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Learning in Social Action:
Knowledge production in social movements

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EDITORIAL

LEARNING IN SOCIAL ACTION:

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

[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)

An emerging body of literature – strongly interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary in its approach – explores the politics and processes of knowledge and theory production *from within* social movement and political activist milieus. Such work has great potential to enrich, broaden and challenge understandings of how, where, and when education, learning, and knowledge production occurs. While most adult education research still tends to focus on institutionalized learning environments, this issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* focuses upon knowledge production and informal learning in social movement/community activist settings – in the global North and global South.

My interest in this topic comes from over two decades of social and environmental justice organizing, education, research, and writing. It also arises from a sense of disjuncture often shared with many others engaged in social struggles (including some of us who happen to work in academe) around the gulf between them and what gets written, thought, and taught about social justice, social movements, community organizing, and activism in scholarly circles; questions of who writes, for whom, and for what purpose, and implicit and explicit hierarchies of knowledge production and education. There is a danger that the conventional processes of production of academic scholarship, and the assumption/claim that such activity constitutes the apex of intellectual rigour and inquiry, can in fact misconstrue or overlook the complexities and dynamics of activism, and the intellectual contributions of activist practice (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Frampton, et al., 2006).

As I argue elsewhere (Choudry, 2007, 2008), even in many supposedly alternative milieus, voices, ideas – and indeed, theories – produced by those actually engaged in social struggles are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized or academic experts. Academic knowledge

production values original, single authorship, which perhaps contributes to a tendency not to acknowledge the intellectual contributions of activism, or recognize the lineage of ideas and theories which have been forged outside of academe, often incrementally, collectively, and informally. That said, these various epistemologies of knowledge – academic and activist – and processes of knowledge production and learning – formal, non-formal and informal – do not necessarily exist in completely separate universes, as Austin and D’Souza note in this issue.

Previous issues of the *McGill Journal of Education* have featured articles which explore questions of social justice and student engagement – variously defined – in the classroom. I suspect that readers are likely to be far more familiar with literature on these subject areas than the theme of this special issue. Yet it is my contention that for all educators – whether in formal settings such as school classrooms and university seminars, or in non-formal (like Lysack’s global warming teach-in discussed in this issue) or informal settings (as Daro describes in the contexts of “anti-globalization” protest actions), the dynamic body of knowledge and pedagogical tools arising from activist practice offer important practical insights which can inform teaching practice and our understandings of knowledge production and learning processes. Drawing upon various methodological approaches and different theoretical traditions, movements, and moments, the articles in this issue critically explore a number of aspects of education and learning.

For me, Griff Foley’s (1999) *Learning in Social Action* makes a particularly important contribution to theorizing and making explicit the incidental learning processes arising from and contributing to engagement in a range of social struggles. In doing so, Foley points out that although learning through involvement in social struggles can transform power relations, it can also be contradictory and constraining. 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 consistent 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 being dropped down on “the people” from movement elites (L. T. Smith, 1999; Kelley, 2002; Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Kinsman, 2006). Yet, as Doug Bevington and Chris Dixon (2005) note, important debates inside movement networks often do not enter the literature about social movements, while few activists read social movement theory.

Scholars who seek to understand social movement and non-government organization (NGO) networks, and the education, learning, and knowledge production associated with them, need to attend to questions coming out of social movements and activist research in regard to power dynamics and the

valuing of certain forms of knowledge. These questions are often based on sophisticated macro- and micro- analyses of what, to an outsider, might seem a baffling network of relations, and shifting power dynamics. This is not to argue that evaluation and analysis from the standpoint of being embedded in activism is *necessarily* rigorous or adequate. Political activist ethnographers George Smith (2006) and Gary Kinsman (2006) both warn of a need for activist researchers to go beyond the “commonsense theorizing” which often goes on in these settings, but which does not attend to actual social practices and organization. Reflexivity is crucial when starting from, engaging with, and analyzing activist knowledge(s). In a similar vein, Foley (1999) writes that the

process of critical learning involves people in theorizing their experience: they stand back from it and reorder it, using concepts like power, conflict, structure, values and choice. It is also clear that critical learning is gained informally, through experience, by acting and reflecting on action, rather than in formal courses. (p. 64)

Many scholarly, NGO and activist accounts pay inadequate attention to the significance of low-key, long-haul political education, and community organizing work, which goes on underneath the radar, as it were. Other scholars, like Walter Mignolo (2000) and Maori educationalist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), raise important questions about the relationship between academic research, epistemologies of knowledge, colonialism and imperialism, and caution against uncritically applying and overextending theories and concepts developed in Western contexts to Third World and Indigenous communities (a thread which runs through several of the contributions in this issue, especially Kapoor and Langdon).

Bevington and Dixon (2005) call for recognition of existing movement-generated theory and also dynamic reciprocal engagement by theorists and movement activists in formulating, producing, refining, and applying research. They contend that

social movement scholars do not have a monopoly on theory about movements. Movement 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)

The black American historian Robin Kelley (2002) argues 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). As the quotation which opens this editorial suggests, Kelley concurs with Bevington and Dixon that social movements generate new knowledge, questions and theory, and emphasizes the need for concrete and critical engagement with the movements confronting the problems of oppressed peoples. Kelley also highlights the importance of drawing conceptual resources for contemporary struggles from critical readings of

histories of older movements – an approach which D'Souza, Kapoor, Austin, and Langdon all highlight here in their articles in different ways. These kinds of knowledge and theory are often shaped by and for concrete and shifting contours of struggle.

Although there is a considerable body of scholarly literature on adult education and learning, thus far relatively few attempts have been made to theorize informal learning and knowledge production through involvement in social action. Foley (1999) examines this topic in a way which analyzes and validates the importance of the incidental learning that takes place in a variety of social struggles. He argues that to do this analysis “one needs to write case studies of learning in struggle, making explanatory connections between the broad political and economic context, micro-politics, ideologies, discourses and learning” (p. 132).

Echoing Foley's contribution, John Holst (2002) uses the concept of “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. (pp. 87-88).

Turning now to the contents of this issue, the opening article, by Radha D'Souza, draws on her work as a trade unionist, political activist, and activist lawyer. In it, she reflects on the meaning of activist scholarship, interrogating the institutional contexts for knowledge and the relationship of knowledge to emancipatory structural social transformations. In contextualizing and historicizing activism and scholarship, knowledge production in social movements and in the academe, she interweaves social theory with reflections on personal engagement since the early 1970s in India.

In the second article, based on her ethnographic research in transnational networks of global justice activists around major mass mobilizations, including World Bank/International Monetary Fund annual conference in Prague (2000), the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City (2001), and the 2003 World Trade Organization Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, Vinci Daro contends that knowledge production in social movement settings cultivates an intensely relational and dynamic disposition towards differences in languages, norms, objectives, and traditions, which are a significant source of the vitality of these networks. She argues that “global justice activist networks generate dynamic settings for learning to negotiate differences in cultural backgrounds, historical experiences, social positions, and political visions.”

Next, drawing from his association with the Adivasi in Orissa, India, since 1992, Dip Kapoor traces the kinds of learning engendered through Adivasi trans-local and local subaltern social movement action addressing state-corporate developmental collusions, state-caste interests and the resulting dispossession of Adivasis from land, forest and their ways of life under a neoliberal regime in India which has intensified since 1991.

Jonathan Langdon discusses knowledge production among social movement activist/educators in Ghana. This analysis builds on Foley's (1999) notion of learning in struggle, and the participatory action research group in which Langdon participated provides several lenses through which to view learning in social movements in Ghana. Langdon proposes a complex view of learning based on the shifting characteristics of power and capital.

Mishka Lysack employs Vygotskyian concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development and learning as social/relational transaction to illuminate aspects of a teach-in on global warming held by social/environmental activists in Calgary. The article concludes by discussing the challenges and opportunities facing today's global warming movement in North America regarding public education.

Finally, David Austin explores the role of practical engagement and involvement in learning and the way in which anti-colonial scholarship was taken up by, and complemented, Caribbean activism and political thought, particularly in the Montreal-based Caribbean Conference Committee (CCC) of the 1960s and 1970s. Austin discusses the dynamics between formal and informal learning in the context of community organizing, and the legacy of the CCC for contemporary community education and action.

There are many pedagogies of mobilization, to use Holst's (2002) terminology. This issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* can only present several snapshots into worlds of learning, knowledge production and social action. It is a small contribution to a growing, exciting and dynamic body of literature – in scholarly and activist networks, across the world – which raises new questions and revisits older ones.

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ÉDITORIAL

APPRENDRE VIA L'ACTION SOCIALE :

LA PRODUCTION DE CONNAISSANCES AU SEIN DES MOUVEMENTS SOCIAUX

Les rêves les plus puissants et les plus visionnaires d'une société nouvelle ne sont pas issus de petits laboratoires d'idées emplis d'intellectuels ou encore de notre monde atomisé, individualiste et déifiant la consommation de masse, dans laquelle critiquer le *statu quo* est tendance. Les rêves révolutionnaires naissent d'un engagement politique : les mouvements sociaux collectifs sont les incubateurs des connaissances novatrices. (Robin Kelley, 2002, p. 8) (Traduction libre)

Les récents écrits scientifiques – inspirés d'une approche profondément interdisciplinaire et transdisciplinaire – explore les notions politiques, les processus et les théories impliquant la production de connaissances *au sein* des mouvements sociaux et des milieux activistes. Une telle exploration a le potentiel d'enrichir, d'élargir et de remettre en question les conceptions existantes relativement aux mécanismes, aux lieux et aux moments engendrant l'éducation ainsi que la production d'apprentissages et de connaissances. Alors que la plupart des recherches portant sur l'andragogie cible les milieux d'apprentissage institutionnels, la présente édition de la *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* met l'emphasis sur la production de connaissances et les apprentissages informels s'opérant au sein des mouvements sociaux et communautés activistes, au Nord comme au Sud.

Mon intérêt pour ce domaine trouve sa source dans plus de deux décennies d'organisation, d'éducation, de recherche et d'écriture dans le domaine de la justice sociale et environnementale. Il s'explique également par un sentiment d'incohérence souvent partagé par plusieurs intervenants engagés dans des luttes sociales (incluant des membres du corps académique) relativement au fossé existant entre eux et ce qui est publié, pensé ou enseigné sur la justice sociale, les mouvements sociaux, les organisations communautaires et l'activisme dans les cercles universitaires; dépendant des auteurs, de leurs auditoires et des raisons qui motivent leurs écrits, de considérations hiérarchiques implicites ou explicites de production de connaissances et d'éducation. Il existe un danger que les processus conventionnels de production de savoir académique, ainsi que les prétentions à l'effet que ces activités constituent le *nec plus ultra* de la rigueur intellectuelle et de la recherche, mène plutôt à la déconstruction

et la négligence des complexités et du dynamisme de l'activisme, au déni des contributions intellectuelles de la pratique activiste (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Frampton, et al., 2006).

Comme je le mentionne dans d'autres publications (Choudry, 2007, 2008), même dans plusieurs milieux prétendument alternatifs, des voix, des idées – en fait, des *théories* – exprimées par des intervenants impliqués dans des luttes sociales sont fréquemment ignorées, camouflées, ou encore reformulées par des experts académiques ou professionnels. La production universitaire de connaissances prise les publications originales, faites à compte d'auteur, ce qui concourt probablement à une tendance de ne pas reconnaître les contributions intellectuelles émanant des milieux activistes, ou encore à ne pas porter intérêt au foisonnement d'idées et de théories qui sont forgées à l'extérieur du cadre universitaire, souvent de manière incrémentale, collective et informelle. Ceci dit, ces diverses épistémologies de la connaissance – universitaire ou activiste – et les processus de production de la connaissance et d'apprentissages – formels, non-formels et informels – n'appartiennent pas nécessairement à des univers distincts, comme le notent Austin et D'Souza dans ce numéro.

Des éditions précédentes de la *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* ont présenté des articles explorant des questions de justice sociale et d'engagement étudiant – de diverses natures – en salles de classe. Je soupçonne nos lecteurs d'être plus familiers avec les écrits portant sur ces dimensions qu'avec le thème de cette édition spéciale. Pourtant, je considère que pour tous les éducateurs – œuvrant dans des milieux formels comme une salle de classe ou un séminaire universitaire, ou encore dans des cadres non-formels (tel que le forum éducatif sur le réchauffement climatique de Lysack) ou informels (comme celui que Daro décrit dans les contextes d'actions protestataires « anti-globalisation »), l'accumulation de connaissances et les outils pédagogiques produits par les pratiques activistes offrent des réponses importantes et utiles pour orienter nos pratiques d'enseignement et notre compréhension des processus de production de connaissances et d'apprentissages. S'inspirant d'une variété d'approches méthodologiques et de traditions, mouvements et moments théoriques divers, les articles publiés dans cette édition explorent un éventail d'aspects de l'éducation et de l'apprentissage.

En ce qui me concerne, le livre *Learning in Social Action* de Griff Foley (1999) contribue de manière particulièrement importante à théoriser et à rendre explicite les processus fortuits d'apprentissage provenant et provoquant l'implication dans un éventail de luttes sociales. Ce faisant, Foley souligne que même si apprendre en s'engageant dans des luttes sociales peut transformer les relations de pouvoir, cela peut également être contradictoire et contraignant. Foley met l'emphasis sur l'importance de « développer une compréhension de l'apprentissage dans les luttes populaires » (p. 140). Son souci de documenter, rendre explicite et valoriser les formes fortuites d'apprentissage et de production

de connaissances dans l'action sociale est cohérente avec celui d'autres activistes qui comprennent que la conscience critique, des recherches rigoureuses et des théories peuvent émerger et émergent d'une implication dans des contextes d'action et d'organisation, plutôt que de l'imposition d'idées élitistes au « peuple ». (L. T. Smith, 1999; Kelley, 2002; Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Kinsman, 2006). Néanmoins, comme le soulignent Doug Bevington et Chris Dixon (2005), il arrive fréquemment que d'importants débats ayant lieu au sein des mouvements sociaux ne soient pas intégrés à la littérature, alors que peu d'activistes lisent les théories portant sur les mouvements sociaux.

Les universitaires qui cherchent à comprendre les mouvements sociaux et les réseaux d'organisations non gouvernementales (ONG), ainsi que l'éducation et la production de connaissances et d'apprentissages qui leur sont associés, doivent prendre le temps d'étudier les questions émanant de ces mouvements sociaux et recherches activistes en ce qui a trait aux dynamiques de pouvoir et la valorisation de certaines formes de connaissances. Ces problématiques sont souvent basées sur des macro et micro-analyses de ce que, pour un étranger, peut sembler un déroutant réseau de relations et d'instables dynamiques de pouvoir. Cela ne signifie pas pour autant que l'évaluation et l'analyse faite par un intervenant impliqué dans des causes activistes soient *nécessairement* rigoureuses ou adéquates. Les « political activist ethnographers » George Smith (2006) et Gary Kinsman (2006) recommandent tous deux aux chercheurs activistes d'outrepasser les « théories du bon sens » qui prévalent fréquemment dans ces milieux sans refléter les réelles pratiques sociales et organisationnelles. En ce sens, la réflexivité est fondamentale que l'on prenne les formes de connaissances activistes comme point de départ ou objet central d'analyse, ou encore qu'on s'y engage. Dans la même veine, Foley (1999) écrit que le

processus d'apprentissage critique implique des individus qui théorisent leur expérience : ils prennent du recul et y remettent de l'ordre, en faisant appel à des concepts comme le pouvoir, les conflits, les structures, les valeurs et les choix. Il est aussi évident que l'apprentissage critique se fait de manière informelle, via l'expérience, en agissant et en réfléchissant sur nos actions, plutôt que dans le cadre de cours formels. (p. 64) (Traduction libre)

Plusieurs comptes-rendus produits par des universitaires, activistes ou ONGs n'accordent pas une attention suffisante aux efforts d'éducation politique et aux travaux d'organisations communautaires plus modérés et de longue haleine qui passent totalement inaperçus. D'autres universitaires, comme Walter Mignolo (2000) et l'éducationnaliste maori Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) soulèvent des questions importantes relativement aux relations existant entre la recherche académique, les épistémologies du savoir, le colonialisme et l'impérialisme, nous mettent en garde contre l'application sans réflexion critique et la généralisation des théories et des concepts développés dans des contextes occidentaux au tiers-monde et aux communautés autochtones (un

élément qui est soulevé dans plusieurs articles de cette édition, particulièrement dans les écrits de Kapoor et Langdon).

Bevington et Dixon (2005) lancent un appel pour que les théories générées au sein de mouvements soient reconnues et pour qu'un engagement réciproque et dynamique entre les théoriciens et les activistes mène à la formulation, la production, le raffinement et l'application des résultats de recherche. Ils soutiennent que

les universitaires étudiant les mouvements sociaux n'ont pas le monopole sur les théories émises sur ces mouvements. Les individus impliqués dans ces mouvements produisent eux aussi des théories, même si une large part de celles-ci ne sont pas associées aux études sur les mouvements sociaux. Ce type de théories couvre et transcende de multiples niveaux d'abstraction, des détails de logistique quotidienne à l'analyse profonde. (p. 195)

L'historien Robin Kelley (2002), spécialisé en histoire des Noirs américains, soutient que « trop souvent, nos critères d'évaluation des mouvements sociaux cherchent à soupeser si les intervenants ont réalisé ou non leur vision « avec succès » plutôt qu'à étudier les mérites ou la puissance intrinsèque de ces visions » (p. ix). Telle que le suggère la citation qui débute ce texte, Kelley partage le point de vue de Bevington et Dixon relativement au fait que les mouvements sociaux génèrent de nouvelles connaissances, questions et théories et met aussi l'emphasis sur le besoin d'un engagement concret et critique de ces mouvements pour faire face aux problèmes des populations opprimées. Par ailleurs, Kelley illustre la pertinence, pour les luttes contemporaines, de s'inspirer des ressources conceptuelles provenant d'une relecture critique de l'histoire des mouvements plus anciens – une approche que D'Souza, Kapoor, Austin et Langdon préconisent tous dans les articles publiés dans cette édition, chacun de manière différente. Ces types de connaissances et de théories, sont souvent forgés par des luttes sociales fondamentales et changeantes qu'ils contribuent également à faire évoluer.

Malgré le fait qu'il existe un bassin considérable d'écrits universitaires portant sur l'éducation et les apprentissages des adultes, peu d'efforts ont été réalisés jusqu'à maintenant pour théoriser les apprentissages informels et la production de connaissances générées dans le cadre d'une implication sociale. Foley (1999) fait l'examen de cette dimension en analysant et validant l'importance des apprentissages fortuits générés dans une variété de luttes sociales. Il avance qu'une telle analyse requière « qu'un individu rédige des études de cas sur les apprentissages en pleine action, dressant des liens explicatifs entre les contextes politiques et économiques globaux, les micro-politiques, les idéologies, les discours prévalant et les apprentissages. » (p.132) (Traduction libre)

À l'instar de Foley, John Holst (2002) utilise le concept de pédagogie de la mobilisation pour décrire :

les apprentissages inhérents à la mise en place et au maintien des mouvements sociaux et de leurs organisations. En participant aux mouvements sociaux, les individus développent de nombreuses compétences et des manières de penser analytiquement et stratégiquement tout en tentant de comprendre leur mouvement en mouvance;... De surcroît, lorsque des alliances se forment, les individus développent une compréhension de plus en plus sophistiquée des interconnexions relationnelles se tissant au sein d'un tout social. (pp. 87-88) (Traduction libre)

Examinons maintenant le contenu de ce numéro qui débute par un article de Radha D'Souza dans lequel elle puise dans son expérience de militante syndicale, activiste politique et avocat engagé. Dans ce texte, elle réfléchit sur le sens donné à l'activisme étudiant, questionnant les contextes institutionnels de connaissances et les relations de la connaissance aux transformations émancipatoires des structures sociales. En dressant le contexte et l'historique de l'activisme étudiant ainsi que la production de connaissances dans les mouvements sociaux et universitaires, elle crée un métissage entre les théories sociales et des réflexions sur son engagement personnel dans les années 1970 en Inde.

Dans le deuxième article, Vinci Daro puise dans ses recherches ethnographiques réalisées sur les initiatives de mobilisations des réseaux activistes transnationaux de justice globale lors d'événements majeurs, tels que la conférence annuelle de la Banque mondiale/Fonds monétaire international à Prague en 2002, le Sommet des Amériques à Québec en 2001 et la rencontre ministérielle de l'Organisation mondiale du commerce à Cancun en 2003, pour affirmer que la production de connaissances dans les mouvements sociaux engendre un climat relationnel intense et une disposition énergique envers les différences de langues, de normes, d'objectifs et de traditions, qui sont à l'origine de la vitalité de ces réseaux. Elle soutient que « les réseaux activistes de justice globale génèrent des milieux dynamiques qui permettent d'apprendre à négocier les différences existant entre les diverses origines culturelles, expériences historiques, positions sociales et visions politiques. »

Par la suite, s'inspirant de son association depuis 1992 avec le peuple adivasi d'Orissa en Inde, Dip Kapoor dresse un portrait du genre d'apprentissages rendus possibles par les actions des mouvements sociaux locaux et inter-cités des Adivasis s'attaquant aux collusions existant entre l'État et le milieu privé dans les initiatives de développement, aux relations entre l'État et les castes et en résultante, à la dépossession du peuple adivasi de leurs terres, forêts et façons de vivre, intensifiée depuis 1991 sous le régime néolibéral indien.

Jonathan Langdon aborde la production de connaissances au sein des mouvements sociaux activistes et éducatifs ghanéens. Cette analyse est articulée autour de la notion développée par Foley (1999) portant sur les apprentissages produits au sein des luttes, et la recherche active et participante à laquelle Langdon a pris part fournit une vue multidimensionnelle de la manière dont se réalisent

les apprentissages dans les mouvements sociaux ghanéens. Langdon propose une vision complexe fondée sur les caractéristiques mouvantes du pouvoir et du capital.

Mishka Lysack applique le concept de zone proximale de développement et la théorie de l'apprentissage comme processus transactionnel ancré dans le socio-relationnel de Vygotsky pour mettre en lumière des aspects d'un forum éducatif portant sur le réchauffement climatique, mis sur pied par des activistes socio-environnementaux de Calgary. Cet article se termine par une discussion des défis et opportunités auxquels fait face le mouvement contre le réchauffement climatique en Amérique du nord relativement à l'éducation du public.

En conclusion, David Austin explore le rôle de l'engagement et l'implication pratique dans l'apprentissage et la manière dont les études anticoloniales ont été prises en charge et complétées, l'activisme ainsi que les pensées politiques caribéens, en particulier dans le cadre du *Caribbean Conference Committee (CCC)* de Montréal dans les années 1960 et 1970. Austin illustre les dynamiques prévalant entre les apprentissages formels et informels dans le contexte d'organisation communautaire et l'héritage qu'a légué le CCC à l'éducation et l'action communautaire contemporaine.

Il existe une multitude de pédagogies de la mobilisation, pour paraphraser la terminologie de Holst (2002). Ce numéro de la *Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* peut uniquement présenter des aperçus des univers de la production de connaissances, d'apprentissages et de l'action sociale. Il s'agit d'une modeste contribution à un bassin des écrits scientifiques en pleine croissance, stimulant et dynamique – au sein des réseaux universitaires et activistes du monde entier – qui pose de nouvelles questions et en revisite certaines existantes.

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THE PRISON HOUSES OF KNOWLEDGE: ACTIVIST SCHOLARSHIP AND REVOLUTION IN THE ERA OF “GLOBALIZATION”

RADHA D'SOUZA *University of Westminster, UK*

ABSTRACT. The rise of new social movements has produced an emerging discourse on activist scholarship. There is considerable ambiguity about what the term means. In this article I draw on my work as a trade unionist, political activist, and activist lawyer in Mumbai, and later as a social justice activist in New Zealand to reflect on the meaning of activist scholarship, interrogate the institutional contexts for knowledge, and the relationship of knowledge to emancipatory structural social transformations. Although based on personal experiences, this article provides a theoretically oriented meta-analysis of activist scholarship.

LES PRISONS DE LA CONNAISSANCE : L'ACTIVISME ÉTUDIANT ET LA RÉVOLUTION À L'ÈRE DE LA « GLOBALISATION »

RÉSUMÉ. La montée des nouveaux mouvements sociaux a provoqué l'émergence d'un discours novateur sur l'activisme étudiant. Il persiste cependant une grande ambiguïté quand à la signification de ce terme. Dans cet article, je m'inspire de mes travaux comme militante syndicale, activiste politique et avocate engagée à Mumbai, ainsi que de mon expérience en tant que activiste en justice sociale en Nouvelle-Zélande pour réfléchir sur le sens à donner à l'activisme étudiant, m'interroger sur les contextes institutionnels du savoir, et sur la relation existant entre le savoir et les transformations structurelles d'émancipation. Bien que prenant appui sur mes expériences personnelles, cet article étaye une méta-analyse théorique de l'activisme étudiant.

INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to trace activist scholarship as it has evolved over the past twenty-five years or so, and to ask where that trajectory leads us in the future. My point of departure is my own experience as activist, writer, and critic in India since the early 1970s. My reflections will resonate with many in the “Third World” who share comparable experiences of historical colonialism, post-war neo-colonialism, and who are currently grappling with the turmoil of globalization and new forms of imperialism after the end of the Cold War. My reflections crisscross boundaries of personal narratives and social theory

with the hope of drawing out new insights from theories and practices that might help to grasp what is entailed in activist scholarship.

After drawing attention to the institutional dimensions of scholarship, problematize activism and scholarship, I draw out the connections between different types of knowledge/scholarship and the possibilities of revolutionary structural transformations of societies. The article then draws attention to the qualitative leap entailed in action that is required if scholarship is to transform the world in radical ways. At the end of the day, the quality of knowledge produced by scholarship needs to be evaluated on the basis of its transformative potential – i.e. its capacity to transform unjust and inequitable relationships in the world as it is today *as well as* radically transform the structures that generate oppression, inequality and injustice.

INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF SCHOLARSHIP

On a pleasant October morning in Mumbai in 1981, long before the internet era, I received an intriguing mail. I was surprised to find an invitation by the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta (IIM), one of the premier institutions of academic learning in India, to present a paper on the Samant Phenomenon at a conference on the rise of labour militancy in the country. The Samant Phenomenon referred to labour militancy in the Mumbai region under the leadership of Dr. Datta Samant, a militant unionist (later assassinated in January 1997), whom I knew closely.

The IIM would fly me to Calcutta and pay for my stay there in a reasonably comfortable hotel. For an activist, it was early exposure to the luxuries of air travel and hotel accommodation, but more importantly, it was public acknowledgement of my knowledge by what was admittedly a part of the establishment. It signified a marked shift in the prevalent perceptions of boundaries between academic and other types of knowledge within the academe and outside of it. A number of developments in the *real world* contributed to the shift.

The sixties and seventies were important decades in the shaping of contemporary politics in India. While secessionist movements in the North-eastern states continued uninterrupted from the colonial era, the first real salvo in post-independence India was fired by the Naxalbari peasant uprising in a remote part of West Bengal in early 1967 (Banerjee, 1984; Bannerjee, 1980; Ghosh, 1974). It was followed by a series of similar uprisings in other states; a radicalised Maoist youth movement referred to as the Naxalites; challenges to federalism in southern states followed by Jammu & Kashmir and the Punjab; demands for statehood by different nationalities; splits, dissensions and ideological debates on the so-called “ultra-Left”; bloody, armed state repression of the peasant, youth and nationality movements; a nation-wide railway strike, a national emergency; “encounter deaths” – India’s term for Pinochet-style disappearances of opponents on the radical Left, and a lot more.

Unlike the Chilean state under the Pinochet regime which overthrew an elected left wing coalition that had come to power with promises of land reform and pro-poor policies, and which established a bloody and repressive military dictatorship, the Indian state, following in the best of British traditions, turned to governance to face the challenges from the post-independence generation. Poverty and democracy came top on the national rhetoric, followed by democracy and nation-building. The national emergency was a big part of it. Indira Gandhi's slogan to give legitimacy to the national emergency was "Garibi Hatao," (eliminate poverty), which the poor turned on its head by truncating it to "Garib ko hatao," (eliminate the poor). Indira Gandhi was forced to end the emergency and call for general elections. The Shah Commission appointed after the end of the emergency indicted the state for the disappearances of young people, often poor rural youth in staged "encounter deaths" by the police (Shah Commission, 1978). Legal professionals turned to innovative judicial interpretations in an attempt to make the law more responsive to the needs of the poor. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court warned "law itself is on trial" (Bhagwati, 1985, 1986) and in case after case, held the bureaucracy to account for ignoring the law as it was applied to the poorest of the poor, from bonded labourers to child workers. Many youths abandoned ideas about revolution and embraced their role as spokespersons of the poor and took to public interest, social action litigation. The message was clear – if the institutions of governance did not respond suitably, uprisings like the Naxalbari would indeed turn into the "spring thunder," as prophesied by Chairman Mao.

The political turbulence of the sixties and seventies was informed by scholarship, although of a very different type. It included philosophy and theory, empirical analysis, debates about agency and intervention. It included scholarly and activist publications. However, the locale of knowledge production was based not within academic institutions but in political organizations with an explicit manifesto of revolutionary social transformation. Consequently, the scholarship that informed radical political change was often wholly or partially underground, fearing state repression. Nonetheless they were read by, and one may add respected by, many academic scholars. The (semi)underground publications engaged with the theoretical orientations of different journals, academic and non-academic, from the standpoint of the oppressed in the country. This knowledge production was not seen as scholarship by universities and academic institutions, largely because the persons producing it were not professionally trained academics. As will become apparent in this article, this perception has less to do with scholarship *per se* and more to do with the types of organizations that espoused the scholarship.

Within the academe, many academics were part of the turbulent times either as students or witnesses to the radical and repressive environment on campuses at the time, or participants at the margins. Their experiences became part of their

research problematic within academic institutions. The new problematic they brought to the academe could not be addressed within the insular boundaries of traditional academe. Since then, and as a result of the turbulence of the times, many academic institutions have established centres for learning that produce knowledge about the causes of social upheavals such as the Naxalbari uprising. Ironically, the non-academic theory and analysis that accompanied Naxalbari articulated unambiguously the causes of social upheavals. What was new was not the knowledge of the causes of injustice but the institutions that produced the knowledge.

There was a new receptivity to activists outside knowledge institutions like the academe and the media. Many sympathetic journalists found work with mainstream newspapers. I started writing a weekly column on labour for the *Business Standard* as a way of earning my living without getting too embroiled in a regular job. The point here is that such options, unthinkable just a few years earlier, became possible for the first time. The academic scholars and the sympathetic journalists all wrote and reported on similar sorts of things as the radical political movements. In another organizational context, the *same knowledge* appeared to have a different type of *effect* on society. Within one organizational setting, the knowledge challenged liberal spaces; in another, liberal spaces came to be reclaimed.

The above story may be interpreted in different ways. It is possible to argue that India's experience shows the need to claim liberal spaces through activist scholarship; that the Indian way is better than the Chilean way, with its militarism, torture, and pain. Equally it is possible to argue that India too had its own Chilean-style dictatorship; notwithstanding the legal activism, sympathetic journalism, and academic spaces, the extra-judicial killings, the armed suppression of dissent, the normalization of routine repression of the poor, the eviction of the poor from their hearth and homes to make way for an elitist development, also happened in India. Indeed even today, custodial deaths, suppression of political dissent, and eviction of the poor to make way for elitist development continue. The political turmoil in Chile roughly parallels the turmoil in India. Yet, in the eyes of progressive solidarity movements then, and "global civil society" now, Chile is the quintessential Third World dictatorship, and India, the incomprehensible aberration of a Third World democracy, the world's largest one at that! This paradox is at the heart of the problematic of activist scholarship – the paradox of how similar realities come to be represented and envisioned in different ways; and how comparable values, for example, justice for the poor, the conditions of the peasantry, empowerment, struggles, equality, non-discrimination, democracy as freedom from state repression and so on, come to mean different things at different times and places.

There could be another way of reading the story. Why did an elitist institution like the IIM want to invite input from admittedly political activists; and why

did they recruit Left intellectuals on their staff to contribute to programs on management? The IIM Calcutta was established as the first national institute for post-graduate studies and research in management by the Government of India in November 1961 in collaboration with the Alfred P. Sloan School of Management (MIT), the Government of West Bengal, the Ford Foundation, and Indian industry.¹ During its initial years, several prominent faculty formed part of its nucleus including Paul Samuelson and Jagdish Sheth, among others. The question becomes even more pertinent today, when everywhere universities are being restructured, inspired by neo-liberal values and policies; at a time when the World Bank, OECD and other national and international organizations, public and private, have generated a new discourse around the “knowledge economy.” Not surprisingly, embracing activist scholars has not kept elite Indian academic institutions away from neo-liberal policies and restructuring. The story invites us to examine the institutional contexts in which activist scholarship becomes relevant to academic institutions. How should we see the knowledge produced by progressive academics working within institutions set up for governance of society such as universities, whether in the old economy or the new knowledge economy?

There is a third way of reading the story. The academics who invited the activists may certainly have learned something about the real world and the real causes of labour unrest in the country at the time. For activists like me who went to the conferences, what did we take back to activism? What difference did it make to the workers, the peasants, the rural poor, the *dalits*² and Indigenous Peoples, on whose behalf we, the activists, spoke? This question becomes more significant today when increasingly academics from influential universities and think tank organizations arrogate to themselves the right to speak for the world’s poor and dispossessed through their participation in events such as the World Social Forum (D’Souza, 2004).

These readings of the story invite us to interrogate the institutional boundaries of knowledge production, in the one case academe, and in the other the political organizations, and ask what the blurring of those boundaries means for social change. Activist scholarship is, in the final analysis, about those boundaries and how and for what they are negotiated. What exactly do we mean by activist scholarship? Interrogating those boundaries requires problematizing both “activism” and “scholarship.”

ACTIVIST SCHOLARSHIP? ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARS? OR ACTIVISM IN SCHOLARSHIP?

Much later in life I enrolled in a western university to do a Ph.D. By then the boundaries between activism and scholarship had blurred and it was easier to cross activist and academic boundaries. Indeed the domains often overlapped. Universities designed special bridging courses to enable those who left academe to pursue activism to return to the academic fold. Social science faculties

developed new programs on social movements. Management schools started courses on non-profit organizations. Academic institutions acknowledged the publications of activists written in non-academic contexts. Against this backdrop, my dissertation had to do with imperialism.

I was dismayed when I was advised strongly not to use the term “imperialism” because it sounded like something from the sixties. The dissertation had to demonstrate I had moved on intellectually, I was told. Surely, I argued, imperialism was not a matter of academic fashions. For me it was a reality that informed our lives as I knew it and understood it. During the final stages of my thesis submission, Hardt and Negri’s book *Empire* (2000) was published and became what Passavant and Dean call “academia’s version of a blockbuster” (2004, p. 2). Since then, and especially after 9/11, imperialism has become a “cool” word and an “in thing” judging by the number of books on imperialism in the bookstores these days. It made me wonder what makes a political terminology come and go out of fashion. Why does a political term sound threatening in some contexts and not in others? In order to answer the question it is necessary to differentiate between the *social spaces where knowledge is produced* and the *effect that knowledge produces on social reality*.

The end of the Cold War has seen the rise of new political language. Prominent in the new political vocabulary are terms like “activism” (was there passivity before?), “global social movements” (as opposed to national?), “new social movements” (as opposed to old?), “anti-capitalism” (and pro-what?), and some with a more distinct flavour of classical liberalism, like “civil society.”

What does activism mean? Most will argue against a binary or literal view and say that they mean “progressive” action that advances social justice and equity. Nevertheless, progressive action could encompass an array of diverse political standpoints. Activism could be a moral ideal, a superior ethic antithetical to the market ethic, something that one engages in, ideally, over and above, or outside of the things we do in our market-life as workers, employees, professionals, etc. In that sense, it could include any philanthropic activity, any form of altruism. Activism could challenge capitalism and the social order from a range of standpoints, from anarchism and armed insurrection, to narrow constitutionalism and parliamentary politics. It could entail reform of capitalism by reconciling market values to egalitarian values; or simply changes in the regime of formal and enabling rights entailed in law reform. It could include a range of views about environment, labour, the “Third World” and Indigenous Peoples. Activism could mean the opposite of passivity, meaning a person participates in the world of the market but nothing outside it. In this sense, activism invokes duties of citizenship which includes living within a market context but contributing something towards maintaining the general conditions required for the smooth functioning of the social order founded on market relations. Activism becomes an omnibus political terminology with a negative meaning in that it does not refer to any specific content or substance.

It may be argued that multiple meanings need to be contested, such contestation is permissible, or at least must be permitted and valued, and it is in such contestation that activist scholarship acquires meaning and relevance. This idea of permissibility itself needs to be interrogated before we can speak of “activist scholarship” in any real sense.

The “Old Left” infused political terms with specific meanings. Terms like imperialism, working class, bourgeoisie, nation, capital, markets, colonies, explained the reality of the lived world. Terms like petit bourgeois politics, syndicalists, socialists, communists, anarchists, revisionists, reformists, liberals, social-democrats, and nihilists denoted the philosophical and theoretical orientations of different groups in society vis-à-vis the lived world. By doing so the Old Left developed *concepts* that explained reality and *analytical tools* that pointed to ways of dealing with reality. No doubt, the explicit articulation of positions invited intense debates and arguments, factionalism and splits, sometimes bloody, but at least people knew what they were arguing about, most of the time anyway. Equally, they were conscious of the *real stakes* entailed in their arguments. The awareness of stakes opened up the spaces for political alliances as exemplified in the politics of united fronts which involved bringing diverse interests together for specific programmatic goals.

The result was structural change. One sixth of the world opted out of the capitalist system, another one-sixth opted out of the colonial system, and the remaining rumpus of capitalism was forced to resort to drastic institutional and ideological innovations to restructure capitalism. The *success* of the post-war program of ideological and institutional innovation to restructure capitalism is at the heart of the problematic of activist scholarship. Somewhere along the ideological road, *successful restructuring* of the capitalist/colonialist project for most people in most parts of the world has become conflated with *valid knowledge* about the world everywhere. This is notwithstanding the fact that there appears to be, in the words of Rajni Kothari, “an inverse correlation between the expansion of human knowledge and decline in our capacity to deal with the real problems [of humanity]” (1988, p. 23).

In sharp contrast to the Old Left, development of progressive vocabulary has tended to lean towards omnibus political terminology that can accommodate a range of concepts and meanings, often contradictory, and philosophically and theoretically incompatible. Much of this has been in the name of inclusiveness and broad-based unity. For example, anti-globalization is a term that can accommodate a range of contradictory concepts from economic nationalism to revolutionary internationalism. The omnibus term “poor,” used instead of terms like workers, peasants, or untouchable castes says little about the relationships between the poor *inter se*, between the poor in the First and Third Worlds, between the rich in the First and Third Worlds, differences in the ways in which the rich come to be rich and poor come to be poor in the First and Third Worlds. All of those differences can be subsumed in the inclusive word

“poor” to accommodate a range of meanings. Likewise “empire” can mean “network capitalism,” “imperialism,” “imperialist globalization,” or simply the changes in the forms of governance such as the United States’ experience at the present moment in its history. It is not surprising that both the Left and the Right in the US talk about Empire; and it is possible to argue that Hardt and Negri’s work became academe’s version of a blockbuster precisely because their language of discourse can mean many things to many people.

The point here is that such omnibus and conceptually ambiguous language prevents *concept formation* and development of *analytical tools* that are so essential for *structural social change*. The philosopher Roy Bhaskar emphasizes the concept-dependent nature of human and social life (1989). Concepts are inherited historically and developed through engagement within socio-temporal-spatial contexts. Neutral omnibus language de-historicizes, de-politicizes and de-contextualizes concepts, and undermines the importance of concept-formation for social change. In the case of human societies, history is the laboratory where social experiences are examined, analyzed and reformulated for further use. The politics of inclusion holds up the ideal of including everyone in supposedly neutral democratic spaces. In reality, the language of inclusiveness disarms politics from building *real unity* and *real alliances* for structural change based on programmatic goals. It does this by de-linking ideas from history and context and thereby stunting the development of conceptual categories and analytical tools so essential for structural change. Without an inclusive politics in *reality*, the revolutions of the early twentieth century could never have occurred. Yet it is to the credit of the inclusive language that the reality of inclusive politics comes to be represented as *non-inclusive*, based on their discourses.

By accommodating multiple meanings, radical concepts like revolutionary structural transformation can *co-exist* in society as part of an omnibus anti-systemic movement (Wallerstein, 2002), at least theoretically, together with reformist, evolutionary and other forms of social change without explicitly and openly negotiating programmatic alliances. In this, inclusive language resonates with the ideas of liberty and freedom in classical liberal theory. Latter-day Marxist revolutionaries assessed those ideas as “bourgeois democracy” to delineate the scope of freedom and possibilities of engagement for those who envisioned change in more radical ways. “Socialist revolutionaries,” a term used by the Old Left, meant people with a specific philosophical orientation engaged in action with certain stated political goals. In contrast “activism” and “activists” does not necessarily mean structural change, yet it does not exclude it. Universities, because of the very nature of their organizations as sites of knowledge production, must prefer the development of such omnibus language to more specific ones. It becomes possible for a range of views to co-exist within the *same* institutional framework. The significance of this for activist scholarship may be expanded by considering through analogy the place of freedom, justice and dissent in liberal theory.

Presenting a synchronic account of the changes in the ethics of capitalism, Jiwei Ci argues “freedom” and “justice” in liberal theory are negative freedoms and negative justice in as much as “conformity to formally universal rules [...] marks the limits of moral obligation [...]” (1999, p. 414). Freedom and justice are conceptualized as absence of restraint, formal rules of procedure, possibility of choices, etc. Consequently from the fact that “something is allowed to happen,” liberal theory invites us to conclude that “it is likely to happen or even cause it to happen”, and:

In this way, [...] manage[s] to impart a moral halo to capitalism by inviting us to evaluate capitalism not in terms of what it requires but in terms of what it permits, and by subtly leading us to ignore the distinction between the necessary and the enabling or sufficient conditions of virtue. (Ci, 1999, p. 416)

The moralization of freedom is “the representation of negative freedom as something of moral value in its own right,” (Ci, 1999, p. 413) and “the maximization of choices is a morally worthwhile project that requires no further justification in terms of the content of the choices” (p. 430).

... the power of the myth of freedom depends on the degree to which negative freedom can, short of merging into positive freedom, be made to take on intrinsic as opposed to merely instrumental value [in other words] can be “moralised.” (Ci, 1999, p. 426)

The innovation of language that echoes a positive sentiment but does not necessarily carry a definite conceptual meaning enables negative ideals such as freedom, justice and liberty to be moralized as an absolute virtue, without infusing it with specific political meaning. No one can seriously argue that freedom and justice are bad things, but what exactly do we mean by those words, and how do they fit with the larger market structures under which we live? Contrast *bourgeois democracy*, a term that qualifies democracy, acknowledges its positive aspects and signals its limitations and retains and expands the sentiment expressed in the word “democracy.”

The politics of inclusion and the inclusive language of politics it has generated expanded the negative spaces of freedom and choice in traditional liberalism, understood *without* reference to their substance/content. It concealed the reality that the new politics of inclusion, a product of the ideological and political movements of the sixties and seventies in the West, was about *excluding* the Old Left and the structural transformations their actions had succeeded in bringing about. It concealed the reality that the expansion of negative spaces itself was made possible by the centralized, and oligopolistic character of post-war imperialism underpinned by technological developments and legal innovations, in other words, the “positive” content of capitalism in the post-war era.

Meanwhile, implicit in the idea of activist scholarship is a dichotomous conceptualization of theory and practice that activist scholarship presumably seeks

to overcome. The mainstream, non-engaged, non-activist, professional academic is the dichotomous “Other” of the concerned, activist, and engaged scholar. Such a conceptualization is open to challenge on a number of grounds.

All theories ramify practices of one kind or another, implicitly or explicitly; and conversely all practices are informed by some theory, either explicit or implicit.³ The challenge for activists and scholars alike is to make explicit that which is implicit in their theories and in their practices. Meeting that challenge invites our attention to a different kind of engagement altogether. It invites us to engage with the co-relation between theory and practice regardless of whether such theories and practices originate within academe or outside it; and investigate instead the ways in which the institutional contexts impinge upon the larger goals of political action.

Scholarship then turns its focus away from the *role* of academics in universities and societies, away from idealizing *all* activism as morally desirable, and turns instead to the *objectives* that the academic *qua* citizen wishes to achieve through the scholarship; and to the practices that are ramified in the theories they produce. The foci then shift to knowledge for what, for whom, for what kind of activism, and the ways in which institutional constraints colour our knowledge of the world.

Is activist scholarship about activists *and* scholars or about activism *in* scholarship, or scholarship *about* activism? The first denotes a relationship based on shared values working towards common goals in different institutional settings. The latter two involve knowledge production within universities and research institutions. The apparently neutral spaces of academe need to be interrogated to be able to speak in any meaningful way about activist scholarship.

The problem of activist scholarship then can be rephrased in the the following way: what are the relations between citizens, human agents, who share common philosophical orientations and programmatic goals and who work within and outside academic/research institutions? Seen in that way, activist scholarship cannot be reduced to yet another type of liberal space; to a negative and permissive freedom, where the permissiveness itself becomes more valuable for its own sake than what is permitted, i.e. the content of social practices ramified in the research. Reformulated in this way, both activism and scholarship, within and outside the universities must return the focus to the substance of activism and scholarship *regardless* of the professional spaces where it is produced. In doing so, the activist and scholar alike are bound to confront the limitations of their respective institutional settings.

The immediate programmatic goals of the party or organisation will constrain the activist from pursuing the theoretical and conceptual aspects of practices; and the institutional settings of universities and research institutions will constrain the academic in providing the type of theoretical and conceptual

knowledge needed to pursue their desired goals as citizens. As Marx said, knowledge of necessity gives freedom of action. Understanding the institutional constraints on knowledge production is a necessary condition for an emancipatory epistemology. The emphasis here is not merely on what we know but *how* we know what we know.

Stanley Tambiah (1990) refers to two axes around which knowledge is produced, vertical and horizontal. The vertical axis consists of theories, the problematic addressed in the scholarship, the types of issues scholars engage with. The horizontal axis represents the institutional dimensions of knowledge production. In social sciences, the permissive spaces provided by the liberal ideals of academic institutions are *offset* by a range of professional norms and practices. The way research funding is allocated, the ways in which funding policies influence the choice of research problematic, the politics of peer review that ensures scholarship remains within acceptable bounds, the means by which journals are set up and promoted, the “publish or perish” imperative that guides academic work, the performance appraisals, all of these internal norms colour the way reality is understood. Above all, knowledge produced within academic spaces is coloured by the disciplinary lens through which a problem is viewed; the ways in which technologies and databases atomize knowledge by making them “programmable” in definite ways, the codification of knowledge and its long hand in the history of colonization more generally. The point here is to understand the ways in which reality is *coloured* by those constraints and the ways in which the knowledge produced in certain contexts limits the wider aspirations we have for the societies we live in as citizens. The problem for philosophers, as Marx argued, is not only to interpret the world but to change it, and in order to change it, understanding the constraints imposed on the philosophers and their philosophies itself becomes an important question for reflection.

The problem of activist scholarship thus entails a tension between two types of norms – the norms of citizenship and of professional institutions. The tension calls into question the very permissiveness and the politics of the liberal spaces in sustaining the paradox of knowledge in contemporary times to which Rajni Kothari alludes. It is therefore not possible to speak of activist scholarship in any meaningful way without clarifying the orientation of both types of activities, activism and scholarship, to structural and revolutionary versus constitutional and reformist changes.

MOBILIZING FROM THE “TOP”

In the movie *Viva Zapata*,⁴ Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican peasant fighting to keep the land from which he and others were evicted, joins forces with Francisco Madera⁵ fighting for constitutional reform. After the initial victory, there is a scene in the film where Zapata goes to meet Madera to ask for the

return of their land. Madera replies that the matter was not quite so simple, and they would have to legislate for constitutional reforms before the land could be returned. Madera is overthrown and Zapata is killed. The scene in some way captures the problematic of activist scholarship. For Madera, the meaning of the revolution was a constitutional order. For Zapata, the meaning of the revolution was return of land to his people.

For the intellectuals, the peasants and their problems derive meaning from the constitutional political order. For peasants themselves, the constitution derives its meaning from return of their land. Both however, need alliances with the other to articulate their aspirations. It is important to recognize this tension in activist scholarship to appreciate the scope and the limitations afforded for such scholarship within the institutional spaces of universities and research organizations. For academic scholars the starting point is the world "out there" and the problems therein that need fixing through their research. For the people out there, the problem is "our land" and "our people."

Summarizing broadly, activism includes two types of mobilization that may be characterized as "proactive mobilization," which occurs from the "top," in that it aims to defend the ideals of the existing order often expressed as constitutional values, and reactive mobilization, which is articulated from below in that it seeks challenge the ideals and values of the existing order and replace them with something new and better. The starting point for proactive mobilization is an ideal and how that ideal is envisioned. The starting point for reactive mobilization is the real existing conditions of life perceived as intolerable and oppressive. The orientation of mobilization from the top is to achieve certain ideals; the orientation of mobilization from below is to transcend certain oppressive states of being as a real lived experience. The distinction, though often blurred in *realpolitik*, is conceptually important for a number of reasons.

First, both types of mobilization involve scholarship *and* activism. The function of scholarship and activism is however different in the two types of mobilization. In the one case, scholarship points to the disparities and the gaps between the ideal and the reality, and action is oriented towards bridging that gap. Much of the scholarship and activism emerging from the new global movements, inspired or based in the West, the anti-globalization movements for example, are based on critical scholarship combined with activism. Necessarily generalizing, it would be fair to say that mostly the scholarship focuses on the gaps between what ought to be and what is, on double standards and hypocrisy on the part of governments, corporations, and political parties/leaders, for example. From this, it follows logically, that action must attempt to bridge the gap by approximating the ideal. Much of the critique is therefore empirically grounded. The critique clings on to empiricism *philosophically* even when the scholarship emphasizes qualitative research methodology against quantitative

ones, and acknowledges the importance of engagement with the wider society. Such scholarship translates into action that is premised on voluntarism, free will, and the primacy of moral action unconstrained by context, and on the understanding that individuals can achieve the ideals if only they will morally transform themselves, in other words, have political will.

Reactive mobilization on the other hand requires knowledge of *how* oppression occurs, the sources of the power of the oppressors, what sustains them, who else feels constrained by them and to what extent, and their limitations. Such a critique *explains* the social order, the causes and modalities of oppression, so that the oppressed can *identify* the actors and institutions involved, and assess possibilities of political alliances to greater or lesser extent. Such explanatory critique has the *potential* to become empowering in certain organizational contexts where emancipatory knowledge is transformed into *instrumentalist* knowledge oriented towards action. Scholarship supportive of reactive mobilization points to the possibilities and constraints imposed by the context so that activist scholarship can *assess* the relative strengths and weaknesses in a given context and judge the scope and the freedom for action that exists within it.

Thus, Marx's analysis of capitalism, by showing the nature of the actors involved in capitalist production, and the necessary yet asymmetrical relationship of the workers to capital, pointed to a manifesto of action that informed the socialist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and changed the architecture of the world *in actual fact*. The scholarship contributed to ways of understanding the world that helped change it in radical ways. In stabilizing the upheavals of the early twentieth century, the knowledge produced by Marx and Marxists had to be recognized, accepted and given credibility. The recognition came at a price, in that Marxism itself became the object of scholarship, producing an immanent discourse of Marxism that disengaged scholarship from activism, meaning the murky business of actually changing the world. The accommodation of explanatory critique as one of the many types of possible critiques within liberal institutional spaces has the effect of idealizing the liberal space rather than mobilizing people for social change. It is important to recognize that the accommodation occurs only in certain historical contexts. To idealize that space without pointing to its limitations, and to refrain from analyzing the *effect* of radical scholarship within conservative institutional boundaries, is to concede that the space is more important than what we do within it.

Second, the tension/affinity between activism and scholarship is often presented as a methodological problem in social science pointing to the need to involve the subjects in the research so as to bring about a better co-relation between scholarship and reality. Since the early sixties, methodologies such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) have argued for the participation of subjects in the research about them. The proponents of these new research methodolo-

gies were seen as dissident voices in scholarship at one time. Debates over methodologies such as PAR derive meaning from their juxtaposition against dominant methodologies in social science research. Measured against dominant methodologies, the claims for PAR can only be limited ones: that they produce better scholarship. It says little about the effectiveness of the scholarship in bringing about the types of social changes that drove the research, let alone structural social change.

On the contrary, there is some evidence that knowledge produced using better research methodologies has contributed to improved corporate governance. Increasingly international organizations such as the World Bank and other development agencies are using the knowledge gained through activist scholarship for purposes that are the very opposite of the inspiration for the research – to improve governance in the wake of rising discontent against their policies (Jordan, 2003). Activist scholarship, by pointing to the gap between reality and socially accepted ideals, can and does provide knowledge useful for proactive mobilization. Apparently, international organizations, development agencies, and other neo-liberal reformers have appropriated better quality scholarship for neo-liberal restructuring.

Cooptation is an inadequate concept to explain the process by which radical scholarship becomes instrumental in bringing about an effect that is opposite of what it laboured for. To call it cooptation says little about the *type* of knowledge that was produced in the first place, or the context that allows its production. Conversely, within the spaces of academe, radical knowledge production takes on a tint that changes its *effect* on the wider society. For example, a radical academic like Slavoj Žižek who reclaims Lenin, (2002b) calls for “Leninist intolerance” (2002a) and exposes the hypocrisy of Western liberalism in its critique of totalitarianism (2001), undertakes the scholarship within the disciplinary orientations of cultural studies and discourses about popular culture combined with social psychology. When critiqued from those disciplinary grounds, far from bringing Lenin back to “the gates” or spurring popular mobilization against the tyranny of Western liberalism, the scholar is himself transformed into a popular cult figure for the liberal academia.⁶

The significance of scholarship then cannot be divorced from the *effect* it has in informing social action. Necessarily generalizing, it is possible to argue that in the present times activist scholarship has been successful in defending social democratic spaces in action and in theory against the challenges of neo-liberalism in as much as it has succeeded in generating what is described as “global movements” that seek to “change the world without taking power” (Holloway, 2002). Such a mobilization for the renewal of social democracy and its adaptation to the changes in capitalism at the end of the Cold War is mobilization of a proactive kind, mobilization from the top, within liberal institutional spaces for realizing certain constitutional values that were devalued

by neo-liberalism. It shuts out the possibility of activist scholarship turning its attention to the ideological, political and institutional role of social democracy *itself* in the demise of socialism and in the growth of neo-liberalism. Equally, it shuts out scholarship that interrogates the ways in which both Left and Right politics, liberalism and social democracy combined and played complementary roles in the expropriation and exploitation of colonial populations. Extending it to the present, it shuts out inquiry about the possible effect of a truncated and reformed social democracy on the Third World. Such a line of inquiry calls for a very different kind of activist scholarship, one that constantly reassesses the actual *effect* of its scholarship on wider society, on the oppressed and marginalized in whose name it speaks.

Third, both types of mobilizations stand to gain to different degrees from constitutional change; both involve negotiations and making temporary and long-term alliances, and concessions that may be required without compromising core interests and aspirations. Scholarship becomes meaningful for reactive mobilization for structural change when the interests and concessions at issue are openly articulated, discussed and debated. When analysis articulates the differences and interests that inform the scholarship, it opens up the possibilities for forging *real* alliances and making *informed* compromises for action leading to social change. Scholarship that blurs the interests that inform different standpoints in activism, forge unity at the analytical level and does not correspond to reality. Analytical unity fetishizes the *real* goals of mobilization. Proactive mobilization often involves scholarship that analytically conflates groups and interests in society, or blurs the boundaries between what is desirable and what is possible in ways that obfuscate the real possibilities for emancipatory action. As a corollary, proactive mobilization from the top must idealize negative spaces for action as a goal worthy for its own sake. The ideal in turn hides the reality that activism within the constitutional order has boundaries and those boundaries may not be sufficient to fulfil the aspirations of the oppressed and the expropriated in whose names all activism rationalizes its existence.

Fourth, activist scholarship and PAR methods call for active involvement of the scholar in social issues at an individual and personal level, as if that alone guarantees good theory and good practice. The dichotomy of the activist as the engaged scholar, and the dispassionate, ivory tower academic is a problematic one. The dichotomous categorization conceals the fact that the ivory tower scholar is *also* as socially engaged as the activist one. It is the institutional context that makes her appear dispassionate and disengaged, and the very appearance fetishizes the inter-institutional linkages, the conduits, by which knowledge is transferred into policy and governance. By focusing on the marginalization of certain research methods and types of research questions within academe, the discourses obscure the real role of universities and scholarship in capitalist societies. This issue has returned with urgency in the wake of the discourses

about the “knowledge economy” and the restructuring of universities along neo-liberal lines.

While active engagement of scholars with social issues cannot be underestimated by any means, it does not follow logically that participation will automatically lead to good theory, understood as radical explanatory critique of the type required to bring about structural change in society. Conversely, scholarship cannot be judged primarily from the degree or extent of involvement of the scholar in social struggles. To argue that is to conflate the individual with the social, and the psychological with the sociological aspects of life.

In the theory-practice-theory dialectic, individuals engage in social practices including actions for social change from their pre-existing understanding of theory which they possess either explicitly or implicitly. The problem of interpreting the world, of engaging with the worldviews that inform the interpretations of the real world is not redundant because the scholar is engaged in progressive action. If acknowledging the institutional dimensions of scholarship invites us to interrogate the effect of scholarship on the wider world, acknowledging the psychological/emotional dimensions of scholarship invites us to reformulate the problem of subjectivity in scholarship as something that is more than a matter of research methodology. It invites us to pay attention to the *relationship* that exists between social action and social knowledge that is entailed in proactive and reactive mobilization.

PRISON HOUSES OF KNOWLEDGE?

In the mid-1990s, a seminar was organized for the benefit of a number of trade union organizers at the Maniben Kara Institute, a research organization for labour and trade unions in Mumbai, on the usefulness of computers for unions and union activists. The speaker had worked with trade unions in Mumbai previously, but had for over a decade lived and worked in North and South America. At the end of a brilliant presentation of the many ways in which workers could use computers to advance their causes and common interests, one of the workers asked if anyone present there were considering buying a computer. Asked to explain his reasons for the question, the worker replied that their union did not have a typewriter, and hoped a donation of a second-hand typewriter might come their way should someone decide to buy a computer. This was in a country where the software industry is one of the largest export-earners.

The response of a number of activist scholars to the story is to say that it shows the importance for researchers of being involved at the grassroots. In their view that is how *reality* is fed into the formulation of a research problematic, and research agendas can be made more relevant by doing so. The unionists in India, to the contrary, saw the purpose of the seminar as a means of network-

ing with the activist himself in person in the hope that they might contact him if needed in the future. For them, the seminar was not so much about knowledge of computers for union organizers, or about any hopes that they might be able to acquire one for their unions. The substance of the seminar had very different meanings for the different interest groups at the meeting, who had nevertheless participated in it and supported similar events for the future. Neither of those objectives was objectionable *per se*. The story however exemplifies a number of ironies: about communication technologies; about the fact that the speaker was from India; that he was an activist in India and abroad; and that it was software development that had put India on the globalization discourse and the promises it held out for the Third World.

The story invites attention to the larger problematic of the relationship of the knower to that which is known, a question that transcends the problematic of activist scholarship. For, generating good scholarship still leaves the question of good actions an open one. Discursive accounts of activist scholarship often commit a logical fallacy in that from the fact that good theories are *needed* for good practices they jump to the conclusion that good theories *will result* in good practices. The jump in the logic underscores another problematic altogether. It concerns the ways in which the relationship of the knower to the knowledge is mediated by psychological and emotional dimensions of human life, a dimension that becomes especially significant for distinguishing proactive from reactive mobilization.

All scholarship entails distancing the self from the objects of knowledge, which in the case of the activist scholar is the unjust world that exists “out there” as a reality of which the scholar can only be a minuscule part. It involves contemplation and reflexivity in that it transcends the realm of the self narrowly defined, and grapples with explanation, why things are the way they are; with causation and the relative merits of different theories; with reasoning and the relative merits of different types of reasoning; with analysis, theoretical and programmatic. All action is based on some form of understanding that exists about the world, and scholarship engages with the pre-existing knowledge. Production of knowledge requires the acknowledgment of and distinguishing between the subject *and* the object.

Activism, to the contrary, is about transcendence. Activism involves transcending the subject-object divide, crossing the boundaries between the self as the knower and the knowledge of the world, about a state of being when the knower identifies with the knowledge so completely, where the distinction between the knower and the knowledge is so blurred, that the knower is able to make a qualitative leap into the unknown. From thought to action there is a qualitative leap. The leap must necessarily be into the unknown in as much as the effect of the actions cannot be known or predicted definitively in advance.

"Just do it" the Nike ad tells us. "Just doing it" for Nike emphasizes an attitude, a state of being. In a "posted" world – post-modernist, post-colonial, post-structuralist, post-industrial, post-human, post-Marxist world, post-socialist, post-social democratic, post-social – "just doing it" transforms the mundaneness of wearing shoes to an exotic if ephemeral consumer experience. Forget unpleasant truths about sweatshops and child labour, Nike seems to tell us, and experience the moment that is here and now, always exotic and ephemeral. Nonetheless, it captures the transcendence entailed in action, and the psychological state, an attitude, that it refers to. While good scholarship of the explanatory kind has synergies with good action, the "just doing it" state of mind is informed by factors that go beyond scholarship alone.

Action is a moment of convergence when the social, the political and the psychological/emotional/spiritual (call it what you will) dimensions of the "self" come together.⁷ It entails freeing oneself from *institutional straitjackets* that impose constraints on human life that people experience as oppressive or exploitative, and is entailed in human suffering in a given context. The nature and extent of social change, and the *type* of social changes action can bring about depends on the *nature* of the scholarship, but *equally* on the social relationships and experiences of the scholar as a human subject, and the extent to which the scholar identifies with the knowledge.

People act with or without good scholarship to break away from the conditions of their oppression as exemplified by spontaneous rebellions, or by riots. For good scholarship to inform action, it needs to be made praxiologically relevant by translating it into programmatic goals. Praxiology therefore may be seen as another *type* of knowledge, another step between scholarship and action, where scholarship is transformed into programmatic goals; where knowledge acquires an instrumentalist character; and where activism undertakes organizational innovations facilitative of the convergences in the social self required to change the world.

In 1967, Charu Mazumdar, the inspiration behind what came to be called the Naxalite movement, referred to universities as "prison houses" of knowledge, and exhorted young people to leave the universities to engage in, and learn from class struggle. His own writing, most of it on revisionism in the Indian context, and none of it professional from an academic standpoint, pointed to the ways in which the Indian Left had compromised the peasantry, the bulwark of Indian society, and the poorest of the poor. The moot point from the point of view of activist scholarship is that tens of thousands of university students actually "just did it." It had a profound influence on contemporary Indian society and consciousness. Forty years later, many rounds of state repression notwithstanding, and despite vitriolic criticism of scholars and contemptuous dismissal by the global social movements, the peasantry continue to pose a challenge, and the cycles of repression and stabilization continue to inform the limits of politics in the subcontinent unseen by the cyber-world.

Activist scholars in the subcontinent attempt to freeze *one* moment, the moment of the uprising and its repression, and theorize *retrospectively* on the theoretical and programmatic shortcomings of the movement. Perhaps it is time for activist scholars to pause and reflect on why the proliferation of activist scholarship in recent times has not inspired the students and youth, and the poorest of the poor in the subcontinent, and in the “Third World” generally, to “just do it.”

NOTES

1. See Indian Institute of Management Calcutta website at <http://www.iimcal.ac.in/index.asp>
2. Dalits, literally means the oppressed, is a term used to refer to people from the “lower” castes in India.
3. For philosophical underpinnings of the theory-practice dialectic see Bhaskar, R., *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom*. 1993, London, New York: Verso. 419.
4. Directed by Elia Kazan and made in 1952 in which Emiliano Zapata is played by Marlon Brando.
5. Played by Harold Gordon.
6. See Mead, R., *Life and Letters: The Marx Brother: How a philosopher from Slovenia became an international star*, in *The New Yorker*. 2003. To read about the documentary film “Zizek” see The Documentary Campaign at <http://www.documentarycampaign.org>. Indeed it would be fair to say most celebrity academics are often “activist scholars.”
7. For the conceptual and philosophical dimensions in this connection see Uberoi, J.P.S., *Religion, civil society and state: A study of Sikhism*. 1996, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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GLOBAL JUSTICE PROTEST EVENTS AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT. Recent social movement activities – in particular, transnationally-coordinated global justice mobilizations – require participants to work across substantial differences in languages, cultural backgrounds, political visions, and organizing traditions. Negotiating such differences is an active, adaptive, and learning-intensive process. In contrast to more institutionalized settings such as schools and workplaces, where tropes like “multiculturalism” figure prominently in treatments of “difference,” I argue that knowledge production in social movement settings cultivates a more intensely relational and dynamic disposition towards differences.

LES ACTIONS REVENDICATRICES DE JUSTICE GLOBALE ET LA CRÉATION DE SAVOIR SUR LES DIFFÉRENCES

RÉSUMÉ. Les activités récemment menées par les mouvements sociaux – plus spécifiquement, les mobilisations transnationales de justice globale – amènent les participants à collaborer au-delà de différences parfois substantielles de langues, origines culturelles, visions politiques et traditions d’organisation. La négociation de ces différences s’incarne dans un processus actif et nécessite un effort intense d’adaptation et d’apprentissage. Contrairement aux milieux institutionnels – écoles ou milieux de travail – où les rhétoriques telles que le multiculturalisme oriente de manière évidente la gestion des différences, je soutiens que la création de connaissances au sein des mouvements sociaux favorise une disposition dynamique et intensément relationnelle envers les différences.

While conducting ethnographic research among transnational networks of global justice activists between 1999 and 2005, it became clear to me that differences in languages, norms, objectives, and traditions are a significant source of the vitality of these networks. Through participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews at mass mobilizations during this period,¹ I came to understand these politically charged settings as intensive environments for learning and knowledge production about differences. More specifically, I argue that global justice activist networks generate dynamic set-

tings for learning to negotiate differences in cultural backgrounds, historical experiences, social positions, and political visions. In this paper, I focus on global justice movement activities – particularly transnationally-coordinated protest events – as intensive arenas for knowledge production about how to work across such differences.

Global justice protest events during the last decade have brought together a remarkable variety of social movements, from faith-based “Third World” debt relief efforts to direct action environmentalism, from human rights campaigns to labour union organizing, from anarchist projects to indigenous, farmers’, and immigrant movements, and more. The contentious dynamism that emerges through efforts to coordinate the collective actions of so many different strands of global justice activism is animated not just by the variety of issues and objectives in play, but also by the transnationality of the activist networks involved. While many forms of knowledge production can be identified in the context of social movements,² in this article I argue that the specific processes of negotiating differences inherent in global justice protest events engender an especially intensive and productive learning experience for participants. In doing so, I draw on the concept of a “figured world” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) of global justice activism to call attention to the interpretive work activated in these processes, with the interpretive work around the activist tactic of “property destruction” as a starting point. Then I briefly frame my argument in terms of a broader analysis of what I call the “edge effects” of global justice protest activity. Finally, I discuss the dispositions towards differences cultivated by knowledge production processes in the context of the figured world of global justice activism.

FIGURED WORLDS OF AND AMONG GLOBAL JUSTICE ACTIVISTS

Global justice activism involves repeated engagements among multiple “figured worlds”: sociohistoric realms of interpretation and action in which social positions and relationships are conducted, and in which individual and collective self-understandings, or identities, are afforded and developed (Holland et al., 1998). Features and acts that function as major markers of position, status, capacity, etc. in one figured world may not function as such in another. As an iterative effect of repeated engagements between figured worlds of different social movements, the emergent figured world of global justice activism itself is one in which differences are not only anticipated, but are expected to be integral to the dynamic of protest events. In this world of interpretation and action, the “differences that make a difference” (Bateson, 1979) do not simply consist of information about individuals’ backgrounds, languages, traditions, and beliefs; they consist of a tremendous variety of political commitments, intentions, strategies, tactics, visions for social change, and “ground rules” for engagement.

Engagement among figured worlds during global justice protest events is often contentious, and due to this contention, popular education has been especially relevant in many contexts of global justice work. Like the “dialogue of knowledges” that happens through the popular education processes described by Kane (2000), dialogism between and among activist figured worlds involves an explicit recognition of differences; but rather than occurring through focused and deliberate discussions as in many contexts explicitly organized as venues for popular education, dialogism in the context of global justice protest events is often more spontaneous, less predictable, and directly shaped by immediate practical circumstances.

To illustrate the kind of learning and knowledge production about differences that has happened through global justice protest mobilizations, I will focus on one source of contention that has been an enduring feature of many activists’ figured worlds. This source is the tactic of “property destruction,” for example, breaking windows of targeted businesses, destroying machinery used, for logging forests or in commercial development, and tearing down security fences erected to control protests. On the surface, contention around this issue is a matter of ideological differences among activists, for example, with respect to the sanctity of “private property,” or with respect to the meaning of “non-violence.”³ But contention around property destruction has, over the years, illuminated many other differences that have become important in the figured world of global justice activism as well. In what follows, I will trace several moments at protest events during the past decade that illustrate how contention around property destruction has developed over time, with attention to the multiplicity of differences that have been evoked and activated in the process. I will then briefly discuss some of the knowledge production about differences – and about how to organize differences – that has resulted from this contention.

Transfixed and transformed in front of McDonald’s in Prague

My interest in how activists negotiate across competing attitudes towards property destruction was triggered in Prague, during the International Monetary Fund/World Bank meetings in September 2000. One evening, after the main march of the week, I happened upon a large mass of people in dark clothing moving silently through the center of the city. As I approached to see what was happening, I heard the sharp clink of glass shattering. And then again. And again. They were attacking a bank. The mass of people moved slowly and precisely, rolling past the bank in a continuous motion while smashing the targeted windows entirely to bits, and leaving the restaurant next door untouched. The tightly organized mass moved down the street, still as if in slow motion; its sticks and arms retracted back into the mass as it continued towards Wenceslas Square. There, the mass merged into a crowd of maybe a thousand other people gathering and filling the square.

As I came down into the square behind them, it was clear that more destruction was planned. I found a subway station wall to stand on at one end of the square where I could watch the crowd of people swell with the slow absorption of the arriving mass. Everything around me was charged. The energy that was pulsing through that crowd is indescribable. There were small eddies in the crowd and then all of a sudden the mild turbulence was whipped into a kind of machine directly in front of the McDonald's at the other end of the square. Bodies dashed in from the side and began to attack the windows as the rest of us watched. It was like nothing I had ever seen or felt before. People all around me began to cheer; there was something undeniably euphoric about watching a McDonald's being destroyed by a well-organized group of people with sticks. As I struggled to maintain my own composure, I was engulfed by people hooting at the top of their lungs at the spectacle.

Whoops and screams of delight were sent soaring over the heads of the now thousands of people collecting in the square, but after a few minutes, I began to feel a hush spreading and pressing into the crowd. The sounds of glass shattering and then the dull pounding of wood against plastic coming from inside the restaurant were amazingly audible. As singular cheers continued to escape into the night air, a creeping sense of sobriety was becoming more tangible. It was a collective recognition of the intensity of what was happening; all of us in the crowd were captivated, awe-struck. We were not merely witnessing this, but were somehow also participating in it; it was difficult, during those dense moments, to perform any kind of divide that would distinguish the violent from the non-violent.

After several long minutes of watching – and feeling part of – the direct destruction of the exterior and then the interior of the McDonald's, I began to hear voices converging in the distance, an accumulating chorus moving toward the square. Then, suddenly, an enormous crowd of people, maybe five hundred or more, emerged from around the corner and descended into the square chanting – screaming – “No - Vio-lence! No - Vio-lence!,” and as they bled down into the crowd, they performed an incision: they marked the boundary between the peaceful and the violent, distinguishing the good from the bad, the right from the wrong. Their call slowly enveloped everyone they moved past. I found myself floating down from the almost spiritual experience of just moments before as my lips formed the words that were literally reshaping the entire experience. As I looked around there was not one person I could see who failed to join in – except for those still tearing away at the guts of the McDonalds – as the rhythmic chant took hold of our interpretive capacities.

As the arriving group was actualizing a clear division between the property destroyers and the peace-seduced crowd, police in white helmets had begun to gather at the bottom of the square. The scattered helmets then merged into a coherent police force, marching toward us, in formation, up the square. After

what felt like about 20 minutes of completely unpoliced activity,⁴ as the helmets gathered into formation and made their way up the square, people started to run. A series of chaotic crowd panics ensued as people fled suddenly out from the square in every direction. (If I had not had my running shoes and been ready to use them on half a moment's notice, I surely would have been trampled.) A tank appeared at the top of the square, sound grenades went off, and puffs of teargas were blasted over the crowd.

A collective rush of adrenaline capped off the night as we variously fled from – or stayed behind to fight with – the police; the time and space for any kind of interpretive closure for the experience was obliterated. But before the rupture of our collective “moment” in the face of aggressive protest policing, the intervention by non-violence advocates had dramatized and magnified key incongruities in interpretations of what was happening. These activists intercepted a figured world in which smashing McDonald's was experienced as a lived collective fantasy. They refigured the property destruction as a form of violence, and in doing so, they directly transformed the crowd's behaviour and understanding of the situation.

Divided by the “peace police” in front of Niketown in Seattle

My experience in Prague reminded me of a story about an infamous incident that occurred in Seattle during protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in November and December of 1999.⁵ In this incident, a group of activists was smashing the windows of a Niketown store when another group locked arms in front of the store to defend the windows. This second group then forcibly intervened to stop the property destruction. This confrontation resulted in several competing accounts from activists. One story was that the activists smashing the windows were police agitators, planted in the crowd to escalate the tactics and thereby justify the unleashing of all of the policing resources available: the CS gas, OC gas, tanks, rubber bullets, wooden bullets, teargas, pepper spray, etc. Another story was that the activists protecting the windows were police plants, switching roles from undercover agents playing activists in one moment to protectors of multinational shop windows in the next. It is not my intention to evaluate the accuracy of these competing accounts, but simply to suggest that the interpretive work triggered by these confrontations reflects the diversity of perspectives at play.

In several accounts, the defenders of Niketown were labeled, derogatively, the “peace police,” as in this activist's report:

Unfortunately, the presence and persistence of “peace police” was quite disturbing. On at least 6 separate occasions, so-called “non-violent” activists physically attacked individuals who targeted corporate property. Some even went so far as to stand in front of the Niketown super store and tackle and shove the black bloc away. Indeed, such self-described “peace-keepers” posed a much greater threat to individuals in the black bloc than the notoriously

violent uniformed “peace-keepers” sanctioned by the state (undercover officers have even used the cover of the activist peace-keepers to ambush those who engage in corporate property destruction).... Response to the black bloc has highlighted some of the contradictions and internal oppressions of the “nonviolent activist” community. Aside from the obvious hypocrisy of those who engaged in violence against black-clad and masked people (many of whom were harassed despite the fact that they never engaged in property destruction), there is the racism of privileged activists who can afford to ignore the violence perpetrated against the bulk of society and the natural world in the name of private property rights. Window-smashing has engaged and inspired many of the most oppressed members of Seattle’s community more than any giant puppets or sea turtle costumes ever could (not to disparage the effectiveness of those tools in other communities). (ACME Collective, 1999)

As is clear from this account, the practical need for better communication, more resilient alliances, and stronger collaborative efforts was urgent in Seattle if mass mobilizations involving such distinct approaches to political struggle were going to continue as key features of the figured worlds of global justice activists. The handling of conflict between competing protest styles during the Niketown incident was aggressively confrontational, and much of the interpretive work generated after the incident was acrimonious. In less than a year, however, activists’ treatments of incongruous protest styles had already developed, as evidenced in Prague: the incident in front of McDonald’s triggered another direct and physical encounter between competing interpretations of effective/appropriate protest forms, but this encounter was not aggressive. And in the years since, adaptations to these kinds of differences have become an increasingly integral and productive part of the protest experience.

Differences deferred and displaced at the fence in Quebec City

The spring following the Prague protests, in April of 2001, I traveled to Quebec City for a mass mobilization against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (described by activists as “NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] on steroids,” referring to the expansion in territory and in market sectors that would have been integrated under the proposed “free trade” governance structure). At these protest events, the first true security fence of the “post-Seattle” period was erected. The fence had a relatively simple design: chain-link fencing three meters high, atop a concrete base, stretched for 3.8 kilometres up and down the intricate topography of the city’s streets. The mobilizing process involved many different people coming from different locations, with different motivations, strategies and objectives. It included coordination with Quebec student movements, labour unions, and political parties, many of whom are directly connected to the provincial struggle for sovereignty from the Canadian government. The mobilizing also included coordination between activists traveling overland from the U.S. and Mohawk “traditionalists,” whose territory bridges the U.S. – Canadian border. It included coordination as well among other indigenous peoples of the Americas, international NGOs, and

an expansive network of anti-capitalist activists. Each of these groups articulated their objection and resistance to the free trade agenda differently. For example both Quebec sovereigntists and Mohawk traditionalists connected their participation with pre-existing locally particular struggles for cultural, economic, and political autonomy, while many labour activists engaged as a form of resistance to neoliberal economic reforms and other activists engaged as a way of extending existing anti-capitalist projects.

Coordinating processes among these diverse interests generated many tensions that persisted up until the main day of action on April 20th. However, on that day, activists were so overwhelmed by the intensity of policing actions that brewing frustrations were largely displaced by the collective trauma and outrage over the brutality of state repression. Our senses of particularity as activists with distinct orientations and intentions were forcibly suspended by what felt like an obscene amount of teargas, along with rubber bullets and an occasional blast from a water cannon. Throughout the day and throughout the crowds I found myself part of, the most contagious chant was “So-so-so! So-li-dar-i-té!” The feeling among protest participants was not one of unity in any simple sense of shared identity,⁶ but one of temporary but intense solidarity across various backgrounds, across languages, and across motivations for opposing the free trade agreement under negotiation at the summit.

The most significant source of contention I heard discussed after the Quebec City protests was connected with a decision among organizers of the “People’s Summit”⁷ to march *away* from the security fence surrounding the meetings, instead of bringing the thousands of participants to join with militant activists engaged in direct confrontations with police at the fence. While so many activists were attempting (and succeeding at several points) to tear down the fence amidst the dense and persistent fog of teargas, many (but not all) of the People’s Summit participants followed leaders further and further away from the most intense street battles. According to one activist report, a Canadian auto worker who found himself in this situation asked afterwards, “Why was the ‘legal protest’ conducted miles away from the security perimeter? Had I known I was marching towards a parking lot, I would have stayed home and done that at the fucking mall” (quoted in Ewald, 2001).

Much of the interpretive work generated by the Quebec City protests emphasized the need for tactical solidarity in the face of police repression. It also invigorated the growing sense of shared opposition to the neoliberal agenda, and galvanized collective challenges to the increasingly sophisticated and costly security apparatuses constructed to protect it. One prominent activist/academic wrote later, “The spectacle of the Black Bloc, armed with wire cutters and grappling hooks, joined by everyone from Steelworkers to Mohawk warriors to tear down the wall, became... one of the most powerful moments in the movement’s history” (Graeber, 2002). To balance this theme of shared

struggle, the involvement of Mohawk traditionalists and Quebec sovereigntists underscored the significance of “autonomy” as a key principle in global justice work; this principle obliges activists to recognize fundamental differences among communities, and to allow space for multiple and distinct agendas.

Differences performed at the fence in Cancún

Three years after the demonstrations in Prague, during protests against the WTO in Cancún in September 2003, the security fence once again became a focal point for protest actions.⁸ Several days into the week of protest activities, a “women’s action” was announced by word of mouth through a crowd of activists gathering for a large demonstration at the fence. Women were to lead the action by taking the “frontlines” along the fence, and then other groups were to play supporting roles in symbolically breaching – and later, tearing down – the fence. Throughout the week of activities in Cancún, tensions had been brewing between anti-authoritarian activists, who didn’t like being told what they could and couldn’t do by other activists, and “internationals” (mostly from the United States, but also from various parts of Latin America and Europe), who were trying to act as liaisons among multiple activist contingents. The women’s action inadvertently amplified this tension by prohibiting men who were planning to tear the fence down from getting close enough to do so, at least right away.

This tension revealed a conflict among activists over the most appropriate understanding of, and behaviour towards, the fence (and each other). In one vision, women would act together in a peaceful show of strength and solidarity, and then later, women of the “global north” would unite with Indigenous Peoples of the “global south” in a show of global solidarity and collective purpose. In another vision, attacks on the fence – and perhaps clashes with police – would demonstrate the effectiveness and force of targeted direct action. The question of whose vision – and whether, when, by whom, and how – property destruction would happen, was settled in due course by a highly ritualized but improvisational series of actions at the fence that took all day.

Justifications for the initial women-only space along the fence were various. Many people said it would keep out undercover police more successfully because of the lesser likelihood of women in such roles.⁹ Another justification was that it would help keep things peaceful so that campesinos and others would be less exposed to police violence. Another was that it would provide a buffer between the police and a particular group of Indigenous rebels who were usually armed, and therefore likely to be targets of harsher police treatment. In any case, everyone involved eventually accepted the women-only space at the fence for a (long) while, with promised opportunities for other types of actions later in the day.

Activists organized a slow rhythm for their actions, relatively spontaneously as the day wore on, creating distinct periods for performances by distinct activist groups. It was almost like a talent show, with some acts more serious than others. Contention over which group would be allowed to perform, and when, seemed to be partly what kept people at the fence, waiting for their turn. First the women stood hand in hand along the fence. Then wire-cutters were passed along the line and we took turns cutting through the layers of the fences. Then a group of Indigenous women negotiated with the police on the other side to be allowed through the fence, in a symbolic transgression of the barrier preventing WTO delegates from hearing their concerns. Then a group of Korean farmers hoisted an enormous woven rope (which they'd made themselves) to the fence and attached it in preparation for taking the fence down. Then other men and women were allowed to join in, and a dramatic tug-of-war began. Finally the group succeeded in tearing down a large section of the fence as they heaved backwards and collapsed as a giant heap into the thousands of us gathered to watch and cheer. Then militant activists climbed atop the fence and continued to rock and topple additional sections. Finally a giant consensus meeting was held for what felt like hours, as concerns, celebrations, and plans were announced and discussed, along with various interpretations of what had happened throughout the week of protests. The meeting culminated with burning an effigy of a WTO delegate, and then burning a U.S. flag.

The emergent and relatively spontaneous self-organizing process at the fence in Cancún illustrates how deeply the incongruity – but not incompatibility – among protest styles had become inscribed into activists' practical sensibilities. Different perspectives, different objectives, different movement traditions, different visions, and groups from different places around the world were not only present, but actively performing, for each other, distinct – yet engaged – figured worlds of global justice activism.

During the four years spanned by these protest events, from Seattle in 1999 to Cancún in 2003, global justice activists' coordinating efforts resulted in significant knowledge, not just about differences themselves, but about how to organize with and across them. In Seattle, distinct attitudes about property destruction led to aggressive physical confrontation among activists, and months of related verbal confrontations afterwards. In Prague, similarly distinct attitudes led to a less aggressive but still physical encounter in which one figured world was directly interrupted and overwhelmed by another. In Quebec City, deep cleavages in activist networks around the issue of property destruction were displaced by shared experiences with extreme forms of state repression. And finally, in Cancún, activists self-organized a complex space along the security fence for the enactment of multiple and distinct traditions and intentions. The knowledge produced through these kinds of events includes the develop-

ment of specific principles and models for dealing with the practical challenges presented by differences among activists.

PRINCIPLES AND MODELS FOR WORKING COLLECTIVELY

Motivated by the unpredictable dynamism, and in some cases, volatility, of summit protests and other global justice activity, activists have developed new models – and refigured older models – for protest actions that explicitly acknowledge, and create space (and time) for different protest styles and agendas. Practical organizing models include “affinity groups,” “Consultas,” “spokescouncils,” and “convergence centres,” each of which not only facilitates information exchange, but also cultivates strategic alliances and support mechanisms across different activist groups. These models are directly supported by key principles that have emerged as cornerstones of knowledge production about differences in contemporary global justice networks that happens *in practice* (Bourdieu, 1979; Holland et al., 1998). Principles that are prominent in the figured world of global justice activism provide conceptual grounding for an open, active and dynamic approach to differences among movement participants. Primary examples are “diversity of tactics,” “decentralization,” “autonomy,” “horizontality,” and “specificismo” (see Starr, 2005 for discussion of these and other principles). Popular slogans that articulate the sensibility reflected in these principles include the Zapatista slogan, “Walking, we ask” and the World Social Forum’s slogan, “Another world is possible.”¹⁰ In each case, the vision for activist practice is open-ended and capable of resonating with a wide variety of objectives, strategies, and motivations.

Activists have developed many models for coordinating diverse summit protest actions in ways that animate key principles such as decentralization and autonomy, even as they function to organize activist groups into a coherent and minimally predictable form. For example, one model designates different protest styles spatially using colour to divide masses of demonstrators into distinct blocs. For example, in Prague there was the Blue Bloc, the Yellow Bloc, and the Pink and Silver bloc, each with a different degree of militancy and risk level for arrest (see Juris, 2008 for an analysis of the affective dimensions of these blocs). The practice of forming a “bloc” referred, for many years, only to the Black Bloc, which is a tactical and temporary convergence of militant activists trained to defend themselves against police officers, and trained in various direct action tactics; the strategy has been adapted over the years to create many different tactical collectives. In my own fieldwork, for example, I have encountered the Green Bloc, the Clown Bloc, and even a Baby Bloc. Another important adaptation for building support networks across distinct affinity groups is the formation of “clusters.” For example, I have witnessed the Pagan Cluster create safe spaces, again and again, for many different activist groups in the midst of especially tense or dangerous protest situations.

Another widespread model divides summit protests temporally by designating particular days or parts of days for different issues, different contingents, and different types of actions, for example: issue-based marches, such as water marches or anti-war marches; contingent marches, such as labour or campesino marches; direct actions such as blockades or tearing down a fence; and street festivals, such as anti-capitalist carnivals and street soccer matches. And yet another model divides protest zones spatially by designating different locations for different types of actions by colour according to risk levels for arrest and aggressive policing. In each case, the shared objective is to allow people to engage in the forms of expression and action they prefer, without interference or endangerment from other, incompatible forms. Activists who engage in more fluid tactics, such as guerilla theatre and roving musical performances, can more easily coordinate their actions to complement other groups' plans when these models are used.

Central in the conceptualization and implementation of these models is the desire to create safe protest spaces for diverse participants. For example, if a march will include children, elderly people, and/or undocumented immigrants, protest actions likely to provoke police intervention present special threats to these participants (e.g., greater physical harm or deportation). An explicit recognition in global justice mobilizing processes of the particular vulnerabilities of particular participants signals the kind of learning and knowledge production that I am calling attention to in this article. This includes recognition that not everyone involved can risk arrest, and not everyone involved can run well enough to escape an onslaught of riot police, or breathe well enough to survive an onslaught of teargas. This also recognizes that not everyone involved feels safe with police escorts, which are usually required for officially permitted marches, and not everyone involved accepts the legitimacy of government authorities, even when "democratically elected."

Other forms of knowledge production related to global justice activists' models and principles for negotiating differences lie in the widespread circulation of triumphant stories about acts of solidarity across otherwise potentially hostile divides. For example, the story of "turtles and Teamsters, together at last" (environmental activists and organized labour) in Seattle appeared throughout both mainstream media and activist accounts of the demonstrations. And while I was in Miami for the 2003 FTAA Summit protests, I heard a story about dock workers coming to the defense of anarchist youth activists being harassed by police recounted at least six times, by six different people. The popularity (and exuberance in the telling) of these stories signals that acts of solidarity are an affectively important part of the global justice experience, and that working across differences is both an achievement to celebrate and an important skill to develop.

LEARNING DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS DIFFERENCES

In contemporary institutional settings such as schools, teacher preparation programs, employee training programs, etc., differences among people are often signaled by the tropes of “diversity” and “multiculturalism.” Policies and practices implemented to address ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic, gender, sexuality, ability and other forms of difference in these institutional contexts are usually structured as “top down” transmission of ways of understanding and approaching differences (for example from academic or policy experts to practitioners, from outside consultants to managers, from managers to employees, from teacher educators to teachers-in-training, and from teachers to students). Through this transmission, students, teachers, and employees learn how to recognize and refer to differences, and how to accept, respect, and value differences, but the learning process is often programmatic, superficial, or even essentializing (Yon, 2000).

Learning how to understand and appreciate differences in such institutional settings is often geared to make individual students or employees more comfortable, more proficient, and/or more productive, and is not typically oriented to actualizing a deeper collective project. In these settings, a structured and structuring “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977) often develops as a powerfully determining force on the experience, or the “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1977), of the differences at play. In addressing the treatment of “diversity” in schools (or workplaces, etc.), my goal is not to criticize existing efforts; it is simply to suggest that processes of learning how to negotiate and organize differences in social movement settings are generative of a much more active and dynamic knowledge. In global justice mobilizing processes, such habitus is disrupted, again and again, by direct encounters and confrontations among different figured worlds. In these contexts, answers to the question of how differences should be understood and negotiated are never fully, or finally, worked out. They are approached explicitly, collectively, and continuously, in ways that articulate with constantly changing practical circumstances.

An active practice of asking, and of listening, is required in collective efforts across differences that are as prevalent – and as potent – as they are in global justice mobilizing processes. This kind of engaged and continuous education is one of several important “edge effects” that I looked at in my dissertation research; the “edges” in the processes I am discussing in this article are those spaces of encounter between diverse strands of global justice movement networks. A closely related edge effect of these encounters is the emergence of a politics of “not-knowing”: a form of knowledge production that refuses finality, and refuses closure; a politics that recognizes the fundamentally “unsuturable” nature of the “the social” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1989). In comparing the emergent power of activist networks to ant colonies, the Notes from Nowhere collective offers this analysis:

The greatest feature of the ant colony is the simplicity of each ant; if one ant began to somehow assess the overall state of the whole colony, the sophisticated behavior would stop trickling up from below, and swarm logic would collapse. Emergence teaches us that not to know everything is a strength and that local knowledge is sovereign. (*Notes from Nowhere*, 2003, p. 71)

As an edge effect of repeated encounters between distinct network strands, activists develop flexible and adaptive dispositions towards differences that do not depend on “knowing” in advance the conditions and the actors that will shape a mass mobilization. These dispositions ground the practical skills and capacities necessary for successful self-organizing.

Global justice movements are, of course, not the only social movement contexts in which organizing differences is an integral aspect of the mobilizing process. How differences are, or might be, organized is a significant question in any context of activism in that political and social contention arises fundamentally from collective critiques and challenges that are rarely entirely unitary. In the protest settings described above, I endeavoured to show that dispositions towards differences develop rapidly in practice through iterative engagement at mass mobilizations, and that direct engagement among multiple figured worlds of activism cultivates dispositions that go beyond tolerance, acceptance, and respect for differences. The dispositions cultivated by knowledge production about differences in these contexts are actively relational, and relationally active: they are directly attuned to the vulnerabilities and capacities, the interests and concerns, of many different groups and individuals. They prepare activists to adapt, improvise, and create space accordingly. These dispositions actively anticipate differences, and expect them to be central both to the dynamic of organizing – and to the feeling – of important social movement events.

NOTES

1. These included transnational protest events and activist gatherings during the following: International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank meetings in Washington, D.C. (April 2000), IMF/World Bank meetings in Prague (September 2000), FTAA Summit in Quebec City (April 2001), the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (January 2002 and January 2005), WTO Ministerial meetings in Cancún (September 2003), FTAA Summit in Miami (November 2003), Life After Capitalism conference in New York (August 2004), Encuentro Internacional/Ronda De Pensamiento Autónomo in Buenos Aires (January 2005), Mediterranean Social Forum in Barcelona (June 2005), G8 Summit in Scotland (July 2005), along with smaller regional and local gatherings, social forums, consulta, meetings, and workshops. Throughout this research, my ethnographic stance ranged from that of an involved but relatively passive observer to that of an active participant as an activist, depending on whether I was alone or with an affinity group. Some, but not all, of this research fits what Jeff Juris (2007), drawing on Nancy Scheper-Hughes, describes as “militant ethnography” among social movement communities.
2. Theorists and practitioners within the tradition of popular education have made explicit many forms of learning in the context of social and political struggle (and this tradition has long been an important strand of global justice organizing, particularly through the World Social Forum and regional Social Forum processes). See Foley (1999) for a related analysis of adult education that focuses on the importance of learning in the context of emancipatory struggles,

and more generally, the social nature of learning (vs. learning as an individual mental process). My discussion directly speaks to, and supports, these approaches by providing an example of the kind of learning that can happen in transnational social movement contexts.

3. One of the more prolonged debates around this issue focuses on writings and speeches by Ward Churchill, who points out that some of the most well-known and successful political struggles popularly understood to be “non-violent” have involved extreme violence (Churchill, 2001; see also Churchill, 1998). For example, the struggle for Indian independence from Britain, popularly understood as a peaceful movement led by Gandhi and informed by his teachings on non-violence, was only successful after thousands were killed (as anticipated by Gandhi himself); and the struggle for civil rights in the U.S., popularly understood as a peaceful movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and informed by his teachings on non-violence, was only successful after the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, and others were willing to adopt a more aggressive stance, and after key movement figures were killed and many activists were badly beaten. While Churchill and others argue that pacifism is counterproductive, other activist/writers who engage in this debate and identify as non-violent argue that destroying property is not a form of violence.
4. There were several police that had been posted in front of McDonald’s, presumably to protect the building from precisely this kind of attack, but when the group with sticks arrived, it seemed they weren’t equipped to intervene. I saw one policeman turn his back, shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head, as the mass moved in to attack – it was like they were turning their backs on their absurd task – why would they want to defend McDonald’s? It was their job, but I witnessed and heard about several instances of police ambivalence about what or who they were acting in service to.
5. I was not in Seattle during the WTO protests, but was instead at a demonstration, organized in solidarity with the protesters in Seattle, in front of a Walmart store in Durham, North Carolina.
6. See McDonald (2002) for a critical discussion of the notion of “collective identity” among global justice activists.
7. The People’s Summit, organized by a coalition of non-governmental organizations and activist contingents, was a “counter summit” held just ahead of the FTAA Summit in Quebec City, and included speaker panels, organized discussions, and performances.
8. Security fences at many global justice protests have come to function as stages on/at which to perform various actions. Although they are meant to keep protests away from summit meetings, they create important sites of visibility and audibility, often miles away from official meeting locations. They serve as props that support and enable a wide variety of theatrical and confrontational actions. In Cancun, the fence was the stage for the dramatic and fatal performance of Korean farmer Lee Kyung-hae’s suicide.
9. In fact, I did see a man with a very expensive looking video camera wander into the women’s space, and then respond to a command from a plainclothes officer among the riot police. The officer was gesturing and pointing frantically at some women cutting the fence, and the man with the camera responded by moving in close to film them. Instantly, a group of men protecting the women’s space grabbed him back away from the fence, yelling at him angrily.
10. The World Social Forum itself can be understood an emergent and iterative arena for conversation across differences, with its own rhythm of institutionalization and de-institutionalization, centralization and decentralization. It has been described by many people involved as a “space of encounter,” in contrast with being an emerging “subject” that speaks and acts as a unified body. Social forums have been described as “deliberative settings” in which meanings are negotiated and frames for action constructed. (e.g., della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, & Reiter, 2006) The World Social Forum addresses a need, which became particularly apparent in the late 1990s at major summit mobilizations, for both more talking and more listening. It has perhaps become the most massive unofficial transnational conversation ever to take place.

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ADIVASIS (ORIGINAL DWELLERS) "IN THE WAY OF"¹ STATE-CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT: DEVELOPMENT DISPOSSESSION AND LEARNING IN SOCIAL ACTION FOR LAND AND FORESTS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT. This paper traces the kinds of learning engendered through Adivasi trans-local and local subaltern social movement (SSM) action addressing state-corporate developmental collusions, state-caste interests and the resulting dispossession of Adivasis from land, forest and their ways of life given the economic liberalization drive to exploit resources in the rural hinterlands in India since 1991. The paper draws upon insights from the author's association with the Adivasi since 1992 and funded research into "Learning in Adivasi movements."²

LES ADIVASIS (HABITANTS ORIGINELS) « SUR LES TRACES » DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
ÉTAT-ENTREPRISE PRIVÉE : LA DÉPOSSESSION ENGENDRÉE PAR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT
ET LES APPRENTISSAGES PRODUITS VIA L'ACTION SOCIALE POUR LES TERRES ET LES
FORÊTS EN INDE

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article dresse le portrait du genre d'apprentissages rendus possibles par les actions des mouvements sociaux locaux subalternes et inter-cités (SLS) des Adivasis s'attaquant aux collusions existant entre l'État et le milieu privé dans les initiatives de développement, les relations entre l'État et les castes suite à libéralisation économique survenue en 1991 et la force motrice qui en a résulté relativement à l'exploitation des ressources dans l'arrière-pays indien. Ce texte s'inspire des découvertes effectuées par l'auteur depuis les débuts de son association avec le peuple adivasi en 1992 et ses recherches financées sur les mouvements d'apprentissages adivasi.

Who is this government (e sarkar kee?) that lets the paper mills and business people (vyavasahi) take the longest bamboo and best wood for profit and then asks us, we Adivasi who depend on the forest for our lives, for royalty and taxes for small cuts for poles.... The ADEA (Adivasi movement organization) is here to fight collectively (sangram) to save (raksha) the forests and to protect our way of life. Our struggle is around food, land, water, forest and unity (khadyo, jamin, jalo, jangalo, o ekta.) Kondh woman member of the ADEA movement organization (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

We organize workshops and gatherings and have created a learning environment for all our people – I feel so happy and satisfied, I cannot tell you – we have been creating a political education around land, forest and water issues and debating

courses of action. We are expanding in terms of participation and we need to keep generating more awareness on more issues that affect us... it is a political awareness, an adult education about society (samajik shiksha) – a different kind of schooling perhaps. ADEA movement organization representative/leader (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

The *Adivasi-Dalit Ekta Abhijan* (ADEA) is a movement³ organization of some 21,000 Adivasis and Dalits (literally means the “downtrodden,” pejoratively referred to as “untouchable” caste groups) located in over 120 villages in the southern districts of the east coast state of Orissa, India. A movement organization that has become more politicized with each attempt to address the developmentalist, casteist and increasingly corporatized state (after India’s adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and neoliberalism, since 1991), the ADEA has matured as a political entity since germination around land and forest struggles in the early 1980s (known then under a different name). It is now poised to take a leading role in a trans-local politics that includes a network of 14 peasant, *Adivasi*, *Dalit* and fisher-folk organizations in the southern region of the state. As a contemporary movement formation, the ADEA draws its impetus from a history of resistance to British colonization (historical memory of *Adivasi-Dalit* communities) and the numerous collective struggles of these groups with state, market and caste interests in the post-independence period (since 1947) of national development and neoliberal globalization (since the early 1990s).

The emergence of the ADEA as a movement cannot be attributed to an epicentre, one central issue or particular occurrence (as in the case of, for example, an anti-dam movement at a particular juncture in time) but to a history of consistent colonial and “post-colonial” exploitation and marginalization that has warranted both a combination of daily struggles for dignity and survival and some critical struggles in relation to major dislocations around land and forest dispossession and caste-deprivations and assaults. Furthermore, through various engagements in a trans-local politics with neighboring subaltern struggles in South Orissa (e.g. Chilika Andolan against corporate shrimp aquaculture through the 1980s into the early 1990s and the Kshipur anti-bauxite mining movement through the 1990s and up until now) the leadership of the ADEA has continued to nurture and enhance its role in a regional subaltern⁴ politics; a politics that continually seeks to address state, market, feudal/caste and civil society groups (e.g. NGOs) and their respective agendas/interests while continuing to assert the claims of *Adivasis*, *Dalits* and landless peasant constituencies.

Learning and local knowledge have been central to the emergence, development and continued maturation of this movement both as received wisdom from elders and as new learning generated through various acts of struggle and movement activism (Kapoor & Prasant, 2002; Kapoor, 2007). The significance of such learning within subaltern social movements (SSMs) (Kapoor, 2008) and

movements of colonized peoples in the "post-colonial" era to outsiders, lies in their relative uniqueness as contemporary anti-colonial political formations. The import of this colonial politics and related learning in social action is not lost on those who recognize a historical juncture where the modernizing and homogenizing colonial impulse is arguably at its most invasive, as expressed through either: (a) the related projects of neoliberal globalization and corporatist development (Barker, 2005; Grande, 2004; McMichael, 2006); (b) the globalist invocations of a civil-societarian social justice politics of participation, equity and inclusion ("empowerment") into modernity, epitomized by an NGOization (domestication) of subaltern social activism (Kamat, 2002; Kapoor, 2005; Manji, 2002; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001) and incorporation into a human rights discourse that is selectively oblivious to the violence of the market (economic violence) and "development repression"⁵ (Donnelly, 1989, p.188; Kapoor, 2008); or (c) an anti-globalization political project which often ignores the political conceptions and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples in transnational advocacy (Blaser, Feit & McRae, 2004; Choudry, 2007). Similarly, (d) a radical western Marxism that elides its modernist ecological and cultural excesses and reduces all radicalism and subsequent political worth⁶ to the imperatives of capturing state power and the establishment of a proletarian hegemony (and socialism), invoked as a post-capital universal apparently beyond interrogation, is also complicit in contemporary Eurocentric political homogenizations. Marxist disdain for subaltern politics in some quarters does little to garner the potential support of a multiplicity of such struggles in a counter-hegemonic politics in relation to capital, arguably, a defining element (conscious or unintentional) of several subaltern struggles in numerous development trenches confronting the rapacious appetite of global capitalist exploitation. The incursions of transnational capital itself produce commonalities that connect "ecological ethnicities" (Parajuli, 2004, p. 235) across their differences, creating serious prospects for counter-hegemonic possibilities.

Mindful of such continued colonizations in relation to *Adivasis* and subalterns, this paper elaborates on *Adivasi* learning in ADEA social action and related processes of knowledge production by: (a) describing the *Adivasi* context of struggle; (b) briefly discussing the approach to researching learning in *Adivasi* SSMs and then tracing the kinds of learning engendered through *trans-local movement* participation (critical, strategic, tactical and informational) addressing dispossession instigated by state-corporate development collusion and *local movement* social action and "*own ways learning*" around land and forest action; and (c) briefly drawing on these "within movement" observations to suggest conceptual and analytical possibilities pertaining to *Adivasi* SSMs and learning in social action.

CONTEXTS OF ADIVASI SOCIAL ACTION IN ORISSA, INDIA

According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and reports from the UN's Working Group on Indigenous Populations, "problems faced by indigenous peoples of Asia (with considerable overlap in other regions as well) include plundering of resources; forced relocation; cultural genocide; militarization; forced integration of Indigenous Peoples into market economies; and bigotry and discrimination" (Eversole, McNeish, & Cimagamore, 2005, p. 32). Unsurprisingly then, while *Adivasis* constitute 8% (or 80 million or more people belonging to some 612 tribes) of the Indian population, they account for 40% of development-displaced persons and in Orissa (home to 62 tribal groups numbering 8 million or more people) while making up 22% of the population, they account for 42% of development-displaced persons (Fernandes, 2006, p. 113).

The British were the first to restrict tribal rights over land and forests in 1885, consolidating the power of the imperial government by emphasizing the revenue yield aspects of forests and ensuring resource requirements for the military, commercial and industrial sectors through the Indian Forest Act of 1878, 1927 and then the Government of India Act of 1935. 200 years of British colonialism "distorted the land structure, ecology, forest resources and flora and fauna with grave implications for the *Adivasis*" (Behura & Panigrahi, 2006, p. 35), as British rule began the process of detribalization of land and forests, reducing the tribals to encroachers on their own territories. The promotion of State Capitalism in the forest sector in the post-independence scenario continued this trend through the Forest Policy of 1952, as the Forest Conservation Act (1980), the Wild Life (Protection) Act (1972) and the Land Acquisition Act made it possible for forcible evictions for an undefined "larger" public interest.

The post-1991 embrace of neoliberalism has exacerbated this trend. Neoliberal land policies have made *Adivasis* subject to summary evictions through reservation, leasing of state land to industrialists, the activation of a Wild Life Protection Act that defines tribals as the enemy of ecology and demarcations of land/forests for national parks and sanctuaries which exclude tribals (Pimple & Sethi, 2005, p. 242). The establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) as economic enclaves of free enterprise is a clear example of such a process of state-corporate collusion around industrial land-grabs from subaltern groups, as even the CPI(M) (Communist state government) in West Bengal with a traditional peasant support base has earmarked as much as 144,000 acres of land in 9 districts for such acquisitions for private industry (Bidwai, 2007, p.14). As the state opts for a Chinese-styled state-managed capitalism, peasant and tribal subaltern groups confront the Left Front-ruled state in acquisitions for the Tatas in Singur (where the corporation is set to produce the world's cheapest car but has now been compelled, largely by this grounded resistance,

to relocate to Gujarat) and in Nandigram (by the notorious Salim group of Indonesia, a known front for the corruption-plagued Suharto family).

Similarly, in the state of Orissa, South Korean steel giant POSCO Ltd., has signed Memorandums of Understandings (MOUs) with the state government to exploit the best coal and iron ore of the state for a period of 30 years, a project that is the single highest foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country; a \$12 billion project that is being held up by betel leaf farmers and the Posco Pratirodh Manch (Vats, 2007, p. 16). Given that 70% of India's (the country has one of the largest deposits in the world) bauxite (ore from which commercial aluminium is produced) deposits are in Orissa and the per tonne spot price of aluminium has increased some 500% over the past 3 years alone, the government of Orissa has made investment in bauxite mining more attractive to private industry. This includes permitting 100% exportation, income-tax exemptions, subsidies, lowering of tariffs for essential equipment and low cost availability of hydro and coal power sources along with cheap labour and a promise of "removal of procedural delays" (e.g. around leases, local consultations, environmental, forestry, pollution, socio-cultural/demographic clearances etc.) under the new National Mining Policy (2006). The government has already leased one billion tonnes (of India's estimated 1.6 billion tonnes) of bauxite to multinational corporations (MNCs) through MOUs (Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights, 2006, pp. 6-11). One such joint venture mining project (owned by Utkal Aluminum Industrial Limited or UAIL, a consortium formed in 1993 which was originally composed of ALCAN, Canada; Hindalco of Birla Group, India; Tata, India and Norsk Hydro, Norway) is in the Baphlimali Hills of Kashipur Block, Rayagada district, an open-cast mine scheduled to produce 195 million tonnes a year (at this rate, known reserves would be depleted in 24-25 years). According to some estimates, UAIL could receive a 6300% return on investment as opposed to the consortium's own projection of 11.5% (Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights, 2006, p. 9). Requiring 2800 acres of land, the project could displace as many as 60,000 people (*Adivasis* and Scheduled castes or *Dalits*) as compared to the consortium's estimate of 2,005 (Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights, 2006, p. 43).

Opposition to the Kashipur bauxite mine is being spearheaded by the Prakruti Sampad Surakshya Parishad (PSSP) movement and several *Adivasi-Dalit* movement organizations in South Orissa in addition to various national and transnational solidarity groups including ALCAN't of Montreal (Kapoor, 2006). Currently 95% of mining activities alone are on *Adivasi* land, while according to some conservative estimates, over 500,000 people in Orissa have been displaced by state-corporate development between 1951-1995 (Behura & Panigrahi, 2006, pp. 203, 211). In the ADEA region, according to the movement organization, over 80% of *Adivasi* families are landless (as per official definition) and suffer the daily indignity of having to endure state-corporate intrusions and land-forest

marginalizations through agro-plantation development, timber/bamboo (forest related) extraction, water/river diversions and the enforcement of land and forest laws that consistently place the *Adivasis* in the position of encroacher. Such historic and contemporary processes of development dispossession of the *Adivasi* and subaltern groups in Orissa have not gone unchallenged as evidenced by numerous movements and struggles in relation to development-related usurpations in Chilika, Kashipur, Lanjigarh, Kalinganagar, Gopalpur and Baliapal, to name but a few relatively known contemporary examples, in addition to the several daily and lesser known challenges posed by organized *Adivasi-Dalit* movement organizations (e.g. ADEA) against detribalization of land, forest and water in the remote interiors of the state.

RESEARCHING LEARNING IN ADIVASI SSM SOCIAL ACTION

Research into learning in *Adivasi* social action by an investigator who has had a long term relationship with the ADEA movement villages in question is understandably predicated upon the centrality of *Adivasi* agency (Chacko, 2005) and the establishment of a research partnership that seeks to explore and address questions that are of significance to the movement and to outside researcher and academic interests. Research questions, methods of data collection and analysis and subsequent popular and scholarly disseminations are all acts of partnership and collaboration, to the extent possible, given the real and imagined constraints and vicissitudes of inside-outside (cross-location) politics and power relations in such inter/cross cultural efforts, personal intentions aside (Kapoor, in press). Early discussions with the ADEA leadership helped to establish the necessity and use for research, i.e., the researcher had to “make the case” for the idea of research and its possibilities for the movement and beyond. The areas of inquiry were mapped out together with the ADEA and this article elaborates and utilizes research pertaining to the typologies and places of movement learning (what and where questions) and the emergence of these through particular forms of social action (local and trans-local, for example). Other questions, some of which have been addressed in Kapoor (2007), have had to do with collectively defining *Adivasi-Dalit* movement issues and concerns, movement purpose and the role of learning in helping to achieve these movement purposes and directions, including elaborations on how learning contributes towards shaping ADEA movement purposes and their subsequent achievement.

The research in relation to these questions and lines of inquiry has catalyzed (catalytic validity) (Lather, 1993) the movement through processes of self and collective-reflection and inquiry (e.g. into movement issues, purposes and achievements); encouraged movement leadership analysis of past struggles and current strategies; motivated participating villages through the sharing of stories, songs, narratives and testimonies while pursuing research questions together; politicized the movement constituencies through identification of sites of

political discussion and through subsequent attempts by ADEA leadership to use these forums more consciously to help with movement maturation and the continuing development of a movement consciousness; created opportunities to promote functional and political literacy through reading circles and publishing *Arkatha* ("our talk") as a people's research sharing journal; and has augmented local grain banks in all the movement villages to acknowledge the sharing of people's knowledge despite the numerous pressures on their time. From an academic standpoint, the research provides outsiders with an opportunity to try and understand *Adivasi* political preoccupations and learning in social action in a colonial context that constantly challenges outside interpretations and understanding of such phenomena in *Adivasi* lives. Attempting to understand and learn from subaltern social movement politics and learning adds a vital piece to social movement and critical adult learning studies (praxis) that seek to make sense of these political possibilities along with other movements in a world that is wrestling with the implications of the globalization of capital and westernization.

The research employs a combination of what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 177) refers to as a "strategy of consultation where efforts are made to seek support and consent" from the *Adivasis* and a "strategy of making space" whereby more *Adivasis* consciously become a part of the research process. Graham Smith's (1992) model of power sharing where researchers seek the assistance of the community to meaningfully support the development of a research process that seeks to be of benefit to the community has also been instructive here. The research is being conducted with a gender-balanced team of six community (movement)-based research assistants. Keeping in mind the key research questions just referred to and emergent questions, data sets are being developed around "mini research projects" defined by the team and the ADEA. Some examples include: (a) tapes and notes on ADEA leadership gatherings; (b) village/regional case studies around land and forest action; (c) developing a collection of cultural-political forms of expression (e.g. songs, poetry, laments, narrations with movement meaning and learning implications) and using this for movement education through *Arkatha*; and (d) participant observation in specific ceremonial and movement-related gatherings (e.g. trans-local movement gatherings). Data consists of observation and interview notes, diagrammatic and pictorial representations and taped songs, poetry and narrations, copies of which have been shared with the communities on several occasions. Whenever possible, data is jointly analyzed to determine emergent themes and key reflections (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the event this is not possible, research team members are collectively engaged in this task, checking back (member checks) with the communities and people concerned if uncomfortable with the interpretations being gleaned from the data. This enhances the plausibility of such interpretations and reduces the likelihood of distortions of *Adivasi* constructions.

The following discussion of learning in *Adivasi* social action pertains to the kinds of learning evident in and emergent from (a) ADEA engagements in trans-local movement activism addressing state-corporate machinations and development dispossession in South Orissa and (b) localized social action in the ADEA region in relation to state-caste interests and land and forest marginalization of *Adivasis* and *Dalits*.

Critical, strategic, tactical and informational learning from trans-local movement activism: Addressing state-corporate machinations and development dispossession in South Orissa

Critical learning pertains to the development of an analytical appreciation for the nature and process by which structured unequal relations of power (political-economic, cultural/racial/caste, of violence and the associated macro-micro socio-political interpolations) play out in relation to *Adivasi-Dalit* lived situations (e.g. the ability to read and expose the state-corporate nexus and its implications for *Adivasi-Dalit* past, present and future) – a type of learning that enhances or obscures (if readings are misjudgements) *strategic* and *tactical* learning. *Strategic learning* refers to the knowledge and learning crucial for the development of a “movement position” (e.g. developing an experiential and tacit sense of why it would be better to take one broad approach, such as outright resistance to development dispossession than another) during a given period of time, while *tactical learning* refers to the development of ideas and learning to select from a host of possible and specific manoeuvres that the movement organization would need to consider in relation to its strategic orientation (e.g. choosing when to initiate or escalate political pressure using several or particular means or a combination of means in a given time or contextual frame such as from gheraos or encirclements, rallies, blockades or letters to officials, etc.). *Informational learning* refers to the acquisition of new facts (mostly “outside or alien” constructs in relation to *Adivasi* conceptions of life such as legal and Constitutional stipulations and constructions of modernity that *Adivasi* social action inevitably “bumps into”) that inform *tactical, strategic and critical learning* as *Adivasis* learn what it takes to address development.

A focus group of 23 members (February, 2008) of the ADEA leadership (120 *Adivasi/Dalit* women and men) shared their observations pertaining to state-corporate development, elaborating on what they had learnt (elements of *critical, strategic, tactical and informational learning* cohere in these conversations) from trans-local movement participation in Kshipur and Chilika and other struggles in the Southern region. The Convenor of the ADEA (lead representative of the movement to outsiders) began proceedings with an exposition on state-corporate development and dispossession in the region that typifies the position of these leaders:

We are gathered here today as *Adivasi, Dalit* and peasant and fisher folk, as people of nature and as natural resource-dependent communities. We are

also the most "burnable" (expendable) communities and by this I mean we, the *Dalit*, the *Adivasi*, the farmer and the fisherman are always forced to give up whatever we have, suffer and sacrifice for the sake of what they call development. Why should the government develop this country at the cost of our way of life? The government and the industrialists and their intellectuals accuse us of being obstacles in the process of development and as enemies of modernization, enemies of progress and enemies of Indian society.

What they mean by this is that we are in the way of their process of exploitation of natural resources for this development. With the help of the big companies and industrialists and multinationals, the state and central governments want to continue to exploit our natural resources to the maximum. And we know what this means for us – we have people here from Maikanch who know how the state police always act for the industrialists and their friends in government who want to see the bauxite mine go forward in Kashipur against our wishes, even if it meant shooting 3 of our brothers; we have people here from Kalinganagar where *Dalits* and *Adivasis* are opposing the Tata steel plant and there too, 13 of us were gunned down by police; we have people here that opposed Tata Steel in Gopalpur and their shrimp-culture in Chilika – in all these movements and struggles many people have been killed by the state and industrialist mafias.

Meanwhile, the state government continues to sign MOUs with Indian and multinational mining companies – POSCO of South Korea alone is going to be responsible for the largest investment in India right here in Orissa and has proposed some 30 or more iron, steel and coal projects. The state policy makers, higher level officials of the state bureaucracy and administration, contractors and mediators and hired mafias all get rich through these projects and the big companies make big profits from exploiting our livelihood resources – why don't you ask the fishermen where all the fish have gone? – of course, all this is with the help of government acknowledgement and protection.

It is time we seriously start to think about this destruction in the name of development.... otherwise, like yesterday's children of nature, who never depended upon anybody for their food security, we will have no option but to go for mass transition from self-sufficient cultivators and forest and fish gatherers to migratory labourers in far away places. After displacement we stand to lose our traditions, our culture and our own historical civilization... from known communities we become scattered unknown people thrown into the darkness to wander about in an unknown world of uncertainty and insecurity.... People's movements have a duty to fulfill and must carry forward our aspirations and hopes, we must come together and engage in introspection and analysis and join together in a greater spirit of solidarity and cooperation to address this destruction. (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

This rendition was followed by an Oriya song (initiated by a member of the group with others joining in) that was repeated at several key junctures in the collective dialogue over the course of the afternoon:

People's organization (sangathan) is the only help, the only way
It is the fountain of knowledge for the poor.

If we come together and get organized,
 That will be the end of the exploiters and oppressors.
 Out of hundred, 85 are poor, can 15 equal the strength of 85?
 In the fight the 15 will be vanquished.
 If we get frightened and withdraw like cowards, we will perish
 We will fight through non-violent means (ahimsa rana)
 How many deaths will we die from running away in fear?
 Our hearts are weeping, our hearts are bleeding
 But the people's organization (sangathan) is the only way...
 (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

An analysis of the conversations shared during this gathering reveal several emergent *critical, strategic, tactical and informational* learnings around ADEA social action in trans-local political engagements in South Orissa, primarily related to Kashipur and with some references to Chilika, pertaining to expositions of state-corporate violations, development destruction and impositions on their communities.

ADEA leadership (through their engagements with these and several other struggles in the state) were only too well aware of Fifth Schedule Area land rights and protections (para 5(2)) available to tribal communities under the Indian Constitution or provisions that aim to prevent the dispossession (by non-tribals, corporate bodies and the government) of Scheduled Tribes and ensure preservation of their unique cultures and livelihoods. There was a clear understanding as well, that in the event there was to be any Scheduled Area (protected areas) land acquisition for development projects by non-tribal entities, it would be necessary for the parties concerned (under the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas or PESA Act) to: (a) hold consultations with the tribals prior to such acquisitions, (b) formulate and share details of a rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) package and (c) obtain consent of the localities concerned as per the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution recommended by the Bhuria Committee. *Gram Sabhas* or *Panchayats* (institutions of local self-governance and administrative units) have the power to prevent land alienation, even if it is instigated by higher levels of government. With this clear understanding in mind, the following alleged machinations (among other examples) were exposed:

Although the UAIL consortium was required to consult with the local people in Kashipur before attempting to acquire over 2600 acres of land for the proposed bauxite mine and refinery, the ADEA leaders claimed that consultations were a farce as:

- (i) police were used to obstruct participation in such consultations by affected villagers while outsiders (some of whom had been promised jobs) were bussed in for these sessions (as was the case for the Orissa State Pollution Control Board hearings around pollution control clearances for the project);

(ii) strong shows of local protest preceded attempts at consultation by UAIL and were then met with repression and bribes as compensation packages were raised (by as much as eight times) after the Maikanch firing and thumb prints secured and compensation forced on to those still resisting -

as one participant pointed out, "people were questioning why after so many years of protesting for a school and health centre which is not available in a 35km radius, they are now building a police station in Kuchipadar village instead!" (Focus group notes, February, 2008). Another member present stated (while lifting his pant leg to disclose scars),

... there were at least 5000 of us when they fired. I too was one of 12 injured (pointing to scar on the thigh) but I never spoke up for fear of police reprisals. I have endured my lot in poverty and silence and could not get treated... but we will never back down.... even in Chilika, after Tata's got shut down by the Supreme Court decision because they violated the Coastal Regulation Zone with their aquaculture project, their mafias came and destroyed people's fishing boats... it seems we act non-violently and use the law and the courts but they always respond with customary violence and break their own laws... (Focus group notes, February, 2008);

(iii) UAIL Communicators allegedly work with police and hired goons to coerce consent and ADEA members present mentioned that some signatures were taken at gunpoint while community leaders often felt pressure to consent given the heavy police presence and after "consenting," were fed meat and liquor; and

(iv) relocation and rehabilitation packages were never presented in writing (strictly verbal interactions) and several examples of exaggerated promises were shared in this focus group discussion.

Even though the companies are required to secure mining leases before proceeding with acquisition and project activities, as the UAIL case demonstrated to ADEA leaders, with the assistance of the Orissa Mining Corporation, a state body, the companies continued activities despite the expiry of the lease (which was obtained under questionable circumstances anyway) in 1996. Adivasi leaders said that environmental clearances were not obtained prior to the issuance of mining leases to UAIL and that the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) had eventually issued clearance based on an incomplete rapid Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), not to mention that site clearance was given to UAIL by MoEF in just 18 days when the norm is closer to a year from the date of application. The EIA conducted by Engineers India Ltd. was never made public as is required by law and Adivasi leaders suggested that UAIL claimed more land than they required for the proposed project. While plans were apparently made to conduct mandatory assessments of social, cultural and demographic impacts (given that this is a Scheduled Area) as late as in 2000, such information was never disclosed. Additionally, the Forest Act

requires forest clearance when forests are used for commercial projects and given that UAIL needed at least 200 acres of forest land, such clearances were also necessary. Similar discrepancies existed in relation to air and water pollution requirements. Armed with the knowledge of these irregularities, participating ADEA leaders emphasized the strategic importance of exposing the state and the UAIL consortium of companies through the progressive and alternative press, people's tribunal hearings (e.g. Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights) and through international solidarity and corporate watchdog groups (e.g. Mines, Minerals and People). Furthermore, they spoke of how important it was to develop a people's consultation process like they did in December 2000, documenting written opposition to the project by all the affected Gram Sabhas and submitting these to the Chief Minister, Prime Minister, and the President of India. Such discrepancies were politicized in the movement constituencies thereby de-legitimizing UAIL and state claims in the region and increasing the tenor of outright opposition to the mining project (which has subsequently resulted in the withdrawal of multinationals Norsk Hydro of Norway, ALCAN of Canada, and Tata India due to company-cited "political concerns"). As one ADEA leader put it:

They are fighting against those who have everything and nothing to lose. We will persist and as long as they keep breaking their own laws – this only makes it easier for us! That is why even after the police firing in Maikanch in 2000, over 10,000 of us showed up to oppose the UAIL project the very next month. (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

ADEA leaders present at this focus group were aware that prolonged protest and social action in relation to such ventures (in the case of Kashipur, for instance, 15 years and counting) raises the cost of such projects (e.g. through escalating demands around relocation & rehabilitation and increased market rates for purchase of private lands from those owners with speculative interests around such developments, not to mention raising risk ratings for the state and the region which has an adverse impact on the financial feasibility of such investments).

Participant leaders in the focus group also revealed that in their desperation, when the state-corporate nexus fails to achieve its objectives for the project, they resort to extreme measures such as the alleged attempt to "denotify" Scheduled Tribes/ST (removal from the scheduled listings as tribes) as in the case of some 40,000 Jhodia Adivasis in Kashipur who once denotified and re-categorized (as Other Backward Classes or OBC) would be stripped of their Constitutional rights as tribes, thereby removing legal obstacles to land acquisition in Scheduled Areas that protect them. Participants pointed out that Jhodias living in areas that were of no commercial value were still being issued ST certificates, while they say the Paroja tribe has met this fate already in the interests of facilitating mining acquisitions. Other leaders present pointed to similar legal gymnastics while referring to the "successful" Chilika

Andolan – despite the movement's victory in persuading the Tatas and the state government to abandon the proposed shrimp culture project in the early 1990s and the Orissa High Court decision that prohibited shrimp culture in Chilika lake, the victory was short-lived as even in the face of a Supreme Court judgment upholding the High Court decision, the industry lobbied the state to push through an Act of Parliament to nullify the court's decision and pass an Aquaculture Authority Bill in 1997 that makes aquaculture permissible within the Coastal Regulation Zone. Under pressure from industry, the state is also being asked to take another look at the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution; Schedules that have been successfully utilized to defend Adivasi rights in Scheduled Areas.

According to some ADEA leaders, NGOs have played a questionable role in the state-corporate bid to foist development on the Adivasis. In March 1997, for instance, the UAIL consortium "floated an NGO" called the Utkal Rural Development Society in an effort to "use social development programs to bribe the communities into compliance with the UAIL project."

Participants noted that other NGOs saw this agitation as an "opportunity" of sorts, as one NGO, for example, "promised the government to help contain the movement in return for rescinding its decision to deregister the NGO." Another participant raised the point that NGOs often end up trying to "derail the people's movement by forcing them into constitutional and legal frameworks" and by "relying on the slow pace of legal avenues" to "make it seem like they are working in solidarity with the people" but "all the time using this delaying tactic to help UAIL." For instance, under recent Constitutional amendments as stated, decision-making authority has been shifted to the Gram Sabha/village level and NGOs tried to

channel public protest aimed at the company, to this nonsense about activating and working through *Gram Sabha* process which is subject to all kind of manipulations by state-corporate people. So, like this they are controlling the force of the movement. (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

In relation to NGOs, the ADEA have learnt not to simply run to the first NGO with funds but are even more selective and discerning in terms of their assessment of such engagements. This was the case with a recent offer for 10 years of project support from an European NGO that was discontinued into the second year by the ADEA leadership given what was construed as an attempt to

make us into program managers and statisticians concerned with funding accountability and the management of our people for the NGO. They expected us to work with village development committees (VDCs) run by a small group when we are used to making all decisions as a community. What they failed to realize is that we are engaged in an *Andolan* (movement struggle) and not a donor-focused program. (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

Instead, engaging in coalitions and networks (local, trans-local, national and transnational) has taken on an increasing significance, as participants are more aware of the odds faced by local activism. Hence, there is increased urgency around stepping up engagements with other struggles/movements (trans-local politics initially) in South Orissa.

“Our ways” learning and ADEA local social action for land, forests and water: State-caste vectors and the daily struggles of the “adhusith” (pejorative reference to Adivasi-Dalit infestation and “pestilence” or spread of impurity)

... and where we live, they call this area *adhusith* (Adivasi-Dalit infestations/pestilence)... we are condemned to the life of *ananta paapi* (eternal sinners), as *colonkith* (dirty/black/stained), or as *ghruniya* (despised and hated). (Kondh Adivasi leader of ADEA, Interview notes, village D, January, 2007)

Such comments regarding the inferior racial-caste categorization of the Adivasis and Dalits abound as they are denigrated as being backward, ignorant and irrelevant to the “new India” (“in the way of development” or seen as anti-development and therefore expendable), although such slurs have not been uncommon even in relation to the “old India.”

The historical and current understanding of *Adivasi-Dalit* colonization and a divide and rule politics (between *Adivasi* and *Dalit* subalterns) is made evident by comments such as, “We are the *mulo nivasi* (root people) and the people who dominated us, history has taught us, came here 5000 years ago” (Kondh *Adivasi* man, Interview notes, village D, January 2007) and “... we fought the British thinking that we will be equal in independent India” (Kondh elder, Interview notes, village D, January 2007) but

Today the *sarkar* (government) is doing a great injustice (*anyayo durniti*)... the way they have framed laws around land-holding and distribution, we the poor are being squashed and stampeded into each other's space and are getting suffocated (*dalachatta hoi santholitho ho chonti*). This creation of inequality (*taro tomyo*) is so widespread and so true.... They tell us they want to modernize, make machines and industries for themselves. To do this, they are doing forcible encroachment of our land – they are all over our hills and stones. They are coming quietly to our forests and hills and in secrecy they are making plans to dig them up and destroy them (mining reference).... they are diverting our water to the towns for their use. They are making dams and water reservoirs, where our villages are to be submerged and we have to leave the place, leave the land and become landless and homeless. We have become silent spectators (*niravre dekhuchui*) to a repeated snatching away of our resources. Whenever we have tried to assert our land rights, we have been warned by the upper castes, their politician friends and the wealthy and have faced innumerable threats and retaliations. The *ucho-barga* (dominant castes and classes) will work to divide and have us fight each other till we are reduced to dust (*talitalanth*). (Kondh Adivasi man, Interview notes, village D, January 2007)

We have bullocks and ploughs and then the government introduced tractors but we could not buy these in the first place, even if anyone wanted to. Then they introduced fertilizers and pesticides and poisoned our cultivable land and water. They introduced soap, shampoos, Surf (detergent) and spices and changed our habits, food habits too. Then they tried to take away our land and forests... They have cut down all the trees from their mountains and forests and now they want to take our forest. We had trees from our forefather in our forest. They took them away and planted useless trees. Our forefathers never needed to dig holes and plant trees. We never gave trees fertilizer. But they came and spoilt the trees.... now that they don't have the waters of Rushikulya river at Chatrapur, they want to take the Nanding too. Water from Nanding will irrigate their fertile land and they will enhance their wealth. (Interview notes, village T, February, 2008)

These eloquent and succinct articulations of *Adivasi-Dalit* exploitation and developmentalist political-economic and cultural penetration, provide a glimpse into a caste, class and state politics of divide and rule (pitting subalterns, *Adivasi* and *Dalit* in this case, against each other in the struggle for resources, while diverting and capturing land, forest and water for urban-industrial development elsewhere), not to mention the introduction of agricultural and consumption practices which undermine *Adivasi* ways. Analysis of data sets reveals the details of a systematic process of *Adivasi-Dalit* divide and rule tactics by the state-business-caste nexus as pointed out by *Adivasi-Dalit* ADEA villagers including (to point to a few examples): (i) state provision of food relief (this is a drought prone area) in accordance with caste v. tribe status, whereby caste villages are ignored in such distributions, (ii) propagandist politics of Constitutional protections around forest, land and water suggesting that the *Adivasi* are the only owners of these resources (*jungle, jal, jammeen hamara* – forest, water and land are ours/*Adivasi*), (iii) a caste politics which differentiates between *Adivasi* as being Hindu and “of higher status” (despite ample evidence of caste prejudices being leveled at *Adivasis* as well, not to mention their predominantly animist beliefs) than *Dalits* who are most likely Christian converts (oft times converting to escape “untouchability” and caste prejudice and avail of missionary material supports) and traitors to the Hindu *rashtra* (country), (iv) ensuring the reproduction of a system of *Dalit* landlessness through preferential and discriminatory applications of land/forest laws and legal processes and implementation (e.g. only charging *Dalits* exorbitant “fees” – illegal extraction or rent seeking – for land *patta* (title) applications, and (v) double standards and ill treatment at government Public Distribution System outlets (PDS or state food security provisions) for subsidized food and daily essentials.

Learning from these historical and contemporary state-caste material and cultural colonizations of *Adivasis* and *Dalits* in the region, the ADEA has responded with several efforts on multiple political-economic and cultural fronts, including promoting collective learning around the need for subaltern unity in the face of these divisive tactics. An ADEA representative emphasizes this point (Interview notes, village D, January 2007):

Ekta Abhijan (ADEA) stands on a root called unity (*ekta*) and the promotion of unity will always be the primary requirement – a unity of minds, hearts and feelings of togetherness. The artificially created sense of difference, divisions and *jati-goshti* (caste-class feelings) need to be destroyed. Our *dhwaja* (flag) is unity (*ekta*) and we have to fly it high (*oraiba*). The flag that ADEA flies is of the people who have lost their land and their forests and who are losing their very roots.

In response to the political-economic incursions, the Convenor of the ADEA states:

We are forest dwellers, poor people, peasants and fisherfolk and we are in all aspects of our life styles different from them. Let us get involved in campaigns to save our forest, land and water which sustain us. Let us occupy land... because I now know that the government will never think about us seriously even if we depend completely on agriculture for our livelihood. If companies like Tata and Vedanta ask the government for land, it is ever ready to oblige them at throwaway prices... this is how the government is planning and acting against our interest. (Focus group notes, February, 2008)

However, elders are quick to point out that land and forest occupation must also be done in accordance with “*our ways*” (the importance of learning to address these incursions in a manner consistent with *Adivasi* culture – ways that are being challenged by the “new agriculture” for instance, and modern legalities and corresponding constructions of individual ownership and the commodification of nature):

Earlier all these forests and the land area belonged to all the people who lived in the area. In the past, in the time of our grandparents, we had one common graveyard, we had a common system of sharing (or *bheda* in the Saora language, in relation to sharing of fruits, benefits, forest products, meat, and land/forest usage) and we had a collective contribution system to support each other. Land was not assigned to any particular person or family – it was a common claim that goes back to our ancestors. We were together in joys and sorrows.

But since the government’s revenue demarcation of land and forests, what belonged to all of us suddenly got divided into two *moujas*/areas of claim and people have started saying, “this is mine and this is mine.” They (the *Adivasis* of the neighbouring village) are now not allowing us to even set foot in their *mouja* and they are saying that you should not cut our trees or bamboo for your use. And we are doing the same. This is not our way. (Interview notes, village D, January, 2007)

Another village elder sheds light on the significance of the forest-ways of the *Adivasi* and their continued significance despite the alleged promises of modernity:

Who wants to go to the city to join the Oriyas and do business and open shops and be *shahari* (city/moderns) if they give you a chance or to do labour like donkeys to get one meal? Even if they teach us, we do not want to go to the cities – these are not the ways of the *Adivasi*. We cannot leave our

forests (*ame jangale chari paribo nahi*). The forest is our second home (after the huts). There is no distance between our homes and the forest. You just come out and you have everything you need.... My friends and brothers, we are from the forest. That is why we use the small sticks of the *karanja* tree to brush our teeth – not tooth brushes. Our relationship with the forest is like a finger nail is to flesh (*nakho koo mangsho*) – we cannot be separated. The past is the present and the present is the past and they are the future, past and present. We are as we are, we are as we have been and we will be as we are and have been. That is why we are *Adivasi*. (Interview notes, village D, January 2007)

The ADEA movement villages have taken on several initiatives to address state-caste led daily intrusions into *Adivasi-Dalit* lives and livelihoods over the past decade, actions that have been all the more urgent given the encircling pressures of mining, forestry, plantation and dam related incursions as has become painfully clear from trans-local activism pertaining to Kashipur and similar state-corporate ventures of development dispossession of *Adivasi* and *Dalit* communities. The ADEA leaders see these forms of social action as preemptive and proactive moves to assert ADEA community control over land, forest, water, and culture. These include: (i) a systematic process of collective land and forest occupation through millet and fruit orchard cultivation (over 7000 acres or more have been “encroached” based on the last count) into land/forest zones that offer maximum potential for re-classifications and *pattas* to *Adivasis* and *Dalits*, i.e., these areas are in dispute and villages have made claims through the revenue courts in a process of “collective mapping, growing, eating, and claiming” (for a discussion of this process, see Kapoor & Prasant, 2002); (ii) promotion and consolidation of grain banks and a network of seed-banks promoting local seed varieties while opposing use of fertilizers and pesticides or GM seeds; (iii) continued and stepped-up use of the *Adivasi* collective labour system where entire villages work family and collective plots together; (iv) rejuvenation of the notion of ownership as stewardship for the community as opposed to personal possession as in the case of fruit trees, for example; (v) a systematic move to take over the PDS outlets (from mid-upper caste resource captures) in the 9 panchayat regions of the movement villages (currently 6 PDS outlets are being managed by *Adivasi-Dalit* women’s groups); (vi) collective (regional and/or multi-regional) political pressure tactics in support of addressing movement concerns in each village or region; (vii) the securing of hutment area *pattas* for over 60% of the villages and random evictions are now no longer possible in these areas (prior to this, it was not unusual for people to go to work in the fields and come back to a village that had been bulldozed to make way for a cashew plantation); (viii) organized pressure to enable infrastructure development through mobilization of the state for local agriculture (wells, paved roads, check dams, canal systems, water-catchments etc.); and (ix) putting up ADEA region candidates for elections to local government positions to ensure control over state funds and projects in the area (*Gram Sabha* and *Panchayat* offices and *Zilla* level).

Additionally and in relation to movement building, the research process has been used by the ADEA to determine where (locations) different groups belonging to the ADEA (gendered, caste-*Adivasi*, different *Adivasis*, age-based) congregate to discuss movement issues pertaining to *ekta* (unity), land, forests, water, livelihood, state-*Adivasi* relations, caste relations and other matters of movement concern. This knowledge is being used by the movement to encourage such discussions and analysis in the interests of a maturing movement consciousness necessary for solidifying the prospects for movement pressure tactics and accomplishments. For instance, sites of political learning and discussion include: *toddy ghat* (local pub for men), butcher stall (for men), earthen pot fire place (for Saora *Adivasi* men), wine cooking ghat, lice-picking place/verandah, bathing stream and well site (for women). The *Adivasi-Dalit* people's research sharing journal documenting research conversations (*Arkatha* or "our talk") serves to encourage popular dissemination of the research reflections and is used at some of these sites in reading circles (Observation notes, February, 2006).

Together, these *critical, strategic, tactical* and *informational* learnings along with "*our ways learning*" have strengthened the ADEA movement's ability to analyze, partially predict and then position itself in order to secure some of its objectives around food sovereignty, land and forests and to curb the possibility of mining destruction and dispossession of *Adivasis*. Knowledge gained through social action informs "pre-emptive" discussions (inoculation exercises through popular education in the movement villages and beyond); political knowledge-building (movement consciousness) in the movement constituency; and tighter organizational and tactical understanding in relation to social action that is planned (e.g. development of systematic land "encroachments") or spontaneous (e.g. joint actions instigated by critical incidents such as forest invasions by bamboo mafias working with or for the timber industry or the large scale theft of Minor Forest Products). Accelerating this process has become an urgent priority in the face of current neoliberal challenges being posed by the corporatized-state and its mining expansionism and agro-industrial developmental ambitions. In the final analysis, the *Adivasi* say:

We are demanding a place for ourselves – we are questioning the government and asking them to help us develop our land using our ways. ADEA's idea is that our livelihood should be protected and our traditional occupations and relationship to the land and forest be protected in the form of community control over land and forest in our areas and this is our understanding of our Constitutional rights too.... If they can help the *shaharis* (moderns/urban city peoples) destroy the forests, then they can and should help us to protect it and listen to our story too." (Kondh leader, Interview notes, January, 2007)

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND SOME CONCEPTUAL-ANALYTICAL
POSTSCRIPTS: DEVELOPMENT DISPOSSESSION AND ADIVASI LEARNING
IN ADIVASI SUBALTERN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS (SSMS)

Drawing directly from the experiences and interpretations of ADEA social action and this research partnership with the ADEA exploring learning in *Adivasi* social movements, it is possible to briefly elaborate on some conceptual and analytical considerations pertaining to SSMs and learning in *Adivasi* SSMs, while respecting the self-definition and integrity of these movements in the global South. In terms of the possible constellation of social movements, SSMs need to be understood as distinct formations in relation to modernist/post-modernist movement categorizations (Carroll, 1997) such as Old Social Movements (OSMs) (referring to labour struggles in industrial/post-industrial society in relation to capital and labour's quest for capturing the state) (Holst, 2002), New Social Movements (NSMs) (referring to identity struggles around race and gender for instance or human rights and urban middle class environmentalist civil society groups with an interest in influencing/reforming the state) or Global Social Movements (GSMs) (referring to "globalized" and transnational strains of NSMs – global civil society, for instance) (Hall, 2000). The distinction needs to be drawn in the interests of preventing the modernist/post-modernist colonization of definitions and projects of radicalism, change and associated notions of critique, not to mention recognition of the plurality of social action and possible presents and futures. This distinction needs to be drawn so that SSMs are not simply erased or ignored as agents of political worth since they do not appear to cohere with the teleology of dominant movement conceptions (modern forms) or worse still, are subsumed (colonized/disappeared and with that, an anti/critical colonial politics is theoretically submerged) within the allegedly more significant (radical?) politics of OSM (socialist) and NSM (civil-societarian reformism) movement formations.

While there are several plausible distinctions that might help to separate SSMs from these other movements (see Kapoor, 2008), a key distinction has to do with their possible location in what Chatterjee (2001, p.165) refers to as "political society" as opposed to civil society. For Chatterjee, in the Indian post-colonial context, civil society means "those characteristic institutions of modern associational life originating in Western societies, which are based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberative decision-making..." (p. 172), "civil society as bourgeois society... and the mark of non-Western modernity as an always incomplete project of modernization" (p. 172),

set up by the nationalist elites in the era of colonial modernity (though often as part of the anti-colonial struggle)... these institutions embody the desire of this elite to replicate... the substance of Western modernity... a desire for a new ethical life conforming to the virtues of the Enlightenment and bourgeois freedom and whose known cultural forms are those of Western Christianity. (p. 174)

Political society, on the other hand (Chatterjee, p. 177) refers to population groups which make collective demands on the state founded on a violation of the law – they are not proper citizens but populations who survive by sidestepping the law – and the state and civil society deal with these people not as bodies of citizens belonging to a lawfully constituted civil society but as “populations” deserving welfare. While civil society was the most significant site of transformation in the colonial era, in the post-colonial period it is political society that is the most significant site of transformation according to Chatterjee, who states that in “the latest phase of the globalization of capital, we will be witnessing an emerging opposition between civil society and political society” (p. 178). This is a case in point when attempting to understand the place and growing contemporary significance of *Adivasi*/other SSMs in India and the South. As civil societarian activism insists on defining justice and possibility as a project of “inclusion and equity” within modernity while the neoliberal state-market forces insist on a politics of dispossession of *Adivasis* “in the way of development,” *Adivasi* will persist with an anti-colonial (resting on critiques of modernity and its historical trajectory of impositions on difference and pluralism) politics of political-economic and spiritual place and cultural recognition aimed at state-corporate development dispossession (material marginalizations) and state-caste cultural relegations (race-caste, urban-forest/rural prejudice). Unlike in the case of NSM (civil society) politics or neoliberal market-state politics, SSM formations arguably have a tentative area of political intersection with OSM formations as capital exploits labour and engages in primitive accumulation vis-à-vis other modes of production (*Adivasi*) resulting in acts of dispossession, thereby creating the prospects for partial cross-pollinations between anti-hegemonic (*Adivasi*) and counter-hegemonic (labour) social action.

Given the possibility of a different social location in political society for SSMs, it would not be a stretch to recognize that in terms of learning in social action, the types of learning, their epistemic basis, the purposes for their activation and so on, would also differ to an extent. As proposed elsewhere (Kapoor, 2008), both, from an analytical point of view (research) and one that relates to contributing toward movement praxis (learning in social action), a possible interactive (i.e., the proposed dimensions are not discrete) schemata for understanding learning in *Adivasi* SSMs might include: (a) macro-political-economic and socio-cultural dimensions (e.g. *Adivasis* assess, analyze and massage their understanding of the political-economic and socio-cultural implications of state-corporate led development-dispossession and its implications for their lives and possible courses of action open to them), (b) micro-political and intra-communal dimensions (e.g. *Adivasis* critically evaluate the schisms in the movement such as questions pertaining to *Adivasi-Dalit* relations and state-caste interests in exploiting these socio-cultural fault lines), (c) specific learning and knowledge processes within movements (e.g., assessing and using inside-outside

knowledge engagements or determining where movement learning takes place and who is engaged in a given space or the kinds of knowledge being employed) – this paper, for instance, elaborates on the *critical, strategic, tactical, informational, and "our ways" learning* that takes place in ADEA trans-local and local social action and (d) consciously studying and simultaneously contributing towards the catalytic validity of research and related movement praxis (e.g., research as a process of creating movement introspection and identity as "*our ways learning*" discussions demonstrate).

In conclusion, this article has traced the kinds of learning engendered through Adivasi trans-local and local SSM action addressing state-corporate developmental collusions, state-caste interests and the resulting dispossession of Adivasis from land, forest and ways of life given the contemporary economic liberalization drive to exploit resources in the rural hinterlands in India. It has also been suggested that Adivasi SSM formations are distinct from (without implying that these are "static formations" frozen in time, space or politics that have ceased to learn) other modernist conceptions of movements and that this distinction needs to be drawn in the interests of duly recognizing the politics (and corresponding learning in SSM action) of these anti-colonial political formations that have a history which predates contemporary movement formations, old or new.

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NOTES

1. This expression is borrowed from Blaser, M., Feit, H., & McRae, G. (Eds.), (2004). *In the way of development: Indigenous peoples, life projects and globalization*. London: Zed.
2. The author acknowledges the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada for this research into "Learning in Adivasi (original dweller) social movements" in India through a Standard Research Grant (2006-2009).
3. In the Adivasi context, some defining elements of a social movement include: (a) movement as a process of articulation of concerns; (b) movement as defined by the maturity and growing unity of an organized presence (movement organization) that engages a critical mass of people with like-concerns; and (c) movement as organized action directed at oppositional social structural and institutional forces that "give cause" for such movements in the first instance.
4. This term comes from Antonio Gramsci's use of "subaltern" and "subaltern consciousness" (1971, p. 55, pp. 325-326) in relation to the Italian peasantry and is being used here to refer to Adivasis, low caste/Dalit agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, smallholder peasants, artisans, shepherds and migrant landless labour working in mines and plantations. The term also alludes to the dialectical relations of superordination and subordination that define social relations in hierarchical social formations (Ludden, 2005, p. 215), while keeping in mind Guha's (1982, pp. 5-8) observation that there are ambiguities inherent in the concept when applied to the Indian context.

5. For instance, the displacement of 33 million development refugees from their homes (due to dams, mining and other projects) is referenced as a "social cost" (a euphemism) by the Indian government (Rajagopal, 2004, p. 195).
6. Hence the tendency to discredit and subsequently emasculate and conflate most subaltern movements with an impotent post-modern individualist politics of the particular (self-absorbed) or worse still, as regressive calls for primitivism thereby exposing the Marxist under-belly of racial/cultural chauvinisms.

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LEARNING TO SLEEP WITHOUT PERCHING: REFLECTIONS BY ACTIVIST-EDUCATORS ON LEARNING IN SOCIAL ACTION IN GHANAIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS¹

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ABSTRACT. This article conveys results from a participatory action research (PAR) engagement with activist/educators working in Ghanaian social movements. First, this PAR group has articulated two typologies from which to understand Ghanaian social movements based on their processes of organization, communication and learning rather than merely the issues, resources or populations that occupy their focus. Second, expanding on Griff Foley's (1999) notion of learning in struggle, the PAR group provides three lenses from which to view learning in social movements in Ghana. Both of these contributions help to present a much needed African inflection to ongoing discussions of learning in social movements, especially as these contributions attempt to maintain a complex view of learning based on the shifting characteristics of power and capital.

**APPRENDRE À DORMIR SANS PERCHOIR : RÉFLEXIONS D'ÉDUCATEURS ACTIVISTES
SUR LES APPRENTISSAGES RÉALISÉS VIA L'ACTION SOCIALE DANS LES MOUVEMENTS
SOCIAUX GHANÉENS**

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article met en lumière les résultats d'un projet de recherche-action (PRA) effectué auprès de groupes sociaux ghanéens d'éducateurs activistes. Tout d'abord, le groupe PRA a articulé deux typologies afin de comprendre les processus organisationnels, communicationnels et d'apprentissages des mouvements sociaux ghanéens plutôt que de se limiter aux problématiques, ressources ou populations au centre de leur action. En deuxième lieu, s'inspirant de la notion mise de l'avant par Griff Foley en 1999 sur l'apprentissage au sein des luttes, le groupe PRA offre trois éclairages sur l'apprentissage dans le cadre des mouvements sociaux au Ghana. Ces deux contributions tracent un portrait du besoin pressant des Africains pour des discussions constantes sur les apprentissages dans les mouvements sociaux, dans le contexte où ces contributions permettent de maintenir une vision complexe des apprentissages basés sur les caractéristiques mouvantes du pouvoir et du capital.

INTRODUCTION

If hunters have learned to shoot without missing, birds must to learn sleep without perching. Northern Ghanaian Proverb. (C. Agyeyomah, personal communication, 2007)

Since the return to democracy in Ghana in 1992, Ghanaian social movements have had to constantly learn new processes of engagement with the ever-changing face of power and capital. The above proverb from Northern Ghana speaks to the necessity of this cyclical process of learning, and the risks faced if social movements do not remain actively engaged in this cycle – lack of vigilance could lead to a sleep with fatal consequences. This image of watchfulness – the awareness of the hunter’s every move – is an appropriate opening to this article as it indicates two major themes that run through the collective PAR work reported here. First, and most importantly, it provides an epistemic link to the Ghanaian setting of this research; even as theories of contestation and of learning in social movements are drawn from elsewhere, this study takes seriously Mahmood Mamdani’s (1996) call to ground analyses of African phenomena in African histories and thinking. Second, this proverb captures the spirit of thinking of all those involved in this study – as the complexity of current neoliberal colonial manifestations of power and capital reconfigure themselves, Ghanaian activist-educators and social movements need to reflect on their history of engagement with these legacies to determine the best way to out-manoeuvre them.

The importance of the cycle of learning and reflection needed to enact this out-manoeuvring is at the heart of the PAR engagement reported on in this article. This engagement brought together Ghanaian activist-educators from a number of social movements throughout the country to reflect on learning in social movements in Ghana’s new democratic era. For the activist-educators involved in this study, the ways in which social movements in Ghana learn and reflect on the shifting and often contradictory role of power and capital – not only against a movement’s interests, but also within its ranks – are indicative of whether a given social movement will remain grounded in the needs of those it purports to represent. For instance, the democracy movement that successfully pressured for a democratic transition in Ghana also demanded a change in neoliberal economic relations with foreign capital. This point that was dropped upon transition as elements within the movement began to transform into political parties (Ninsin, 2007; Abrahamsen, 2000; Akwetey, 1994; Yeebo, 1991). Griff Foley has called this dual-natured, complex process “learning in struggle” (1999). He has described the ways in which social movement success can also be a double edged sword as particular sets of interests begin to dominate others, undermining the very collaborative spirit at the heart of movement organization. In a thought-line that echoes the collective analysis of the PAR group at the centre of this study, Foley notes that studying learning in struggle must be grounded in an analysis that “recognizes the

complex, ambiguous and contradictory character of particular movements and struggles” (1999, p. 143).

In this article, a complex understanding of learning in Ghanaian social movements is articulated by referring to a selection of results emerging from the activist/educator PAR engagement. These selected results fall into two inter-textually linked categories: 1) providing an initial overview of the characteristics of contemporary social movements in Ghana; and, 2) making a contribution to ongoing discussions of social movement learning through the introduction of an African perspective that expands on Foley’s (1999) notion of “learning in struggle.” The introduction of an African perspective on learning in social movements is especially important as it remains largely unarticulated: social movements in Africa themselves remain under-researched (Prempeh, 2006), let alone any articulation of their processes of learning.²

The article first situates the research in ongoing theoretical debates about learning in social movements, beginning with an elaboration of Foley’s notion. It then elaborates two different axes along which one can analyze Ghanaian social movements: as being embedded in old social movement and new social movement dichotomies or in subverting these dichotomies through local iterations of movement activism; or, as emerging from two particular approaches to organization, communication and learning. The final of these two views is based on a heuristic typology articulated by the activist-educator PAR group, where didactic movements are differentiated from dialogue-based movements.

The article then provides a detailed articulation of three lenses intended to expand Foley’s (1999) notion of “learning in struggle.” These three lenses provide different ways of viewing learning within social movements. The first, a re-articulation of Foley, provides a long-term view of the complex and ambiguous process of learning within movements in the Ghanaian context. The second zeroes in on particular moments of extreme learning, where an event or major conflict reveals the hidden agendas of many of those in the movement and on its outside. These events are often the moments where movements are born or reborn, but they are also the time when they are most open to cooptation precisely because the conflict/event forces the hand of those with hidden agendas, making them declare allegiances that can shut doors to social transformation/emancipation. Finally, the last lens reflects how movements themselves conceive of learning, and how to use learning to build struggles. Here, the two typologies that the PAR group modeled are seen to be indicative of how particular movements conceive of learning to struggle, whether this is a didactic process of instruction or a dialogue-based process of mutual learning and problem-posing.

As a final aside it is important to remember McTaggart’s (1991) point that the results of a PAR process are collectively owned and therefore must be seen as a collective product. The collaboration at the heart of this study is based

on between five and ten years of working together within various contexts in Ghana. This long-term relationship provides the trust necessary for this type of endeavour to contribute positively to processes of learning in social movements (Kapoor, 2007; Reason, 1994).³ While I consider myself a member of this PAR collective, I am also acutely aware of the challenges of both participating in and then reporting on collaborative work – both as a cultural insider/outsider and also as a researcher who has a background in the context, but is nonetheless predominantly based in a university setting. This is a tension that Michelle Fine and Maria Torre (2006) report on in their work with female prison inmates. They suggest we must be open about our complementary roles in the research, and the way in which what appears here as consensus is in fact the result of collective debate and analysis where not everyone agreed all the time. In the pages that follow, I will speak of decisions made by the PAR group, not in an effort to write myself out of the research, but rather to honour the collaborative nature of the work presented here. However, it is important to state that my main role in the collective was to help connect some of our collaborative thought to theories and research on learning in social movements that already exists. In this sense, the theoretical framework outlined below was articulated collaboratively, but much of the theory and language came from my contributions to our ongoing analysis.⁴ Before turning to this framework, however, Mamdani's (1996) call introduced above underscores the importance of beginning a discussion of Ghanaian social movement learning by grounding this discussion in a recent history of movement activism in Ghana, especially as this activism connects to the contemporary democratic era. This interconnected historical snapshot will be used as a reference point for elaborating the typologies of Ghanaian social movements and the ways through which their learning can be understood.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: A BRIEF HISTORY OF RECENT GHANAIAN ACTIVISM

In a recent study of Ghana's current period of democratization, Kwame Ninsin (2007) suggests that Ghanaians do not have an active tradition of activism. This remark is strange given the consistent pressure of various Ghanaian social movements around such issues as women's rights, water privatization, the effects of globalization in such areas as mining, agriculture and timber, as well as the repeated defence of democratic institutions in the face of real threats of cooptation and corruption. In this last instance, a consistent force of activist-educators associated with the various manifestations of the democracy movement, has constantly asked critical questions about power throughout the rule of the military government of the 1980s, as well as the democratic terms of both major political parties. In order both to provide an example of activism in Ghana and also to better articulate what social movements mean in the Ghanaian context I will dwell here on the ebb and flow of this movement.

Ghana's democracy movement must first be situated in its origins in the antecedent socialist student, worker and lower rank military movement of the late 1970s to early 1980s. First in 1979, and then in 1981, Ghana went through what have been called socialist-informed revolutions (Shillington, 1992). While both of these seizures of power revolved around the central figure of Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, there were also huge numbers of students, workers and lower-ranked military personnel that actualized and defended these revolutions. In 1981 in particular, these elements made up an important part of the first institutions of the revolution – the People's Defence Committees (PDCs) (Shillington, 1992; Yeebo, 2007). However, a large number of those who led or were a part of these institutions were later targeted by the Rawlings military regime – the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) – as it took a giant right turn in its political allegiances in 1983 and began implementing Ghana's first structural adjustment policy sponsored by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Yeebo, 2007). Many of those described in this article as activist-educators were targeted during this period, and were in many cases captured and tortured at the hands of this regime – becoming living testaments to the saying that the revolution eats its babies.

In many ways, it is during this period of targeting that the momentum for a movement to return to democracy began. For many of those targeted, this experience led to the critical realization that it is only within a broader public space where one's human rights can be defended that it is possible to truly mobilize for a socially just form of governance that contests the exploitative nature of capital and globalization. This realization was steeped in a socialist praxis of activism, yet this praxis had been deeply affected by the failure and totalitarian turn of the PNDC (Yeebo, 2007). Meanwhile, the growing dislocation of structural adjustment (Hutchful, 2002; Hilson, 2004; Ninsin, 2007) became intertwined with the activism of those whom the revolution had targeted, which generated a growing platform from which to question the violence and lack of accountability of the government as well as its growing link with transnational capital and Bretton Woods institutions (Abrahamsen, 2000; Akwetey, 1994; Yeebo, 1991; Langdon, 2009). This convergence sparked the democracy movement and forced the military government to return power to civilian institutions in 1992. While there are mixed interpretations as to whether or not this transition led to free and fair elections, one characteristic did emerge in this form of democracy – it did not question the relations with foreign capital (Ninsin, 2007; Abrahamsen, 2000). Partially as a result of this failure, many of the same activist-educators who matured in the complex period of revolutionary disappointment turned their activism on the newly minted democratic institutions and the foreign-imposed policies they enacted that further deepened the poverty of average Ghanaians.

In the democratic period, these activist-educators became embedded in amalgamations of urban labour-forces, the urban working poor, students and – to

a lesser extent – oppositional politicians (these later had mostly an exploitative relationship with these movements, which I discuss below). While both major political parties were in power – the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) – these amorphous movements sparked major demonstrations around several policies that affected the poor and marginalized in Ghanaian society. In 1995, a schism in the formal labour movement, led by a younger set of labour activists against the older generation that was closely aligned with the ruling NDC party (formed from the former military government that maintained Rawlings as its leader) brought out into the open tensions surrounding the introduction of a World Bank-sponsored Value-Added Tax (VAT). This schism provoked a massive outpouring of street activism throughout the country, known as the *Kume Preko* demonstrations. This mobilization not only slowed down the application of this new tax and changed its nature, but it also provided the NPP opposition with the platform it needed in 2000 to achieve the first ever democratic transition of power in Ghana's history. Yet, despite initial support for this new NPP regime, many of these same activist-educators became involved in a similar series of demonstrations as the new government also aimed to build growth on the backs on the poor. Reacting to what it called the “Whahala” (“hard suffering”) budget, this new manifestation of many of the same elements that made up the democracy movement helped to coordinate demonstrations in every major city in Ghana. The most recent manifestation of these elements has called itself the Committee for Joint Action (CJA). Central to these demonstrations was the huge burden of costs for services and goods being shifted to the urban and rural poor, as the government attempted to privatize and deregulate health, education, electricity, water and fuel. The National Coalition Against the Privatization of Water (NCAP) – a movement that arose in the previous NDC regime but faced its greatest challenge during the NPP tenure – has also been closely aligned with both of these manifestations. NCAP has successfully built a nationwide resistance movement that brings together urban and rural poor to contest what they see as the erosion of a social water policy meant to bring clean water to every Ghanaian (Prempeh, 2006). In one particular demonstration in Tamale, 400 women from across Ghana's mostly rural north showed up and took over a meeting where World Bank-hired consultants were trying to sell the privatization to urban users. Not only did these women forcefully drive home the link between public water provision and urban subsidization of rural water – making water privatization everyone's business. They also insisted that the proceedings be conducted in the northern language of Dagbani, a demand that revealed the intersection of capital interests with identity politics as the consultants could no longer speak directly to the crowd. This intervention made it clear to all present that privatization served someone else's interest – not their own.

As a further telling indication of the lasting nature of some of Ghana's social movements, the CJA – with its antecedent links to the organization in the previous NDC democratic regime, to the democracy movement itself, and to the socialist movements of the 1980s – remains constantly vigilant regardless of who is in power. For instance, the CJA endorsed John Mills of the NDC who subsequently won Ghana's most recent election, securing Ghana's second peaceful transfer of power. Yet they have mobilized mass demonstrations against this new government as it set about granting huge end-of-service benefits to members of the previous administration. As a result of this action, the benefits have been frozen in place and a major member of the NDC has been purged for signing the authorization (Daabu, 2009).

In this sense, Ghanaian social movements can be understood as being embedded in the history of activism in the country that goes back to failed socialist experiments in the 1980s and runs through the current democratic period. Yet they can also be understood as consistently questioning power, especially as it is intertwined with foreign and domestic capital, though in the section on social movement typologies below, this is recontextualized based on two models articulated by our PAR analysis. Finally, the Ghanaian movements need to be understood through the lens of local identity and cultural politics, especially as these politics became sites of resistance to coercive or hegemonic power.

LEARNING IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: CONTRIBUTIONS TO AN ONGOING DISCUSSION

John Holst's (2002) recent study could be one place to introduce the ongoing discussion of theories of social movement learning, especially as it provides a detailed account of contemporary radical adult education contributions to this discussion. Holst is equally compelling for his insistence that to begin discussing learning in social movements necessitates a discussion of broader sociological debates concerning social movements themselves. Yet, as Kapoor (2007) notes, Holst can be criticized for being over-situated in Euro-American debates and understandings of movements and of their learning processes. Extrapolating Kapoor's critique to the African context, one can add Mamdani's (1996) strong argument against analogizing African phenomena with other spaces, places and histories. Mamdani (1995), along with Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, co-edited one of the only articulations of social movements in the African context, especially as they relate to the problematic of the failures of state-led and market-led development models, as well as a complex thinking through of the links between social movements and democratization in Africa. For Mamdani (1995) an important shift in thinking is captured in this collection, as authors in their network entitled "Social Movements, Social Transformation and the Struggle for Democracy in Africa" have critically challenged their own connections to a strictly structuralist, Marxist, materialist, and dependency informed position with a position much more deeply informed by the problematic of the

state in the African context.⁵ In this sense, Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba's collection is in dialogue with Kapoor's (2007) critique of the tendency of radical adult education writing on social movement learning, including Holst, to over-simplistically universalize the Euro-American experience onto other settings outside of this set of experiences. What needs underscoring here, however, is that like the proverb that began this article suggested, the starting point of the collaboration at the heart of this research has been a particularly Ghanaian and more generally African analysis of social movements and their learning. It is critical to keep this starting point in mind as it frames how theories of social movement learning are understood in the Ghanaian context as well as how they came to inform our PAR group's analysis.

With this important inflection in mind, Foley's (1999) work on learning in social action provides an equally important point of departure for theorizing learning in social movements. Not only does it provide an important critique of formal approaches to conceiving of learning in organizations – and adult education in general – it offers a complex and nuanced theoretical framework for beginning to think about learning in social movements. With case studies ranging from environmental activism in Australia to popular education in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, Foley's framework elaborates three important concepts that were helpful to the PAR group in situating our analysis of Ghanaian social movement learning.

First, Foley (1999) makes a strong case for being aware of the shifting role of capital in understanding the challenges – both internal and external – that social movements are facing. In re-emphasizing the importance of a political economy analysis, Foley also critiques those educational theorists who have analyzed social movement learning from a strictly post-structural point of view, such as Holford (1995). For Foley, simply focusing on the discursive and ignoring the complex interplay of power and capital in social movement formation, mobilization and learning is “idealist and simplistic” (p. 143). While I think Foley may himself be oversimplifying discursive interpretations of power, his emphasis on the importance of the shifting face of capital certainly surfaced in the current Ghanaian study as a key facet to build into the analysis both of the formation of movements and of their learning processes.

Second, Foley (1999) embeds this awareness of capital in a complex and multifaceted conception of power and how it operates:

People's everyday experience reproduces ways of thinking and acting which support the, often oppressive, status quo, but [...] this same experience also produces recognitions which enable people to critique and challenge the existing order. (p. 4)

In this sense, he presents a vision of emancipatory learning which is both complex and contradictory – sometimes leading to moments of broadening of emancipation, and sometimes leading to other moments where resistance

actually contributes to new forms of oppression. In this sense, and though he may resist the connection, Foley is employing a Foucauldian sense of power and embedding it in a recognition of the role capital plays in these moments of contradiction. This nuanced concept of power is important as it helps underscore one of the main reasons for the typological differentiation articulated by the PAR group – discussed more fully below – where, in the didactic social movement, leaders become deracinated from their core, making strategic decisions for the broader collective, and becoming directive in their instructions to this collective core.

Third, both of these two other dimensions of Foley’s analysis of social movements are intertwined with a reconceptualization of struggle as learning. For Foley, this notion goes right to the heart of his argument about the primacy of informal learning over more formal educational processes. More importantly for the analysis here, it also provides a key conceptual hook for understanding how learning occurs in social movements. While Foley’s case studies provide a variety of instances of “learning in struggle” – learning often overlooked by those involved because it is embedded in the struggle – he does not make an attempt to classify or breakdown these different types of learning in struggle. Without intending to do so, this research on Ghana organized itself along the lines of Foley’s theoretical hook, and has provided three categories, or ways of thinking about learning in struggle. Before turning to these three lenses, there are two other voices that need to be amplified here as they add other key inflections to the study presented.

Kapoor (2007) has expanded on Foley’s original notion of learning in struggle, and has linked it to an emerging postcolonial critique of radical adult education perspectives on learning in social movements. As mentioned above, Kapoor criticizes Holst (2002) for taking a global view of local struggles and learning. While acknowledging the importance of the political economy perspective that Foley brings, Kapoor reminds us of the dangers to a subaltern movement, such as the Adivasi movement with which he collaborates in India, of becoming theoretically appropriated by either the overtly-Marxist position, or the civil-societarian and identity politics analysis of new social movement theorists. The portability of these conceptual lenses across cultural divides, especially in postcolonial contexts, needs to be questioned, and their link to a colonial legacy of thought needs to be highlighted.⁶ In light of this criticism, Kapoor (2007) proposes using a subaltern studies lens to examine social movements in postcolonial positions, providing room for subaltern perspectives to resist hegemonic interpretations through local iterations embedded in their context. In this sense, an analysis of Ghanaian social movements must constantly ground itself in conceptions of social action and learning that are informed by the historical legacy and contemporary manifestation of colonialism within particular settings as well as by the political-economic context.

The tension at the heart of this balance has important implications for both Marxist conceptions of hegemony and subaltern iterations of agency. While Marxist extrapolations from Lenin and Gramsci may situate capitalist hegemony as the major adversary of radical learning in social movements (Holst, 2002), even while civil-societarian theories may position the state as the adversary in the achievement of group and individual rights (Holford, 1995), Kapoor's study provides an important reconception of both of these positions. As he notes:

Adivasi movements often appropriate the human rights or civil societarian discourse (e.g., around notions of people's participation or individual rights) or Marxist conceptions (e.g., revolutionary left-party sloganeering), digesting them within localized frames of reference or instrumentalizing them in the interests of *Adivasi* prospects and existence rationalities. Such strategic utilizations need to be recognized as such and understood within the various contexts of the historic struggles of the *Adivasi*. (2007, p. 34, italics in original)

In this articulation of subaltern agency, social movement learning not only implies a demystification of power and hegemony, but also a recognition of the ways in which marginalized groups produce subjugated knowledges that question dominant narratives from their own lived realities. Like Scott's (1990) notion of the hidden-transcripts and the infrapolitics of subaltern groups, this view of power inflects a political economy approach with the epistemic and lived reality of groups contesting their place in the status quo.

Finally, to this we should add Choudry's (2007) recent articulation of the power relations among non-government organizations and social movements, especially as they move from the context of an indigenous struggle to a transnational context. For Choudry, the power differential between these two different sites of resistance can lead and has led to silencing and dominance by the transnational anti-globalization movement over those forms of local struggles such as the indigenous Maori social movement with which he works. In many ways, Choudry's example echoes the complex power relations Foley has articulated. What is important to Choudry, however, is being aware of the knowledge being produced by indigenous movements, and the ways in which this knowledge production could bring new insights, yet is often marginalized as oppositional space is dominated by the larger Euro/North-American movements and non-government organizations. While this is not something addressed in this article, it has been a major feature of learning of many movements in Ghana, where they have seen their localized concerns and understanding of issues sidelined in transnational debates about strategy (Langdon, 2008a).

In this way, the PAR engagement at the centre of this article is built on a research outlook that is wary of analogies with other locations. Nonetheless, the outlook does keep in mind the role of capital in the challenges faced by social movements, the complex and contradictory nature of their learning and growth, and that the informal learning in struggle undergone by members of these movements is where these issues play out. Added to this, the research

outlook has aimed to consistently ground discussions of Ghanaian social movements in the post-colonial African and Ghanaian context, especially as these discussions question dominant narratives of contestation from subjugated and subaltern perspectives. Finally, it has also attempted to build into all discussions an awareness of the power dynamics not only within social movements but also between them, especially when these movements are situated in sites away from the locations of national and global geopolitical power. To sum up, the research outlook that has shaped – and was validated by – the participatory action research described below is informed by Mamdani's (1996) position and therefore uses an African and Ghanaian informed perspective as its starting point, uses Foley's notion of learning in struggle as the background of investigation, inflects it with Kapoor and Choudry's perspectives, and, through the analysis of our PAR group adds a much needed contemporary African articulation of the ongoing learning in struggle of Ghanaian social movements. In the next section, I expand on the parameters of this study, including the methodology used, and then share some of the research results.

STUDYING GHANAIAAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH WITH MOVEMENT ACTIVIST-EDUCATORS

PAR has been identified as an important window through which to research social movements (Kapoor, 2007). Not only does the methodology provide for collective ownership of all aspects of the study, but it also requires that the research produce action – a very important element to activists involved in social movements (Reason, 1994; McTaggart, 1991; Tandon, 1988). As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) notes, PAR is an important aspect of a research methodology that decolonizes – in line with Kapoor's (2007) point above of ensuring social movement research remains grounded in a postcolonial awareness. The potential of PAR to lead to cooptation of voice must also be kept in mind (Jordan, 2003), and therefore needs to be grounded in Fine's (2007) notion of response-ability, where all outcomes of the research contribute to furthering the collective goals of the group, and where there is a clear articulation of the complementary roles of all those in the group.

On this last note it is important to articulate one last note about using a PAR approach in an activist setting. Using the knowledge of those working from a subjugated position as its starting point, the PAR approach being articulated here assumes a dialogue-based stance on research knowledge production where, as Fine et. al. (2004) note, "insiders carry knowledge, critiques, and a line of vision that are not automatically accessible to outsiders" (p. 111). This understanding of PAR does not mean a university based non-Ghanaian such as myself has nothing to bring to the discussion, nor does it mean that these discussions do not involve challenging one another's understanding of issues. As Fine et. al. (2004) note, in a study of US prison education from the perspective of women prisoners, collective work is not consensus-building but

is rather collaborative, where those involved disagree with each other, bring complementary skills, trust that all involved have the interest of the group and their larger question at heart, and at the end of the day do not have to agree on everything. Yet it must be clear that in this discussion there is not a privileging of any one understanding of the issues faced by a particular movement. For instance, during our discussions our group initially disagreed on whether or not to focus on religious groups as one example of movements in the Ghanaian context. In the ensuing debate, a number of us pointed out that the larger project was to focus on movements attempting to make changes in Ghanaian society to better address the needs of marginalized communities, and that Ghanaian religious movements seemed largely more concerned with stabilizing the population rather than contributing to its change. I also added that from a Gramscian perspective, we needed to be wary of forces in civil society interested in maintaining the status quo. This critical interpretation became our way forward even though one of our number disagreed with understanding all religious movements in this way.⁷

Before turning to a more detailed explanation of our PAR process, it is important to recognize that there are many ways to engage in PAR. As Fine et. al. (2004) note, the decision around the way PAR is articulated in a particular research setting is determined largely by the circumstances of that study. In their research setting in a women's prison, inmate researchers as well as college-based researchers faced challenges in actualizing PAR elements such as the collective analysis of transcripts. They also faced the additional challenge of being unable to record interviews with other inmates outside of the core research group. In similar ways, the design of the PAR approach taken here was based on the practical realities of doing research in this particular setting. As a sort of caveat, a number of distinctions⁸ stand out. First, that the consultation of an older generation of activist-educators was necessary not only for the reasons listed below but also for the future reception of the research, as their initial consultation would make them more open to the research analysis. This stems from the strong cultural importance of respecting elders in Ghanaian society, even when one presents an alternative and critical view. Second, as an additional sign of respect for a generation that was tortured and harassed during the years of military rule and is still wary of being documented, our PAR group decided recordings of discussions were to be limited to our group's discussion alone. We understood this research to be a form of baseline study of social movements and their learning in the Ghanaian context, in preparation for a longer PAR engagement with a particular movement to be determined as part of our action-taking process.

With these caveats aside, let me now turn to a description of the actual PAR process. As noted earlier, the PAR group that initiated this study is the product of a long-term set of relationships that brought together 6 activist-educators from an emerging generation of activism, yet who were also grounded in

various different movement backgrounds.⁹ The term “activist-educator” is derived from the work of Michael Newman (2006), who powerfully describes how activists who take on the active role of educator can make an impact in their movements.¹⁰ In the year prior to the active engagement of the research, a number of us in the group discussed strategies for conducting research on social movement learning in the country. Out of these discussions, a research approach emerged that was further refined in the first few weeks of the active period of engagement.¹¹ First, the members of the collective agreed on the importance of the research, not only because of the lack of research on Ghanaian social movements, but more significantly because we saw this process as an opportunity for each of us to step back and reflect on what Ghanaian social movements are and the ways in which they learn. Considering the amount of pressure and work most group members faced just to keep up with the ongoing challenges of being deeply involved in a movement, having this space to pause and reflect was a critical feature of why many of us got involved.

Second, because of the workload faced by my colleagues, the group decided that I should conduct a wide array of interviews with activist-educators from an older generation – and from movements not covered by our collective experience – in order to garner their inputs into these questions. This approach was seen as the most effective since the inputs of this older generation were critical for our collective deliberation, yet this older generation was perceived to be too busy to be actively involved in the research.¹² I have alluded to some of the reasons for this importance above, but it should also be noted that my colleagues also saw this as an educative process for me as it gave me a rich set of discussions from which to begin to understand the Ghanaian context of social movement learning. I therefore conducted 25 interviews in the leadup to the retreat of our PAR group where we would collectively analyze these inputs. The ongoing thought-lines these conversations provoked were shared with the rest of the PAR group on an ongoing basis through an invitation-only blog – a blog all those interviewed could also contribute to anonymously – and in hard copy. Using this technology allowed those interviewed and the PAR group to question and comment on any of the thought-lines before the PAR collective analysis began. This was an important feature as it provided a dialogue-based space where a number of interpretations could be questioned: my interpretation of the issues raised in interview discussions; an open debate of these interpretations amongst all interviewees and members of the PAR group; the ability to question individual interviewers’ accounts; and the possibility of posting alternative understandings of the interpretations. In this sense, the blog provided an online forum for broader participation in the research process, and helped ensure a more accountable and interactive process of interviewing a large number of people. This approach had a real impact as a number of interventions emerged from this space that contributed to a more fleshed-out starting point for the discussions held by the PAR group.

For instance, the critical role of the antecedent socialist movements of the late 1970s to early 1980s in the formation of contemporary movements was made apparent through an intervention made early on by more than one blog participant. This helped to remind our group that though we were interested in the learning of contemporary movements, these movements could not be understood without reference to their antecedents. This historical link can be seen in the example of the democratic movement elaborated above.

Thirdly, we built in a PAR group retreat that would allow members of the group to mentally and physically step back from the ongoing issues facing our respective movements. This proved crucial for our collective in-depth analysis of Ghanaian social movements and their learning. In discussions like the one on religious movements described above we were able to bring our complementary experiences to bear on how to understand social movements in the Ghanaian context, and then how to analyze their learning trends. These discussions involved unpacking the constitution and its impact on activism as well as natural resource allocation, connecting discussions to particular theories in social movement learning and organization, placing particular movements in their historical context, and coming to grips with why some movements represent the interests of the marginalized while others push a middle-class agenda. Most of us brought some theory and some first hand experiences to bear on discussions. Some, like myself, concentrated more on the theoretical side while others had a stronger connection to the everyday realities of activism in Ghana. Having this space to come together as a group helped solidify our sense of what needed to happen next, in other words, what action should come from the research. From my personal perspective, this was one of the most electrifying moments of our collective work as we came to a decision I had not even anticipated, where we decided to start working as a collective with an organic movement, defined below, that one of our number had already been working with for some time. In this sense, our group came out of our research process with a clear call for action. This is a call we have already followed up on, as a longer-term process of engagement with this movement has begun. Some of the details of this organic movement are elaborated in the next section.

Out of this collectively defined process emerged two clear contributions to thinking on Ghanaian social movements. The first, described in the next section, elaborates a distinctive differentiation of movement types in the Ghanaian context. This mode of differentiation moves away from a simple analysis of the issues that inform particular movements and their connection to “old” and “new” movement labels, to a more complex understanding of the politics of movement formation, organization, leadership, communication, and learning. The second contribution examines the learning of Ghanaian social movements and provides three key inflections to Foley’s original notion of learning in struggle: learning in struggle, learning through struggle and learning to struggle.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN GHANA: HEURISTIC TYPOLOGIES THAT EMERGED FROM PAR PROCESS

Although there has been some recent literature on social movements in Ghana (Prempeh, 2006), this work has failed to provide an overview of the movements, or to provide any background into their antecedents. As such, it has fallen to those involved in this research, whether interviewed or part of the PAR group, to provide this type of overview of social movements in Ghana. As a result, two axes of analysis emerged in both the interviewing process and the subsequent PAR group collective analysis. The first axis takes the labels of “new” and “old” social movements and reconfigures them in the post-colonial and Ghanaian context. The second axis, based on analyzing movement patterns of organization, communication and learning, yielded two heuristic typologies for categorizing movements in the Ghanaian context. Due to the lack of literature to build on to elaborate a detailed articulation of Ghanaian social movement trends, our PAR group decided to focus on providing heuristic typologies – as opposed to detailed accounts of individual movements – in order to begin a discussion in the larger Ghanaian activist community as to the nature and composition of Ghana’s contemporary movements.

Postcolonial inflections of “old” and “new” movement labels

The first axis falls along a similar line as the Euro-American literature on social movements, in that a line of tension emerged between old and new social movement interpretations. As in the example outlined in the beginning of this article, the old social movements (OSMs) of organized labour and socialist party structures grew to prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Ghana. Since that time, and especially since the return to democracy – and some would add most especially since the NDC, or the civilian version of Rawlings’ government, lost power – there has been a proliferation of issue-based movements, such as women’s rights, environmental protection, and the people with disabilities rights movements. In many ways, these movements suit the descriptions laid out elsewhere of new social movements (NSMs) (Habermas, 1981). Yet, as the opening example above should indicate, the clear lines of distinction between these movement labels are blurred when one considers the links between many contemporary, or apparently “new,” movements and the “old” socialist movements of the past. In this sense, it is apt to draw comparisons to Kapoor’s (2007) warning against facile distinctions between old and new social movement strategies in a postcolonial setting, given their potential use by movements at different times.

This nuance is further underscored as the initial axis of analysis was expanded to include what our PAR group called natural/communal-resource based movements. While communal defence of natural resources has been identified elsewhere as an important mobilizer of social movements (Peet & Watts, 2004), what emerged in the Ghanaian analysis as critical was the way in which

this defence is embedded in deep structural critiques of globalization. Here, a clear sense of a critique of the global and national economy is intertwined with the issue-based critique of the rights of rural communities to land access and decision-making rights to their land and natural resources. When this is coupled with strong spiritual and ancestral connections to these resources and land, the implications not only on everyday livelihood issues but also on cultural reproduction become clear. The Ghanaian anti-mining movement is a perfect example of this. Communities affected by the “perpetual expansion of mining and mineral exploration activity [that] has displaced numerous subsistence groups outright and destroyed a wide range of cultural resources” (Hilson, 2004, p. 54) has led to an emerging critique that combines the erosion of cultural ways of life as well as livelihoods into a strategy that uses both human rights discourse as well as a pointed and well-articulated critique of capital exploitation to defend their ways of life (Owusu-Koranteng, 2007). The Ada example discussed further below is also indicative of this intertwined balance.

Movement typologies based on organization, communication, and learning patterns

According to our PAR group analysis, movements in Ghana should not only be analyzed by what they are interested in, but also by the ways in which they organize, communicate, and learn. This is the second axis of analysis. Based on these criteria, we concluded that there are two types of movements in Ghana. While movements often emerge or are re-energized by an event or new issue that is confronting a particular group, the way in which a given movement mobilizes and organizes can be seen in two ways: one that is grounded in the larger membership of the movement and one that is professionalized and begins to take over the leadership. While the professionalization of movements is not a new phenomenon (McCarthy & Zald, 1987), for our PAR group it begs the question, “How rooted in the people’s needs are the decisions made by this elite leadership?” The learning that emerges from these two types of movements is telling: where the first is seen as communicative and dialogue-based, recycling all learning and decision-making back into the wider movement; the second is didactic and strategic, instructing the movement on its goals and further “educating” the membership on what they “need to understand.” Based on our group’s analysis, Ghana’s most recent manifestation of the women’s movement is suggestive of the didactic model, as it has been dominated by an urban professional elite that has failed to connect with a wider cross-section of rural and market women’s issues. The anti-mining movement, on the other hand, is an example of the dialogue-based movement as it is a pluralistic movement constantly re-grounded in the needs of the communities affected by mining. Both of these movements and their connection to the typologies established by our PAR group are explored more fully elsewhere (Langdon, 2008b).¹³ In many ways, the language that emerged around these two models is grounded in Freire’s (1970) differentiation between dialogue-based and didactic learning, as well as in Habermas’ distinction of communicative versus strategic action

(1984; 1987).¹⁴ Both of these theorists helped the PAR collective frame some of its thoughts around these two types of organizations, but it should be noted that the differences emerged prior to the introduction of these theories.

The differentiation between these two types of movements is key for what we identified as the most important characteristic for the successful emergence of a movement that is communicative and dialogue-based within the Ghanaian context. Building on the natural resource defence model discussed above, where a way of being as well as way of life is being defended, our group discerned that dialogue-based movements are most likely to emerge around communally held resources whose protection implicates a community as a whole. This connection, when threatened by external – or even internal – capitalist exploitation can lead to an “organic” movement, one firmly grounded in the needs of that community. Here needs are very much understood as being mediated both by the influence of and resistance to capitalist hegemony as well as by the strategic agency of marginalized communities embedded in their own history of land use and natural resource management. This type of movement was seen to be a building block of many resource-based movements, including the anti-mining movement – part of the reason they have been successful at impacting decisions around mining despite an incredible uphill battle (c.f. Owusu-Koranteng, 2007).

Based on this definition of organic movements, we decided to begin working with a local movement defending the communal ownership of the salt flats in Ada, a town a short way east from the capital, along the coast. These salt flats are sustainably maintained through a traditional ownership arrangement that sees none of the chiefs who surround it having overarching rights to the resource. Anyone, even those not from Ada, can obtain salt from the flats, so long as they pay a small amount of what they take to the authority upon whose land the salt is collected (Langdon, 2009). The Ada movement has successfully defended this communal ownership process despite successive governments’ attempts to expropriate it for use by foreign and national capital. At one point, during the military regime of the 1980s, the defence of this resource resulted in a confrontation between troops and the local citizens where a number of people were wounded and a pregnant woman was killed (Radio Ada, 2002). To this day, a statue dedicated to this woman stands in a nearby village. This highly successful organic movement has begun to face new challenges as new forms of capital exploitation emerge. Smalltime entrepreneurs have purchased and enclosed some of the land surrounding the lagoon that transforms into salt flats, effectively blocking off a large chunk of the land by which people have traditionally accessed the flats to collect salt. Young people associated with the movement mobilized and destroyed these walls and, in the aftermath, were jailed for destruction of private property (Langdon, 2009). The community is uncertain how to advance, since some of the entrepreneurs are also locals. This clash of loyalties has meant that the movement must engage in a much

deeper reflection on how this emerging form of capitalist exploitation could alienate them from this resource as well as split their movement – a perfect example of Foley's (1999) notion of contradictory and ambiguous learning in social movements. This process of re-engagement is precisely where the PAR collective has been asked to make a contribution, although how this will evolve remains to be seen given that our engagement has only just begun.

While the differentiation between didactic and dialogue-based movements is based on shifting from classifying movements by their links to "old" or "new" labels, to classifying them based on the way they organize, communicate and learn, this is only one way in which we analyzed learning in social movements in Ghana. In the next section I present three lenses for further thinking about learning in social movements that emerged clearly throughout the research. Each of these lenses highlights a different aspect of learning in social movements, and are all interlinked with the typologies of movements our PAR group articulated. Again Foley's (1999) notion of learning in struggle has framed the emergence of these lenses, though like the note about Freire and Habermas above, it needs to be clarified that this concept helped our PAR group find common language for trends most of us had already noticed. Any expansion of the concept was due to the refinement of the term based on our mutual understanding of the Ghanaian context. It is towards an elaboration of these lenses that we now turn.

LEARNING IN SOCIAL ACTION: GHANAIAAN ACTIVIST-EDUCATORS REFLECTIONS ON THE CONVERGENCE OF LEARNING AND STRUGGLE

The multiple articulations of the link between learning and struggle described below are grounded in three different definitions of the word "struggle." Struggle can be understood as an ongoing process, as in the struggle by slaves for emancipation. Struggle can also be defined as a singular event of struggling over something, such as a struggle at the workplace. Finally, struggle can also be understood as an action, where one struggles to learn a new skill. These different articulations of struggle are indicative of how the combination of learning and struggle can come to mean different things when expanded upon within social movement activism. It should be noted that in describing these three approaches to understanding learning in social movements in the Ghanaian context, our PAR group elected to first identify trends in the ways in which the larger group of older generation activist-educators described learning, and then to gloss these interpretations with a collective group analysis. These categorizations were cycled back to the larger group through the online blog for comments and further discussion.

Learning in struggle

Based on Foley's model, this lens helps to view the long term process of learning that has occurred in social movements through the emergence of new

strategies, and through the cycle of external conflicts with the shifting nature of capital and internal conflicts that often result from these external shifts. This understanding of learning in social movements takes a much longer view than the particular moments of learning *through* an event or conflict discussed below. Many of those interviewed talked about the shifting strategies of movements over time, or the conclusions and compromises movements made as a result of shifting realities.

For instance, a great many of the older generation of activist-educators involved in the socialist movements of the 1980s spoke at length about the realization that human rights discourse was an important starting point for building a better Ghana, even if it had been previously critiqued as a capitalist tool used to stabilize the populace. For many of these respondents, faced with the reality of a military government that was persecuting, torturing, and killing people, human rights were seen as a first necessary step in creating the room to discuss a form of Ghanaian society based on social justice. Hand in hand with this change in thinking was the support for democratic change, which was seen as a strategic first step in opening up the space to question and explore alternative societal arrangements. This generation also elaborated other learning that emerged over time, such as the realization that the Soviet Cultural Centre, and Marxist analysis and discourse, had played too great a role in their articulation of issues facing Ghanaians, and that they had ignored the critical factors of Ghana's colonial and pre-colonial histories as well as the cultural make-up of the various peoples in the country in their analysis. Likewise, they underscored how the Rawlings revolution had "ruined revolution in Ghana" for a long time to come, and that they did not see state seizure as a realistic goal for the time being – another reason why they have consistently been a part of a movement stance critically watchful of whomsoever is in government (see the opening example for an illustration of this stance). As the section below on learning *to struggle* elaborates, socialist seizure of power has not been ruled out, but must be worked for through a long-term educational process with new generations of potential cadres and activists.

Equally compelling is the evolving sensibility of those contemporary anti-globalization movements, such as the anti-mining movement and the anti-privatization of water movement, who have seen that it is only through constant, ongoing engagement with the issue that some constraints can be placed on the expanding needs and desires of capital – foreign and domestic. Both of these movements have learned how victory today is only really a pause in the battle until tomorrow.

This type of long-term learning was also discussed in our PAR group, and the relationship of the movement and its ability to generate effective new strategies was seen as being intrinsically linked to an organic reconnection with the needs, ideas and thinking of the broader constituency of a given movement.

This realization is the basis of the typologies described above. In this sense, the ongoing internal reflection on learning *in struggle* was seen by our group as critical to the process of dialogue-based movements. But this process is not easy, as the example of the Ada movement shows: processes of dialogue-based reflection on learning are likely to be messy and, to quote Foley, “contradictory and ambiguous.” However they are necessary if movements wish to avoid becoming technocratic in nature, leading to changes in strategies that would a) further alienate the constituency a movement supposedly represents, and b) increase the likelihood that new strategies would be more responsive to status quo needs than to changing the sets of relations that sparked the movement in the first place.

Learning through struggle

Here struggle is understood as a singular event or conflict *through* which learning occurs. It is learning that emerges from a particular moment of conflict over resources/issues/policies that leads to a deepened awareness of the political terrain, both on the individual level and the movement level.¹⁵ A number of interviewees talked about the learning that occurred when the 1981 coup happened – ushering in an ostensibly socialist government – and how they began to see how socialist rhetoric was abused and misused for power consolidating purposes. Likewise, the learning that happened during the 1995 *Kume Preko* demonstrations to stop the application of a value-added tax, as well as to protest against the continued application of structural adjustment in the country emerged as a major theme (Abrahamsen, 2000; Essuman-Johnson, 2007). As the opening example discusses, demonstrations which originated in the rank and file of the national trade union movement, erupted around government misrepresentation concerning progress in the economy and the need for the tax. They were quickly turned into a political tool on the one hand for members of the opposition to gain notoriety and exposure in the public eye, and a conservative union leadership on the other hand, who used their protests as an excuse for imposing a constitution on the Trade Union Congress that defanged its outright potential for partisan political mobilization. In this sense, this event revealed who was truly interested in transforming the sets of relations in the country, who was interested in taking advantage of the situation to improve their public image, and who wanted to restrain this possibility in the future. These telling moments, to quote one of the respondents, showed “people’s true colours” and being a part of them was the best education one could receive in discerning who was really interested in change that would benefit average Ghanaians rather than the status quo.

These conclusions were validated and further inflected in our PAR group retreat, where a number of other moments of learning were added. All of these moments were seen as the sites of birth or rebirth of movements discussed in the typologies above. Similarly, how a movement was organized coming out of

these moments of extreme learning revealed to our group which of the two types of movements they would become. It is a moment like this that the movement in Ada currently faces, where the community is split between supporting the new forms of capital and the youth who are resisting its attempts at enclosure. How this emerging learning is processed, as well as decisions around how the movement should now be organized will indicate whether it will continue to be an organic movement of the people of Ada, or merely a remnant of a bygone era. If, for instance, the youth are excluded from the movement, it will likely lose its connection with the needs of the broader community, and therefore will become more and more of a didactic movement detached from the source of its support.

Learning to struggle

This lens represents thinking by activist-educators on the process of education within social movements or that can contribute to movement activism. Many of those interviewed reflected upon how to generate/mobilize enough momentum for change. Key to this question in most of their minds was the way in which movements and their members learned *how* to struggle. Reflecting back on the cadre-building days of the socialist movements of the 1980s, many of the older generation insisted it was necessary to start rebuilding the revolutionary cadres, but to avoid any shortcuts to this process, since these lead to the potential for cooptation.¹⁶ Other older activists spoke of the need to reinstitute educative processes that would help the young become aware of the realities of current global power dynamics. For some, this would require establishing a school in a remote location where the next generation of activists could be bred. The regenerations of activism in the youth emerged as a major preoccupation of many of those interviewed as they worried about the lack of radicalism in the current generation, and wondered if it could be re-instituted. Part of these discussions revolved around the ways in which the past generation acquired their knowledge from the Soviet Social Centre in Accra, but also from the previous generation of activist-educators of the Kwame Nkrumah era – even as they now are asking critical questions about a too-easy assimilation of European and Soviet socialist thinking.¹⁷ It was clear that the current older generation feels a certain responsibility to pass on their knowledge and their experiences to the next group to carry the torch, even where these experiences are complex and contradictory.

At the same time, from the perspective of our group, a different vision of learning to struggle was discussed. While the need to go back to the education and momentum building techniques of the past was seen as useful, for those of us in the PAR group what was necessary was not to look for the proper ideological educative process, but rather to look at those already-existing organic movements, and to work with them to better understand what is being learned, and how knowledge about the localized struggle is being connected

to other locations of resistance as well as to larger structural issues. In this sense, the question became, “What can this PAR collective contribute to those movements already struggling to help them be more effective, and to connect their learning to learning ongoing on a wider scale?” It was this question that led our PAR group to explore working with the movement in Ada. However, what has become apparent is that the process of engaging with this local movement will take time, especially if our group is to resist any tendency towards didacticism. Nonetheless, in our first meetings with members of the Ada movement, a dialogue-based process of learning was already emerging, as we learned about the complex history of the movement, while also sharing our experiences of learning *in/through/to* struggle in other Ghanaian movements. This led to new ideas about potential methods/strategies for contesting the use of the constitution as a lever for appropriation of the resource by government and foreign capital, as well as ways to use current environmental policy frameworks to place barriers on those attempting to enclose the salt flats. Our discussions also led to new ideas about organization, as well as the possibilities of linking the Ada movement to other resource-based struggles in the country, such as the anti-mining movement. Where this process will head next remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion presented a selection of results from a PAR engagement with activist-educators that collectively analyzed the ongoing learning of social movements in the Ghanaian context. Our group found that the differences among Ghanaian social movements could be understood not only through the labels of “old” and “new” social movements, but also by the ways in which they organize, communicate and learn. Based on this, our group articulated two heuristic typologies of movement organization: one that was didactic with professionalized leadership and decision-making within the movement, and the other that aimed constantly to cycle back learning and challenges to the larger collective for broad dialogue-based deliberation. Furthermore, our PAR group also articulated three lenses for further refining our understanding of learning in social movements in the Ghanaian context. These lenses are based on an expansion of Foley’s notion of learning in struggle – a theoretical frame that both informed the work of our PAR group, but that we also pushed at and made fit the Ghanaian context.

Returning to the proverb that began this article, the research emanating from this PAR process provides important insights into the ways in which social movements in Ghana are engaged in a cycle of learning and action that heightens their awareness of their adversaries’ every move. Yet it also reveals just how complex a proposition this is, as the power dynamics within movements, as well as their relationships to ongoing shifts in capital, reveal the messy, contradictory and ambiguous process the learning entails. More often

than not, according to the activist-educators that made up our PAR collective, Ghanaian social movements have become strategic and didactic, alienating their broader membership. This is why it is so important to us to work with organic movements that are grounded within dialogue-based histories, as we believe these are the only movements that can truly have a positive effect on power-relations in Ghana, and on broader, globalized forces of capital. Together, our PAR group has attempted to build a praxis-based approach that will remain aware of the ways in which new forms of power are constantly emerging within movements, as well as against them. This process is important to all of us involved as it helps reveal how power operates in all our work, even as we try to build new strategies and alliances for struggling against domination. To put this proverbially, movements – like flocks of birds – that are better at dialoguing internally have a greater likelihood, according to our PAR group analysis, of remaining more vigilant against the changing strategies of “hunters,” and of remaining in touch with the needs of the “birds” that make up this “flock.” For it is not enough to develop keen strategies to challenge capital and power in the Ghanaian context if in the process our movement activism has re-entrenched new orthodoxies that dictate ways of being and learning that are disconnected from those Ghanaians who helped the movement take flight in the first place.

NOTES

1. The support of the International Development Research Center (IDRC) is gratefully acknowledged. Its provision of a standard Doctoral Research Award to the author helped to make this research possible.
2. Although Mamdani and Wamba-dia-wamba (2005) have provided one example that stretches across sub-Saharan Africa, the only African country with substantive writing on social movements is South Africa (c.f. Ballard et al 2005; Bond 2004; Habib & Valodia 2005; McKinley 2004) although very little of this work has focused specifically on learning within these movements.
3. This long-term relationship also helps mitigate my position as a cultural insider/outsider. While I have over ten years of working experience in Ghana, and am now related to a Ghanaian family, I nonetheless occupy a white male position of privilege. Based on the PAR process our group defined – expanded on below – I bear responsibility for the reproduction of the results here and also in my PhD thesis and therefore am solely responsible for any errors or omissions. This according of responsibility is grounded in Fine’s (2007) notion of response-ability, where PAR results can be communicated in different forms so long as the PAR collective has the consistent ability to respond to the products.
4. For instance, when first discussing the research with colleagues who would later become part of the PAR group, a number of them underscored how they liked the term activist/educator, and felt it was appropriate for what they did, as well as the role those others they identified as important to interview. Likewise, the notion of “learning to struggle” became the starting place for our collective deliberations.
5. Taking a note from Ferguson (2006) here, it is important to recognize both the tensions around reducing all the complexity of the continent into the conceptual container of Africa, as well as the reality of this term in the everyday lives of Africans as a result of ongoing othering that stems from a colonial legacy, and a concomitant economic reality that sees current globalized capital flows paint all of Africa with a singular brush.

6. Leela Gandhi (1998) has pointed out that postcolonial theory is both informed by and in tension with Marxist and poststructuralist thought, where the tension emanates from the applicability of both of these lines of thought in post-colonial settings.
7. This difference is noted here both as an example and a way to recognize this disagreement.
8. The importance of this approach was further underscored in our initial interactions with the Ada movement as my colleagues insisted we start with the older generation in order to be able to interact with the youth that had led the recent destruction of enclosures around the salt flats.
9. Including myself as the sixth member, the other five group members are: Al-hassan Adam, Gifty Emefa Dzah, Kofi Larweh, Coleman Agyeyomah and Tanko Iddrissu. Collectively they have been involved in the socialist movements of the 1980s, the national democratic movement, the current movement to stop privatization of water, the women's movement, the Songhor Lagoon protection movement (in Ada), and the northern people's movement.
10. Given the lack of writing on social movements in the Ghanaian context, building a collaborative research space with activist-educators is a useful starting point to establish an overview of the movements in the country since they have experienced movement learning in Ghana first hand.
11. The active period of engagement ran from December 2007 to April 2008.
12. The differentiation between generations of activist-educators is important in the larger context of the study, as the power differential between generations is pronounced in Ghana, even in a social justice movement. While there isn't room to explore this issue fully here, the clashes between the generations are very indicative of the kinds of contradictory and ambiguous learning struggles going on in Ghanaian social movements. With me conducting these interviews, the PAR group felt able to critique the older generation that often dominates the movements in which they have worked. The PAR group was also highly interested in collectively exploring the possibilities of working with movements in new ways that are not dominated by an older generation.
13. In both of the examples used to illustrate these types of movements, our group discussion circled around how each could become more like the other type given the right or wrong circumstances. As another indication of the ebb and flow of our discussions, one of our members discussed at length how the current version of women's movement could be understood as a historical reaction to dominance of the space by government-aligned movements prior to 2000, and how in the contemporary space a resistance to connecting to rural women's issues could be understood as a by-product of this dominance. Nonetheless, this was seen as problematic given the class-bias of the majority of current women's activism.
14. Morrow and Torres (2002) have provided a useful convergence of Freire and Habermas, revealing how dialogue-based learning and communicative action complement each other. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it has been suggested that the emphasis on a dialogue-based posture needs to be measured against writers such as Žižek (2008a; 2008b) who are critical of this position.
15. While it is beyond the scope of this current paper, especially as it is focused on Ghanaian iterations of social movement learning, it has been helpfully pointed out that there is a wealth of literature in Euro-American socialist circles that focuses on conflict and its subsequent learning. Lenin's speech on Bloody Sunday (1964), or Sorel's (1999) *Reflections on Violence* are two such entries.
16. In the lead up to the 1981 return to power of Rawlings, a large number of cadres were established within student, worker and rural populations. These were transformed under the Rawlings government into Committees for the Defence of the Revolution. As the regime changed ideological tacks, these committees became more like police forces than sources of socialist learning and debate.
17. Nkrumah was Ghana's first President, and his coming to power on the wave of a popular movement in 1951 helped to propel the government into independence in 1957. Many of those associated with this popular movement were aligned with socialist values.

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EDUCATION AND LIBERATION

DAVID AUSTIN *The Alfie Roberts Institute*

ABSTRACT. Drawing on his personal experience as a university student in the 1990s as well as those of a little-known 1960s Montreal-based group, the Caribbean Conference Committee, Austin calls for a return of community education and to the idea that education has meaning and value on its own term. He argues that the joining of theory with practice represents a powerful tool in the struggle for social and economic justice and transformation.

ÉDUCATION ET LIBÉRATION

RÉSUMÉ. S'appuyant sur son expérience d'étudiant universitaire dans les années 1990 ainsi que sur l'histoire d'un groupe des années 1960 méconnu, le Caribbean Conference Committee, Austin préconise le retour à une éducation communautaire et la revalorisation du processus éducationnel comme activité porteuse de sens et de valeurs. Austin avance qu'allier la théorie et la pratique peut s'avérer un outil percutant dans la lutte pour la transformation et la justice sociale et économique.

Canada has a long tradition of student protest. College and university campuses have been and remain important sites of popular dissent, debate, and mobilization around many of the pressing issues of our time. As an undergraduate in Montreal in the early 1990s, there were a number of issues that I and fellow students struggled with: police harassment and brutality and the shooting of young members of the Black community by the police; the white supremacist apartheid regime in South Africa and the plight of Palestinians; Haiti and the overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide; the relationship between race, gender, and class; neo-liberal globalization, and course curriculum and pedagogy. In those days, some of us felt the need to complement our role as politically active students with independent study. The ideas of individuals such as bell hooks, Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill Collins, Karl Marx, Amílcar Cabral, C.L.R. James, as well as the history of various social movements and anti-colonial struggles framed our analysis and informed the

political work in which some of us were engaged. I say some of us because, in retrospect, that “some” was actually a minority within the minority of students who were politically active on campus to begin with.

Of course, most of what we learned came less from books – whether within the classroom or out – and more from our practical engagement and involvement. The tendency to want to simply “do” – to act without the benefit of informed reflection – was perhaps, in hindsight, as persistent then as it is today. But theory played an important role. bell hooks (1984) informed us about the critical debates confronting feminism from within: how the lack of diversity within the feminist movement hampered genuine solidarity among women, and that the particular experiences of women of colour could not simply be glossed over under the rubric of a broad feminist movement; that men could not afford to sit on the sidelines and observe feminism from a distance as if it were separate and distinct from their own lives; and that gender, race, and class were not discrete categories but part of a complex whole that governed and shaped our lives in various ways (p. 140-141).

Patricia Hill Collins (1991) reminded us of the critical work that women – in this case particularly Black women – play within political and community organizations, often behind the scenes, while men arrogate leadership to themselves. Collins also made a point of illustrating how women’s political work, often in the form of “silent leadership,” is devalued by social scientists, and particularly male ones, in favour of those “big” leaders, again usually men (p. 11). Reading both hooks and Collins challenged us (I am referring specifically to the men here) to examine our own relationships with women in the various organizations and movements that we were part of – the Black Students’ Network, the anti-apartheid struggle, the short-lived Friends of Haiti and Progressive Students Association, as well as campus-community radio (CKUT) and the university’s major newspaper, the *McGill Daily*. Often, we fell short in terms of translating theory into practice, but a seed was planted which continues to be nurtured.

Extrapolating from his experience in Algeria and the global South, Fanon (1967) explained that psychosis is as much a social as it is a psychological phenomenon, and that its prognosis rests “in the hands of those who are willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure” (p. 11). His analysis of violent phenomena in the Third World – the violence that colonialism and oppression engenders – helped us grasp the folly of the notion of “Black on Black” violence; that the inherent inequalities and the palpable sense of alienation that societies’ most dispossessed live – particularly younger women and men, and even more so Indigenous Peoples and people of colour – breeds violence because they are the product of violence (pp. 35-106).

From C.L.R. James (1993) we learned of the capacity of “ordinary” women and men to do the extraordinary; to be creative and artistic, and their ability

to re-organize society from below. Whether it was a batsman on the cricket pitch in the Caribbean or Pakistan, shopfloor workers in Poland or England, (James, 1958) or – perhaps the penultimate transformative example – the predominantly African-born slaves of Saint Domingue who organized an army that defeated Spanish, British, and ultimately French imperialism en route to establishing the independent state of Haiti in 1804, (James, 1980) James's work left an indelible mark. We read his books, pamphlets, and articles, but it was through direct contact with individuals who had met and worked alongside him in Canada and who were willing to share that experience that left the most lasting impression of the significance of his work, and theirs.

In the 1960s, James had been central to the work of a Montreal-based group named the Caribbean Conference Committee (CCC). Its members were comprised primarily of students, most of whom had come to Canada with the intention of acquiring an education and returning to the Caribbean to contribute to the region's development, perhaps by assuming government posts, working in a hospital or other para-public institutions, or teaching at the University of the West Indies. But a small political core within the group had a different path in mind. While only four Anglophone Caribbean countries were independent by the end of 1966, the challenges, indeed the tragic cost of this newfound freedom was already apparent. Constrained by a political framework inherited from colonialism which lacked economic teeth, the Caribbean found itself mired in what one astute observer, referring to the modes of dependency and exploitation that characterize the region, has described as the "coloniality of Caribbean citizenship" (Kamugisha, 2007).

As someone who had been actively involved in international socialist, African, U.S., and Caribbean political organizations and who, by the 1960s, joined forces with Eric Williams, Trinidad's prime minister and his longtime friend, in the late 1950s, and who had worked tirelessly as the secretary of the failed West Indian Federation, many young West Indians turned to James for guidance. His harsh criticism of the Caribbean's leadership in part reflected his own, somewhat bitter, experience in the Caribbean between 1958 to 1962:

Today nationalism is under fire and every people has to consider to what extent its nationalism has to be mitigated by international considerations. Of this[,] as of so much else[,] the West Indian middle class is innocent. What happens after independence? For all you can hear from them, independence is a dead end. Apart from the extended opportunities of jobs with the government, independence is as great an abstraction as was federation. We achieve independence and they continue to govern. (James, 1962, p. 135)

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1968) was equally critical of nationalist leadership. He described independence as an empty shell in which its leaders adopt new flags, anthems, and other nationalist paraphernalia, while negotiating pacts with foreign interests behind the backs of the people whose popular support put them in office, pacts that maintained the social and economic

structures in their pre-independence form (p.176). But beneath the surface of James' and Fanon's remarks lay a bigger question: How do you organize to change these conditions? It was precisely this question that preoccupied the dedicated core of young West Indians who comprised the CCC.

In the 1960s, Canada experienced an unprecedented wave of immigration from the Caribbean (Winks, 1997, p. 438; Williams, 1997, p. 105). Many of these West Indians came to Canada to work as domestic workers, in much the same way women from the Philippines do today, or to work on the railroads or wherever they could hustle a living. Others came as university students. Given McGill University's reputation as an elite tertiary institution on the one hand, and Sir George Williams (now Concordia) University's more open admissions policy on the other, Montreal became a city of choice for many of these students, although they also found homes in Toronto, Ottawa, and other Canadian cities. Many of them – and this was true of the CCC's founding members – Robert Hill, his cousin Anthony Hill, Alvin Johnson, Anne Cools, Hugh O'Neale, and Rosie Douglas – were driven by the idea of returning home to participate in the Caribbean's social and economic development. But the CCC was not the only Caribbean group based in Montreal. They were part of the Caribbean's "exile" community which also included members of the influential Caribbean-based New World Group. Edward Said (1996) describes exile as "being liberated from the usual career, in which 'doing well' and following time-honored footsteps are the main milestones." Exile "means that you are always going to be marginal and that what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path. If you can experience that fate," he continues, "not as a deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovery in which you do things according to your own pattern, as various interest seize your attention, and as the particular goal you set for yourself dictates: that is a unique pleasure" (p. 62). As Robert Hill argued (1966), West Indians live a form of exile while at home, stifled and suffocated by colonialism and neo-colonialism's glass ceiling; and that it is when they are voluntarily exiled abroad that they begin to discover their identity and destiny and embrace possibilities that home does not immediately afford them. The absoluteness of this claim can be questioned, but there is little doubt about the group's impact. Between 1965 and 1967, the CCC organized a series of annual conferences that brought many of the Caribbean's leading thinkers and artists to the city (Roberts, p.76). These events were attended by West Indians living in Canada, the United States, Britain, and the West Indies and raised awareness about social, cultural, and political developments in the Caribbean. Nothing like these conferences had ever occurred in Canada, and Barbadian writer George Lamming (1966) believed that the inaugural meeting was the first of its kind anywhere (p. 63).

What might be described as the group's political core – Robert Hill, Franklyn Harvey, Anne Cools, Alfie Roberts, and Tim Hector – also formed the nucleus of the C.L.R. James Study Circle, a CCC-affiliated group dedicated to studying James' work. They adopted James' notion of self-organization – the idea that workers and the underclass can organize themselves for change without being guided by political parties or an elite vanguard, an idea that became central to the CCC's political analysis. The Montreal New World Group paralleled and complemented the work of the CCC and several of its members were also actively involved in the group, but the CCC's emphasis on self-organization is perhaps the main ingredient that separated them from New World's more economics-based approach. The CCC also collaborated with Facing Reality, the Detroit-based Marxist group that was co-founded by James, distributed James' various books and pamphlets, and helped publish some of his more obscure works, including one of his most important books, *Notes on Dialectics* (Hill, 1970; James, 1986, p. 64).

The CCC produced its own publications: three bulletins – *Caribbean Symposium: The West Indian Nation in Exile* (6-8 October, 1967), *Caribbean Conference Bulletin* (September 1967), *Caribbean Conference* (October 1967) – and, under its new name, Caribbean Nation, the journal *Caribbean International Opinion* (October 1968). While the bulletins chronicled the group's events and included short articles, *Caribbean International Opinion* situated the Caribbean within a global context through its historical essays on slavery and the Haitian Revolution, the French Revolution, as well as articles on contemporary issues such as racism in Canada, France in 1968, and the Vietnam War.

This much-neglected group also attempted to influence official Caribbean politics. In 1966 it presented a brief to Caribbean heads of government during the Canada-Commonwealth Caribbean Conference in Ottawa (July 1996), and the group's influence extended beyond its immediate activities. Former CCC members played key roles in two watershed events in the history of Blacks in Canada – the 1968 Congress of Black Writers and the 1969 Sir George Williams Affair. A scandal involving an FBI *agent provocateur* on loan to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – sent to spy on former CCC member Rosie Douglas – played a significant role in the establishment of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (McQuaig, 1981). Members of the group were also instrumental in establishing several important New Left groups in Jamaica, Antigua, and Trinidad, and played a crucial role in the early stages of the Grenada Revolution. In short, the CCC was critical to many of the most noteworthy events in the history of Blacks in Canada, and in the history of the Anglophone Caribbean.

My point in describing the group's work is not to provide a litany of activities and achievements, although the CCC represents a prime example of what a small organized and focused group can achieve. The chief concern here is

with the group's approach to education. Its activities were designed to educate Caribbean people and the general public about Caribbean culture and politics in a way that could not be carried out in a classroom. They were designed to engage their audience politically, although the group was by no means anti-academic. Rather, they recognized the limits of their formal training and that as community educators and organizers, initially in Canada and eventually in the Caribbean, education, by necessity, extended well beyond the academy. As I have mentioned, almost all of the group's members were students at the time. But, given their particular political interests, their formal study was inadequate. As a result, their "informal" study became central to their work, so much so that in the case of Tim Hector, it almost cost him his coveted degree (Hector, circa 1966).

Caribbean fiction, history, and politics, including the Cuban Revolution, were the main focus of their work, but the group also followed developments in the United States, Europe, and Africa with keen interest. Their reading list was eclectic. In addition to James they read Caribbean writers such as George Lamming and Wilson Harris alongside Hegel, Marx, and Lenin. They also studied and critiqued the writings of Shakespeare, Rousseau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Herbert Marcuse alongside Fanon and Malcolm X. Their informal reading overlapped with their university studies. For Hector, a philosophy student at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, this involved challenging one of his professors over the ideas of Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset's apparent denigration of "masses" (Hector, circa 1966), and for Hill, who studied political science, the study of Heraclitus and Greek 'polarity' at the University of Toronto illuminated his reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Marx, and ultimately the ideas of James (Hill, 1966). In their day, these were among the thinkers that captured their imagination. Today that list would look different. But the point here is less about content and more about process. CCC members did not simply read texts as texts. They engaged them and discussed and debated their ideas among themselves. In *A View for Freedom*, (2005) Alfie Roberts described this process:

I was in constant communication with people like Franklyn [Harvey] and Tim [Hector] and there would be endless exchanges on different questions. If you were not sure you ran home to your books and checked. So we never really adopted any dogmatic positions. Once I figured I wasn't sure I ran to my books and then came back and said "so and so and so". We were practicing that type of open, democratic way of conversing and doing things.

Eventually we started to embark on other activities and we cultivated other relations in Montreal outside of ourselves. You need to have contact with people because it is only by interacting with a wider group of people that you get to understand humanity in a more comprehensive sense and make assessments... much more profoundly than if you didn't interact with people. So we consciously sought that type of extension of our activities outside the university as well. (p. 72, 73)

Roberts makes a number of important points. First he talks about education as a process of constant dialogue in which ideas are discussed and debated. They engaged and challenged one another without fear of disagreement. Disagreement was not something to avoid, but a component part of their education and evolution. Second, the group made a consistent effort to clarify its ideas, not only through discussion and debate, but by verifying facts and complementing their own observations with additional reading. Third, Roberts describes the group's discussions as open and democratic, suggesting that participation involved actively contributing ideas, and active listening. In the second part of the quote, Roberts speaks about the links that he and other members of the group made outside of the university environment, and beyond the Caribbean community, a process which, as they forged ties with the various groups from Africa, Asia, and eventually Indigenous Peoples and Quebec nationalists, no doubt put a human face to what they read. For Robert Hill (2005), the Vietnam struggle was "among the greatest events of the twentieth-century" and played a crucial role in the formation of his generation's political consciousness (p. 100). CCC members were wholly supportive of the Vietnamese struggle against U.S. imperialism and Tim Hector became somewhat of a prominent figure on the anti-Vietnam War lecture circuit. Hector (2002) has described how, in his attempt to understand the conflict, he spoke to as many Vietnamese as he could find: "Every South East Asian student or worker I met I plied with questions aplenty. Some got sick of me," he recalls, but history "is best understood by learning from those who experience it." It was partly through this kind of process that the group developed a body of ideas which not only found a place in their publications, but later became an integral part of their praxis.

Reflecting on his experience within the CCC and the C.L.R. James Study Circle while living in Canada, Hill (2009) recently remarked: "Education was preparation to take part and play a role in the new stage of Caribbean history... more specifically, the next stage in the centuries-long struggle of the Caribbean people for freedom, dignity, and nationhood." Hill continues: "To undertake this role outside the Caribbean... these students launched a series of community-based initiatives that were both a defence of their community as well as a testing of their intellectual cultural resources. They had one great advantage," he goes on, "namely, they saw no distinction between the campus and the community and they based their actions on this mutual convergence of interest." Once again we witness the selfless preoccupation with education, education for a higher purpose than professional advancement. CCC members were educating themselves for their community, at home and abroad, and their primary concern was with the Caribbean's marginalized and neglected, the underclass, and with the fundamental role that this group plays within a given transformative process. This was "education for liberation" and in this sense they epitomized Antonio Gramsci's "organic intellectual" (Gramsci, 1980, pp. 5-6).

Much of the CCC's discussion and debate unfolded in the form of letters, a form of communication that, with the advent of the Internet, with all of its laudable benefits, is becoming somewhat of a lost art. Given that the group's members lived in various cities in Canada, letters became one of their preferred mediums of exchange. And their correspondence represents some of their most lucid writing as, unconstrained by the strictures of formal academic writing, they felt free to explore, imagine, and project in confidence and without fear of sanction. In one exchange that involved Hector, Roberts, Martin Glaberman, the veteran Marxist and longtime associate of C.L.R. James, and the Marxist theorist Raya Dunayevskaya of *News and Letters*, they grappled with the Cuban Revolution and, through it, the vicissitudes of revolutionary politics. According to Hector (1966), Cuba's leadership had failed to live up to its promise. It led the country above the heads of the population and for the vast majority of Cubans, the Revolution was like a parade passing them by. Dunayevskaya (1967) agreed with Hector's views and encouraged Roberts – who adamantly supported the Revolution, championed the leadership of Fidel Castro, and argued that steps were being made to address what might be described as its birth pangs (Roberts, 1967) – to temper his enthusiasm for the Revolution, lest he be disappointed with its ultimate outcome. Glaberman (1967) also cautioned Roberts against over-exuberance, but he too expressed his admiration for Castro's leadership and Cuba's achievements after only eight years and begged the question, to what extent are the Revolution's shortcomings attributable to the menacing, destabilizing U.S. presence in Cuba.

Here the point is not to determine who was right and wrong within this debate, although it is noteworthy that Hector became one of the strongest supporters of the Cuban Revolution when he returned to the Caribbean. Whether in letter form or during their meetings, education for CCC members was, to borrow from, and slightly distort, the ideas of the celebrated philosopher of education for liberation, Paulo Freire (2000), a dialogical process (pp. 87-95). Their dialogues and debates were part of the push and pull process through which they clarified their thoughts.

Much of what we learned about the CCC and C.L.R. James in the early 1990s came directly from one of its former members, Alfie Roberts, who lived and worked in Montreal and was a constant presence at community and political gatherings. Roberts was always willing to share both his vast organizational experience and the accumulated knowledge one acquires from both being actively involved in a community over several decades, and voluminous reading. As we traveled our own road, we also encountered countless individuals who had committed themselves to social and political change. And as we grappled with the world around us, this experience was formative and we gained tremendous insight into how to approach the issues that preoccupied us at that historical moment. Decades have passed since the CCC folded, but the need for the kind of education described in this article persists. The rioting and

protest in Montréal-Nord following the August 2008 police shooting of 18 year-old Freddie Villanueva highlights the palpable sense of marginalization and alienation that youth – and particularly people of colour – feel in this society. Inadequate schools, high unemployment, police brutality, harassment and violence, and institutional racism define much of their existence. But how do they – how do *we* make sense of this condition? How do we analyze and assess it in a way that permits us to work towards changing the deep-seated social, historical, and structural factors of which this condition is a concrete manifestation?

Theory, at its best, is a powerful social and political tool. Far from being abstract, theory is 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. In my view, the wedding of theory and practice – engaged study, theoretical and otherwise, of the issues involved, combined with, and informed by, concrete actions, and vice-versa; drawing on experiences of the past in order to inform our understanding of the present as we assess the prospects for the kind of change that is not simply desirable, but necessary if we are to combat the socio-economic and environmental catastrophes that even some of the most conservative observers are now forced to acknowledge – this is perhaps where we begin. Our experience in the early 1990s taught us that the world is our classroom, a place full of ideas and possibilities, and that history is replete with examples of how, even during – and often as a result of – deep-seated crisis, change is eminently possible.

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THE TEACH-IN ON GLOBAL WARMING SOLUTIONS AND VYGOTSKY: FOSTERING ECOLOGICAL ACTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

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ABSTRACT. The Teach-in on Global Warming Solutions is part of a larger socio-environmental movement concerned with combating climate change. Highlighting the history and elements of the teach-in as a model of learning, the article examines the teach-in movement, using a local event at the University of Calgary as an illustration. Conceptual resources from Vygotsky – the Zone of Proximal Development, and learning as social/relational transaction – are used to illuminate specific aspects of the teach-in. The article concludes by discussing the challenges and opportunities facing the global warming movement regarding public education.

LE FORUM ÉDUCATIF SUR LES SOLUTIONS POSSIBLES AU RÉCHAUFFEMENT DE LA PLANÈTE ET VYGOTSKY : FAVORISER UNE ACTION CITOYENNE POUR L'ÉCOLOGIE ET L'ENVIRONNEMENT

RÉSUMÉ. Le forum éducatif sur les solutions possibles au réchauffement de la planète est partie intégrante d'un vaste mouvement socio-environnemental visant à lutter contre les changements climatiques. Retraçant l'historique et les éléments du forum qui en font un modèle d'apprentissage en s'appuyant sur un événement ayant eu lieu à l'Université de Calgary, cet article fait l'examen du mouvement des forums éducatifs. Les concepts mis de l'avant par Vygotsky – tels que la zone proximale de développement et la cognition résultant de processus d'interaction socio-relationnelle – sont mis à profit pour illustrer les défis et les opportunités auxquels font face les tenants des mouvements anti-réchauffement climatique en termes d'éducation publique.

I think H. G. Wells has it right when he said that we are in a race between education and catastrophe. (Orr, 2004, p. xiv)

On a Friday afternoon in a Calgary winter, a young woman nervously and yet purposively arose from her seat in a large room to express her concerns about global warming. But rather than confining herself to speaking about her fears regarding climate change, she passionately described how this environmental crisis also represents an opportunity to create a more just and sustainable

society. She was followed by an expert on solar energy who talked eloquently about buildings and climate change, after which a biologist spoke affectionately about his work with polar bears, underlining his fears about the prospects for survival of this species. Each of the three speakers addressed a group of forty to fifty persons for ten minutes.

After the three speakers concluded, the facilitator thanked the three speakers and invited the crowd to break into small groups to discuss what elements of the presentations resonated with each person in a personal manner, or what aspects of the mini-talks captured their imagination. As the participants shared their responses in small groups in this second phase, the speakers hovered outside the groups, eavesdropping on the conversations for the next twenty minutes, noting the elements of the discussions which touched them in some way. Finally, the facilitator invited the groups to conclude their deliberations, allowing the three initial speakers to share their brief reflections on what they heard in the discussions, providing a circular closure or literary *inclusio* to the hour of listening and dialogue. For four hours, this same three-fold pattern – speakers, dialogue groups, speakers – within an hour-long format was repeated with different presenters and participants. During this time, multiple speakers of diverse ages shared their responses to the two key questions that lay at the heart of the educational event: 1) what concerns you the most about global warming? 2) what does your specific profession have to offer by way of solutions to the problem of climate change?

As one begins to reflect on this event, some questions emerge: what was the nature of the educational event that was taking place in this crowded room over a four hour period? What was the social movement that provided a larger context for these learning events? What kind of learning was being transacted through this particular format? How could we interpret or understand the nature of the learning that occurred on that day, and how was it a microcosm of the larger social movement combating global warming? In this article, I discuss ways that the conceptual resources of educational psychologist Lev Vygotsky regarding learning as a social and relational transaction may be helpful in illuminating the dynamics and processes represented in this activity.

There are an abundance of conceptual lenses through which the learning activities in the teach-in could be interpreted, such as a Bakhtinian dialogic process moving from monologue to intersubjective dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986), as a form of distributed cognition (Cole & Engestrom, 1993), or as a variety of legitimate peripheral participation in situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, for this article, the idea of learning as a social and relational transaction between persons as developed by Lev Vygotsky – described as the Mozart of psychology (Toulmin, 1978) – was selected as offering the most promising theoretical perspective. From Vygotsky's writings, two ideas in particular were chosen as conceptual resources that could offer some insight into the learning activities in the teach-in. Firstly, the teach-in could be viewed

as a cluster of *multiple, overlapping Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD)* where participants act successively as both teachers – or, to use Vygotsky’s language, “more capable peers” – and as learners for other teach-in participants. Secondly, the teach-in as a form of adult learning was oriented by the guiding principle that learning about global warming and the ways in which we can take action as a global community best emerge from within a social context that is fundamentally *relational, dialogical, and interactional*.

In the development of his thought and practices, Vygotsky placed both of these notions at the heart of his own work as an educational and cultural psychologist. Newman and Holzman (1993) insist that Vygotsky forged linkages between his science as a psychologist and his educational practices as a political and social critic, highlighting the many ways in which he initiated and utilized ZPDs as *tools of social change* in his own life with individuals in a variety of settings and social networks, first as a youth facilitator, and later as an adult educator. The spirit of social change is a thematic thread that transverses and pervades Vygotsky’s practices as well as the learning models in the environmental movement, such as the teach-in. The intent of the teach-in is to facilitate the emergence of engaged action and sustained commitment in combating global warming through social change in the form of environmental citizenship. It should also be noted that insights from Vygotsky’s thinking regarding the cultural/economic context as well as the social and material forces underpinning the teach-in and comparable models of ecological learning could be helpful in highlighting the limits of these models as tools of social change, a question for which the environmental justice movement (Gosline & Teelucksingh, 2008; Hossay, 2006; Athanasiou & Baer, 2002) would provide some crucial perspectives.

Finally, this article will conclude with some reflections on the challenges and opportunities that the movement against global warming faces as it seeks to develop and refine its educational and political advocacy activities as a means of fostering ecological literacy, environmental citizenship, and committed social action. Given the urgency and magnitude of the ecological crisis that we are facing as a species on Earth, what possibilities for facilitating the emergence of environmental citizenship lie within the practices of the teach-in, and what further developments could be made to enhance its effectiveness?

THE TEACH-IN ON GLOBAL WARMING AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well – for we will not fight to save what we do not love. (Gould, quoted in Orr, 2004, p. 140)

The development of the teach-in on global warming as a network

The event described above was one of over 1,900 teach-ins that took place on January 31, 2008 (or in Canada at the beginning of February) across North

America as part of a network called *Focus the Nation*. This network of public educators has developed as a social movement in its own right, even though it is clearly part of a larger series of a diversified and variegated cluster of over a million social movements which have emerged centered on advocating and educating for environmental sustainability and social justice (Hawken, 2007). With an organizational staff led by environmental economist and activist Eban Goodstein (1999, 2007, 2008), the network initially focused its organizational efforts on universities and schools, but found that their proliferating web of locally organized teach-ins spread like a virus deep into the community, both into local organizations and worksites, and most robustly, through the structures of diverse religious groups across the United States.

Historically, the teach-in movement that coalesced in the *Focus the Nation* network over the last two years emerged from an earlier and more modest organization called the Green House Network, founded in 1999 by Goodstein – an ecological economics professor at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon – and a fellow public educator, Matthew Follett. In his critical appraisal of what he calls “compromised activists” in the movement against global warming, Gelbspan (2004) offers a favourable assessment of the Green House Network (pp. 140-141). In organizing these educational events for climate change activists, Goodstein (2007) consciously drew on the collective experience of the civil rights movement regarding the centrality of learning in building a robust social movement, including his own family’s experience with the Highlander Centre near Sewanee, Tennessee that provided education and training to civil rights activists such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. (pp. 89-91). By focusing on offering a series of intensive three-day educational workshops for students, educators, and community leaders across the US, the Green House Network provided a learning experience for these community leaders, facilitating a return to their communities to offer their own educational events to galvanize social action against global warming.

In its three years of operation, the Green House Network trained almost 250 activists in thirty states (Gelbspan, 2004, pp. 140-141; see also Goodstein, 2007, p. 7). The community-based leaders who had “graduated” from these training events organized more than 600 educational events in 30 states. In so doing, the “network has contributed to a remarkable proliferation of climate groups over the last decade... both informing and inspiring individuals, congregations, campus groups, and local organizations around the country to begin to take action on the climate crisis” (Gelbspan, 2004, p. 141). By the end of this initiative, the Green House Network had equipped a total of over 500 community leaders with foundational tools: a *conceptual* framework, a *community* of practice and activism, and the *pragmatics of organizing* a movement centered on combating climate change (Goodstein, 2007, p. 91).

In 2006, Dr. James Hansen, one of the more respected climate scientists, and Director of the NASA Goddard Space Center at Columbia University, issued a startling statement in an interview on global warming. Hansen warned that we

have to stabilize emissions of carbon dioxide within a decade, or temperatures will warm by more than one degree. That will be warmer than it has been for half a million years, and many things could become unstoppable. If we are to stop that, we cannot wait for new technologies like capturing emissions from burning coal. We have to act with what we have. This decade, this means focusing on energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy that do not burn carbon. We don't have much time left. (Hansen, 2006, quoted in Goodstein, 2007, p. 137)

It was this statement of urgency on the part of Hansen that precipitated the emergence of *Focus the Nation* as a national network facilitating the planning of educational symposia in centers and organizations. This “red alert” signal which spread through the public coincided with other warnings arising in the scientific community – the rapidly melting ice in the Arctic and Antarctic regions being just one striking example (see Homer-Dixon, 2007) – regarding the fact that the changes in the environment resulting from global warming were exceeding even the most pessimistic predictions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). There was, of course, already a rising groundswell of climate change activism and education that preceded this turning point in 2006, as many groups had been preparing the foundations for a large-scale social movement for several years.

For Goodstein – the Project Director for *Focus the Nation*, its predecessor, the *Green House Network*, and its present successor, *The National Teach-in on Global Warming Solutions* – the motivation for organizing did not spring from merely an intellectual apprehension of the scientific evidence regarding climate change and its threat to both human society and the Earth's biosphere. Rather, for Goodstein, his commitment to combating global warming proceeded from a deep affection for life on Earth, or what the Harvard biologist, E. O. Wilson (1984), calls *biophilia*, an innate tendency within human beings to affiliate themselves with life. In a telling introduction to his book, Goodstein (2007) reveals how his partner perceived the absence of his “heart” in the “languishing” first draft, and encouraged Goodstein to rewrite the book so that it was animated by his own deep biophilic attachment to the Earth as well as his sense of grief and sadness regarding the environmental losses – both present and future – that we are facing. This component of developing and deepening one's sense of attachment to the environment and the biotic community of life within it is a key component of learning and ecological literacy for both the environmental movement in general (Orr, 2004, p. xiv), and the movement against global warming (Isham & Waage, 2007, pp. 55, 179, 240).

On January 31, 2008, organizers in the network enacted mini-symposia involving persons from diverse backgrounds sharing their personal concerns about

climate change, followed by dialogue regarding proposed solutions to global warming. In the evening, political round tables involving the participation of elected officials from municipal, state, and federal levels encouraged the formation of links between the personal experience and professional solutions shared by participants, and the need to translate these discussions into public policy and political advocacy. In his account of the teach-in as a public educational experience, Goodstein (2007) outlines the three operative principles of each local teach-in: 1) honour the *complexity* of the global warming issue, 2) engage individuals from *diverse backgrounds*, encouraging them to interact with each other, and 3) support and encourage all participants to act and to develop their role as *public educators* (p. 139).

THE TEACH-IN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY: AN ILLUSTRATION

The teach-in on global warming as a reflecting process

At the University of Calgary, organizers drew on a format of adult education called “reflecting processes,” originally a clinical practice derived from family therapy (Andersen, 1987, 1992) where a reflecting team listens in on a conversation of a family and therapist from behind a one-way mirror, subsequently offering reflections on the family’s discussion. In the third stage of the reflecting process, the originators of the conversation – the family and therapist – reflect on the reflections of the reflecting team. Such a format of a three-stage structure of listening and talking has been adapted as a learning tool for a variety of adult educational contexts, including the education of counsellors (Lysack, 2003) and social workers (Woit & Brownlee, 1995).

Two features of reflecting processes were visible in the teach-in on global warming. First, the teach-in adapted the *tri-partite structure* of talking-listening-talking in the reflecting processes. In this format, a primary presentation or “text” was enacted by three presenters while other participants in the teach-in listened. This was followed by multiple conversations in small groups of the listeners as “outsider witnesses” who highlighted the ideas in the presentations that resonated with them. Finally, the original presenters selected the themes that captured their imagination as they listened in on the small group discussions, sharing these reflections with the entire group. This three-fold structure was intended to enhance *deeper listening between* the participants, to facilitate a greater movement between *listening and talking* on the part of each person, and to encourage a rhythmic interaction between *inner speech and outer word* for each participant (Emerson, 1983). This three-fold format was also intended to privilege talking-in-order-to-listen, rather than listening-in-order-to-talk, and to support interactive processes where a multiplicity of meanings are generated and “laminated” together as the listening and sharing in the teach-in continued.

Rather than the teach-in simply consisting of a collective iteration of facts about climate change, it was important for the teach-in as a reflecting process to focus

upon the dialogic interaction of the *personal responses* of each participant to the responses of other participants within a *community* of concern. The goal of this orientation to personal responses was to encourage the emergence of not only of a greater *awareness* of the urgency of global warming and the potential solutions offered by others, but also to facilitate the development of a deeper sense of personal and collective *agency* on the part of each participant. In other words, the teach-in's emphasis on personal and collective responses was intended to foster the emergence of both engaged *ecological literacy* (Orr, 1992, 2004) and *environmental citizenship*, i.e., political advocacy and civic participation in democratic structures in order to advance environmental causes and to take action to protect the ecosphere from the impacts of climate change. While there is a growing proliferation of books on approaches to cultivating ecological literacy (Bowers, 1995; Orr, 1992; O'Sullivan 1999; O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004), it is still the case that we "know very little about the cognitive origins of ecological learning and biosphere perception" (Thomashow, 2002, p. 193). As the activities within a social movement are intended in part to be a "vehicle for public education, social engagement and political pressure," Meyer (2007) argues that the intentionality of those who facilitate the learning that takes place within a movement – such as the teach-in network on global warming – is strongly vectored towards maximizing the degree of mobilization and readiness for public action on the part of the members of that movement (pp. 452-453).

The teach-in at the University of Calgary

Given that the Teach-in on Global Warming was the first to be organized at the University of Calgary, there was no previous experience upon which the organizers could draw in their planning of the event. Documents posted on the *Focus the Nation* website (www.focusthenation.org) offered substantial guidelines, such as an outline of the goals and objectives of the teach-in, an interdisciplinary model for structuring the event, and other supplementary resources for would-be organizers. Invitations to present were circulated by email for a few weeks prior to the teach-in, highlighting that the teach-in did not require presenters to be scientists or climate researchers, but that one only need be a citizen who was deeply concerned about a public policy issue. It was hoped that such an educational philosophy for the teach-in would serve to relieve anxiety and ease the pressure of expectations on the part of presenters. The invitation for presenters was distributed primarily through the key organizer's electronic listserves and networks, supplemented by several other networks both within the university and through organizations external to the institution in the community.

The focal point of each presentation was two-fold, and each posed in the form of a question:

- 1) the personal response and lived experience of the presenter to the crisis of global warming (What concerns you the most about global warming?), and
- 2) the pragmatic contributions that were available by way of innovative responses and possible solutions to combat climate change, aiding in the transition to a society based on renewable forms of energy and a respectful relationship with the Earth. (What resources or possible solutions does your own profession offer to combating climate change and moving to a more sustainable society?). Participants were asked to limit their presentations to a maximum of ten minutes, encouraging the emergence of a sharp focus on the part of all presenters.

As a result of three “calls for presenters” circulated through email networks for a period of three weeks, a total of fourteen individuals offered to present. On the basis of their order of application, twelve of these candidates were selected to participate in the teach-in as actual presenters, with attention devoted to making sure that students as well as faculty were represented, and that there was a balance in terms of professional background. Seven different professional backgrounds were represented in the range of prospective presenters: social work, education, biology, business, environmental design, religious studies, and veterinary medicine. The presenters were organized into triads of speakers so that no two professional backgrounds were duplicated in a one-hour block. The topics for the Teach-in consisted of a wide diversity of issues: a Prosperous Solution; Building and Climate Change; Potential Impacts of Climate Change on Polar Bears; Social Justice and Climate Change; How a Diverse Group of Students from Calgary’s Post-Secondary Institutions are already Taking action on Climate Change; Environmental Stewardship: Prairie Conservation and Climate Change; Social Work, the Environment, and Disfluency: Why Social Workers have Trouble talking about the Environment; Creating Political Will; Business Strategies for a Warming World; What is Climate Change doing to the Energetic Costs of Arctic Breeding Shorebirds; Earth as Sacred Trust: The Ramifications of Ethics and Faith; and Métis Observations from Rural/Northern Manitoba.

The three presentations were followed by small-group reflections for a 20 minute period while presenters listened in (but did not participate in) the dialogue. Subsequent to the small group discussions, a five-minute block was devoted to an opportunity for the three presenters to offer brief reflections. The final five minutes of each hour-long block of the teach-in was for participants to transition in and out of the room in which the teach-in was located, allowing individuals to enter or to exit the learning event without disruption. Over the course of the four hours of the teach-in which began at 12 noon and concluded at 4 pm, a total of over 150 participants participated in the event, ranging in age from late teens/early twenties to retired individuals from the community in their sixties and seventies. The average number of participants

in each of the four one-hour blocks that made up the teach-in varied from 34 to 55 learners.

The evaluation of participants of their experience of the teach-in

Although no formal evaluation of the teach-in was completed, the comments informally shared with organizers by participants were very positive. Participants described how they believed that the teach-in had enabled them to see new connections between issues and solutions, as well as to deepen their sense of being empowered to voice their concerns on global warming to families and colleagues more frequently and with greater confidence. For instance, one young adult with a background in engineering and psychology commented that the “teach-in created bigger linkages for me. I found courage to speak out more about the environment from a personal level” (Dulaney-MacNicol, 2008, p. 2). Another young adult appreciated the multiplicity of perspectives that the teach-in generated in the course of the afternoon. She found that each “discipline brought something different to the overall picture, and listening to the scope of solutions that were offered made quite an impact” (Dulaney-MacNicol, 2008, p. 2).

Yet another adult participant (Perdue, 2008), the director of the Office of Sustainability at the University of Calgary, suggested that the teach-in reminded her of a social space or arena for the expression of “public worry” about global warming, adding that she was struck by what she experienced as a slow, incremental, and “mysterious” emergence of hope as each stage of the teach-in unfolded throughout the duration of the afternoon. This image of the activities within the environmental movement being a crucial public space or “echo chamber” for communal expression and witnessing of fears and hopes regarding global warming has been echoed by other environmental activists, such as writer and activist, Bill McKibben (Isham & Waage, p. 4; see also McKibben, 2007) in his perception of the dynamics of the global warming network, *Step It Up* (McKibben et al., 2007) – now morphed into the international network to combat global warming, 350.org.

THE TEACH-IN ON GLOBAL WARMING: A VYGOTSKIAN PERSPECTIVE

[Vygotsky] gives language both a cultural past and a generative present, and assigns it a role as the nurse and tutor of thought. (Bruner, 1986, p. 145)

The teach-in as multiple zones of proximal development

Perhaps Vygotsky’s most famous notion bequeathed as a legacy to education is his notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), an idea that is emblematic of Vygotsky’s understanding of learning as a relational interaction. Vygotsky (1978) defines the Zone of Proximal Development as being “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem

solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or *in collaboration with more capable peers*" (p. 86, emphasis added). Although Vygotsky developed this idea specifically regarding the learning of children in a structured school environment, the notion of the ZPD could also be utilized to understand the teach-in process as involving multiple, overlapping zones of proximal development for each participant in the activity, whether they are the original presenters or participants in the teach-in event. Vygotsky's reference to "more capable peers" is suggestive of participants in the teach-in, where they successively and interchangeably act as more capable peers with each other.

For Vygotsky (1978), learning "presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88). This image of growing into the intellectual life of those around them could function as a metaphor for understanding the teach-in as a cluster of simultaneous learning processes, where the semiotic meaning-making process is transacted within a dialogic "space" of intersubjectivity. Bruner (1986) drew comparisons between the ideas of Vygotsky and psychological research with respect to the activity of tutoring, where learning is described in this setting as facilitating learners to develop a "vicarious consciousness." Bruner suggested that the learning process in this tutorial relationship could be perceived as an event where the learner "borrows" the awareness of another person, or where the student transacts a "loan of consciousness" from the tutor (pp. 74-78).

Bruner's notions could be one way of understanding this notion of "growing into the intellectual life of others" in a manner that is useful in describing the teach-in as a form of adult learning. I would conceptualize the teach-in as being a series of multiple and reciprocal "loans of consciousness" between the presenters and the members of the teach-in event. The teach-in as a reflecting process could be viewed as a collectivity of vicarious consciousnesses, one of whose purposes is to facilitate the emergence of new co-emerging personal and relational knowledges regarding global warming and possible responses to climate change. The "intellectual life" into which a person grows is not a fixed attribute of a presenter in a hierarchical relationship with other participants in the teach-in, but rather is a fluid quality of the process that moves and shifts around the teach-in as members share in the discussion groups. In one moment, a person may be a "tutor" or facilitator who "loans a consciousness" to another teach-in participant who is listening in on the dialogue. In another moment, the same person may be a "learner" from another member of the teach-in who "loans their consciousness" in facilitating learning.

Vygotsky's sociogenesis: Emergence of human awareness in relationship

Vygotsky conceptualized the human person not as an isolated individual – a discreet being whose meaning is construed in reference to itself – but rather as a being-in-relation within a larger interactional context. The genesis of hu-

man consciousness is not *sui generis*, or self-generative, but emerges out of a network of relationships in a social and cultural context. Vygotsky (1986) insists that “the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual” (p. 36). In one of Vygotsky’s (1978) best-known quotes, he describes the internalization of higher psychological functions in children.

An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological).... All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (p. 57)

This idea of *sociogenesis* was a key feature in Vygotsky’s first public presentation which he gave at the Second All-Union Congress of Psychoneurologists in Leningrad in 1924. Vygotsky (1979a) concludes this inaugural talk by referring to the sociologization “of all consciousness, the recognition that the social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and in fact” (p. 30). Vygotsky (1979a) proposed that we

are aware of ourselves in that we are aware of others; and in an analogous manner, we are aware of others because in our relationship to ourselves we are the same as others in their relationship to us. I am aware of myself only to the extent that I am as another for myself. (p. 29)

Elsewhere, Vygotsky (1989) writes that we “become ourselves through others” (p. 56). “Any higher mental function was external because it was social at some point before becoming an internal, truly mental function. It was first a social relation between two people” (1979b, p. 162). Drawing on these ideas of Vygotsky, we could begin to understand how the teach-in, as a set of interpersonal relationships and interactions in a learning context, could be a generative event for participants. Vygotsky (1979b) writes: “We could therefore say that it is through others that we develop into ourselves and that this is true not only with regard to the individual but with regard to the history of every function” (p. 161). In this way, Vygotsky views a human being as a social person, “an aggregate of social relations, embodied in an individual” (1989, p. 66).

If we translate Vygotsky’s notion of sociogenesis – individual awareness emerging out of social relationships and interpersonal interaction – into an adult educational context such as a teach-in on global warming, it is possible to interpret the development of the thinking and awareness of a teach-in participant as a process of emergences from systemic and social interaction with other participants. Through mutually interactive processes of listening, talking, and reflecting, a teach-in participant would be influenced and *in-formed* by the dialogue that is transacted between participants. At the same time, each participant would also *act upon* others as a formative influence as they engaged with the conversations during the teach-in.

Vygotsky's foundational notion – an individual becomes aware through dialogical interaction with others in a learning environment and social network – is a thematic thread that also runs through the literature of the movement against global warming. For instance, Isham and Waage (2007) insist that it is only through the “process of face-to-face persuasion and collaboration” that a vibrant social movement may develop (p. 19). Other climate change activists suggest that organizations and groups that privilege listening and consultation as part of their ongoing processes facilitate the emergence of a new vision of key eco-social values, mobilize resources within the networks, and generate both organizational and individual learning (Doppelt, 2007, pp. 169-181).

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

[W]e must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization. (Gore, 1992, p. 269)

A critical question remains unanswered for the movement against global warming: what are the most effective learning processes that encourage ecological literacy to deepen into environmental citizenship and committed action? This issue is not merely an academic conundrum, but is a priority concern for this movement if it is to motivate the general public into taking decisive action in transitioning from a carbon-intensive economy to a society centred upon renewable forms of energy and a benign relationship with the environment. The time frame for making crucial changes as a global community is a very modest one at best – perhaps as short as ten to twenty years if we are to avoid the severe consequences of global warming – as even the most dire predictions of the IPCC are overtaken by the accelerating rate of climate change presently occurring. While our political leaders continue to dither and fail to provide any significant leadership on climate change, many in the scientific community – Hansen being only the most visible proponent among many scientists of this position – have intensified their communication with the general public about the imminent crossroads that we face as a human species on Earth regarding global warming within the next decade or so.

The challenge of building a public consensus for making a qualitative re-orientation of our global culture and economy is exacerbated by the emotional responses of the public to the crisis in the global North. Some activists have argued that many “people walked out of *An Inconvenient Truth* feeling disempowered, not empowered, which is why the June 2006 Pew survey found that global warming remains far down the list of the public's priorities” (de Kirby et al., 2007, pp. 65-66). Other researchers have proposed that knowledge or “information alone is not sufficient to produce behaviour change” (Moser, 2007, pp. 85-86; see also p. 65; see also Moser & Dilling, 2007), pointing to research that suggests that while a “majority of Americans judge climate change to be serious or very serious, only one in three is *personally* concerned

or worried” (p. 86). Thomashow (1996) suggests: “Some of us become psychologically numb as we become accustomed to the litany of environmental bad news. Others experience fear and anger, are outraged by the social and environmental injustices that plague the planet. Sometimes people just tune out and ignore or avoid the negative images, rationalizing their inaction, practicing denial and apathy” (p. 143). As our awareness of the magnitude and complexity of the environmental crisis increases, so does the temptation to take refuge in avoidance, denial or defeatism, thereby eviscerating the ability of a social movement to nurture individuals into a heightened sense of motivated environmental citizenship.

Public education regarding global warming needs to achieve more than a simple transfer of information. It is necessary to provide the conditions for individuals and communities to complete the transition to being committed environmental citizens, engaged with protecting the planet’s climate and ecosystems, and actively advocating for substantive socio-economic and ecological change. In a manner reminiscent of the civil rights movement, educational work was an important dimension of the climate change network’s activities from 2001 to 2006 in the “ripening conditions” of this social movement, and became pivotal in its emergence to a full-scale social movement in 2005 (Finley, 2007, pp. 42, 48). In developing public support among citizens in the global North, public education activities on the part of the movement against global warming will be essential (Finley, 2007, pp. 51, 78).

The movement for combating global warming must also provide a sense of *communal belonging* by tapping “into this yearning for community, the moral sense of responsibility that goes beyond one’s small self-interest” (Moser, 2007, p. 81; see also Bateson, 2007; Lysack, 2007). Here the insights of Vygotsky that authentic learning is inherently social and relational in quality is a valuable resource for the climate change movement, and specifically educational networks such as the Teach-in on Global Warming. This sentiment is echoed by Orr (2004) who insists that a relationship (or ZPD) with another person – for example, an ecologically literate adult with children – is critical for cultivating their biophilic capacities and their intrinsic tendencies to affiliate with life, a capacity foundational for sound ecological literacy and environmental citizenship (p. 143; see also 1992, p. 88). In like manner, the Teach-in on Global Warming movement has recognized the inherent value of creating ad hoc communities of ecological learning for those concerned about the impacts of global warming through the organization of teach-in activities in a variety of community settings, all focusing on what each individual would like to protect most from the consequences of climate change.

In order to transcend the narrow self-interest of the individualism inculcated by our present global culture, the climate change movement also faces the challenge of facilitating the deepening of the importance of civic engagement and

participation through enabling individuals to connect their love or *biophilia* of the natural world with an increased sense of the centrality of political advocacy. For some time, conservationists as early as Aldo Leopold (1966) have perceived the efficacy of “biological education as a means of producing citizens” (p. 208) as a countervailing force over and against the hegemony of the dominant industrial culture that privileges individualism and rights over citizenship and responsibility (Orr, 2004, p. 32; see also Grotzer & Lincoln, 2007).

The teach-in movement offers an innovative and promising approach to creating communities of learning and empowerment directed towards enhancing committed social action to combat global warming. At this crossroads of history, it is our love for the Earth and our attachment to the remarkable diversity of life that encompasses the planet that will be the energizing force to equip us for this turning point in history. If our love of life on Earth is true, we will act to defend it and to protect the life around us. For as Wendell Berry (2000) reminds us with a certain vigour: “We know enough of our own history by now to be aware that people *exploit* what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they *defend* what they love” (p. 41).

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