternatives to neoliberalism, entailing the erasure or writing out of Canada's own ongoing colonial injustices and struggles by Indigenous Peoples for self-determination, and rendering invisible the historical and present-day experiences and struggles of racialized communities. These positions, which replicate, rather than challenge dominant national practices, serve to undermine and contain more critical forms of knowledge production and action in relation to confronting global capitalism. But these processes are also being challenged by ideas and mobilization strategies arising from past and present anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles.

In sum, even within movement networks purportedly committed to 'global justice', one finds hierarchies and dynamics around power and knowledge similar to that found in the academy. Frequently, for example, questions of immigration, indigenous sovereignty, racism and colonialism are viewed as separate, unrelated issues by NGOs and activists critical of neoliberal globalization in the North, while they are often seen as intimately connected by movements in the South (Sivandan, 1982; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Mathew, 2005). Many NGOs in the North and South replicate dominant approaches to hierarchies of knowledge by favouring academic, professionalized forms over learning developed in social struggles.

CONCLUSION: A CALL FOR REENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMICS

There is a danger that the conventional processes of production of academic scholarship, and assumptions or claims that such activity constitutes the apex of intellectual rigour and inquiry, can in fact overlook the complexities and dynamics of activism, and the intellectual contributions of activist practice (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Frampton et al., 2006). I do not imply that these various epistemologies of knowledge (academic and activist) and processes of knowledge production and learning (formal, non-formal, and informal) exist in completely separate universes. Yet it seems important to consider how critically engaged scholars located in universities can avoid replicating the tendency to ignore or misconstrue forms of social action and the knowledge produced therein, because they do not fit neatly within a pre-established theoretical framework? Academic work on activism and social movements requires some level of political investment on our part as scholars. It also requires an acknowledgement of the intellectual debts that many of us have to knowledge and theory arising from conversations, debates, discussions, dilemmas in the everyday worlds of organizing for social change, reconnecting with ideas and action and the importance of context/dynamics of institutionalization. If we are to play a role in creating a future in a world marked by devastating economic and ecological crises, militarized violence, war and occupation, in which Canada is complicit, we need to urgently direct some thought and energy towards building social movements. We now face a period of global economic and political crisis—to be addressed by austerity measures which download the social costs onto the poor and marginalized (McNally, 2011). We need movements to create counter-power and radical alternatives to the prevailing world order which is

steeped in colonialism, imperialism and war, by building upon, and in dialogue with the intellectual/conceptual resources produced in the course of social movement activism. Perhaps one of the most important challenges in the early part of the 21st century for those of us who are privileged to work in universities and are committed to social justice, is to connect, reconnect, renew and ground our scholarly work with/in continuing struggles here in Canada, and around the world. And to make our work count. For, as Marx (1968) noted nearly two hundred years ago, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”. In *Theses on Feuerbach* (*ibid*), he further reminds us: “All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.”

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