

Book reviews: *Interface* volume 4(2)

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Selwyn, Ben. 2012. *Workers, state and development in Brazil: Powers of labour, chains of value*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press (paper) £65.00

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Reviewed by Chris Richardson

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Selwyn, Ben. (2012). *Workers, state and development in Brazil: Powers of labour, chains of value*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press (paper). £65.00

Reviewed by **Ana Margarida Esteves**

Workers, state and development in Brazil is a well-structured, well-researched and theoretically sophisticated book that is thoroughly satisfying for political economists but only marginally engaging for scholars of social movements as well as activists. Selwyn masterfully combines institutional and structural analysis in the explanation of how workers in export grape production in Northeastern Brazil's São Francisco Valley organized around *Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais* (STR), the valley's rural trade union, managed to achieve considerable advances in their working and living conditions. Such gains happened despite the evolving requirements and conditions of export grape production, and at a time when organized labour was suffering significant setbacks in other regions of Brazil.

Selwyn's analysis shows that, to the contrary of what is often implied, labour is not always a passive sufferer or beneficiary of the outcomes of capitalist development and globalization. Successful offensive actions are possible in the framework of dependent development, especially when external demand of a high-quality product is added to the presence of a strong, unifying labour union, supported by favourable state regulations. In these circumstances, labour can exercise significant influence on the accumulation of capital and how it spills into wider developmental processes and outcomes, leading to outcomes that are favourable to the interests of workers.

This frame of analysis has the great advantage of breaking with the entrenched tendency of development scholars of focusing too much on the role of state regulation and structural power relations at the expense of the agency of organized groups. The result of this tendency is that the role of organized labour in development processes is more often than not ignored in academic literature. When such a role is acknowledged, the victories of organized labour tend to be portrayed either as defensive movements or as the result of the "trickle-down effect" of economic growth.

With this analysis, Selwyn aims to shed light on the role of labour in development processes and outcomes in the framework of the insertion of local economies on global commodity chains. The author does that by engaging critically with both the Global Commodity Chains approach and with World Systems Theory. It is in the combination of these two approaches that lays the major success of this book, as it prevented the analysis of the development of export-oriented grape production in the São Francisco valley from becoming disembodied from the social relations and institutional contexts that shaped it. The attention paid to transnational class dynamics shows that globalization can be beneficial to the interests of organized labour if the skills of organized workers are a defining factor in making products correspond to the demands of

consumers. Since the 1980's, increasing demand by northern retailers upon suppliers in Latin America has forced grape exporters in the São Francisco valley to initiate a complex process of technical upgrading which provided labour with an important source of structural power to disrupt production.

Selwyn also shows how capital reacted to the growing power of STR, namely by trying to control labour through the promotion of clientelist social services such as very cheap housing in the farms. However, the author clearly points out that the inability of STR to push for further monetary enhancements to their members' working conditions was mainly the result of a shift from a strategy of confrontation to one of compromise in the early 2000's. Such a shift was to a large extent the result of institutional and organizational ties to the Workers' Party (PT). The ascent of PT to power in that period is to a significant extent the result of a shift towards "third way" politics and class compromise, which reflected itself in the emergence of an increasingly conservative union leadership within the affiliated *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT).

The major limitation of *Workers, state and development in Brazil* comes from the fact that, although the author indicates that the agency of strategically prepared union leaders and rank-and-file members was crucial for such achievements, he does not adequately explain the frames of action and learning processes that contributed to make them possible. Besides, the analysis focuses on gains achieved by a skilled labour force that is formally and permanently employed by medium and large farms, therefore excluding the growing contingent of seasonal and informal workers. A comparative study between the working and living conditions of formal and informal workers would allow a more rigorous assessment of the structural force of labour in the export grape sector, as well as of the adequacy of the strategy of rigid and restrictive cross-class unity promoted by STR.

About the reviewer

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Sen, Jai (Ed). (2012). *Interrogating Empires*. New Delhi, India: OpenWord and Daanish Books. (352 pp)

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Reviewed by **Guy Lancaster**

Books two and three of the *Are Other Worlds Possible?* series, *Interrogating Empires* and *Imagining Alternatives*, collect together a group of public seminars and debates organized at the University of Delhi in 2003–2004—the Open Space Seminar Series (the first book of this series, *Talking New Politics*, was published in 2005). The contributions in each volume, produced by an array of educators and activists, are grouped thematically, with an “open forum” at the end of each section presenting the transcript of that seminar’s question-and-answer period—a feature which makes these books true dialogues. Though approaching their respective subjects primarily through the contextual lens of the Indian subcontinent, these volumes possess a universal appeal, addressing structures of oppression and the desire for alternatives common across the world; however, to assist readers unfamiliar with some of the culture-specific terms or references used, the editor has included an extensive glossary comprising dozens of pages in each volume.

Interrogating Empires tackles the subject of five overlapping and related empires: patriarchy, nationalism, caste/race, fundamentalism/religious communalism, and globalization. As editor Jai Sen notes in his introduction, “While some of these empires are superstructure in our lives and consciousness, being relatively modern (such as nationalism and communalism), some—like patriarchy, sexuality, and caste—are... now embedded in our subconscious, and held in place by extensive, complex, and robust regimes, and constantly reinforced in daily life” (p. 16). The contributors to this volume aim to subject these various empires to thorough investigation and, by revealing their inner workings and how human beings are conditioned to accept them through education and socialization, begin to de-naturalize them for the reader in order that, once they are delegitimized in the mind, they might be dismantled in the world at large.

Uma Chakravarti opens the section of patriarchy by arguing that “[j]ust because globalisation is occurring at an unprecedented scale, we cannot assume that traditions and structures are decreasing in significance” (p. 39). Patriarchy, for example, remains relevant because it continues to shore up systems of caste and class reinforced by the current regime of globalization. Other contributors emphasize how patriarchy attempts to impose hard-and-fast categories on the individual; as Shaleen Rakesh opines, “The panic around homosexuality in India is because of the widespread notion of gender identity being fixed across time” (p. 59), adding that there is the freedom to “do what you want, even engage in homosexual activity, so long as you don’t assume that as an identity” (p. 61). This may seem contradictory, but such categories are imposed less to

constrain personal behaviour than to limit sympathy and solidarity with others who may also desire to assume such an identity. Nationalism functions in much the same way, drawing fictional lines separating self from geographical other in order to make for easier exploitation, or as Achin Vanaik explains, "Neo-liberal economics, in contrast with its own principles, wants complete freedom of movement of capital but does not want free movement of labour; so it needs the state to perform policing and patrolling functions" (p. 85). Similar policing functions within the nation, embedded into millennia-old tradition, help to keep people lower-caste individuals, for example, from being seen as full members of society. In traditional Indian culture, "anything created by the Dalits still bears what-according to caste-is the soil of pollution; whatever Dalits do is polluted. So there is no labour theory of value for Dalits within the kind of system that we have" (p. 162).

The contributors to the book's section on religion call for not just the toppling of idols, but the toppling of all impulse toward idolatry. Purushottam Agrawal relates an anecdote about some leftist university friends who were demonstrating against the harassment of artist M. F. Hussain, who was targeted on account of his depiction of the goddess Saraswati; these friends, in turn, went to protest the Delhi showing of the James Bond film *From Russia with Love* because it depicted a dancer cavorting atop a fallen idol of Lenin (p. 192). In the various writers' views, the problem of faith versus reason is not confined only to ancient creeds but also includes new, even "secular" creeds, such as materialist consumerism, which have their own devoted adherents and, like religions, desire monopolistic dominance of the market. The last section of the book, covering globalization as the new imperialism, explicates exactly how the regime of international trade operates a lot like religions have, perhaps especially the medieval Roman Catholic Church, promising future prosperity in return for a down payment of money and labour now; or, as Jayati Ghosh observes, "It is this obsession with increasing exports that is driving the most peculiar feature of international capitalism today—that the poor and less developed countries are financing the external deficits of the richest and most powerful, the United States—since that is seen as the most important destination for exports" (p. 218).

Certainly, plenty of overlap exists in these empires, as nationalist and fundamentalist movements tend to promote rigid gender identities (patriarchy) or develop intricate racial hierarchies (caste), and in much the same way does the dominant empire of globalization produce its own caste ranking through mechanisms such as the International Monetary Fund, which regularly deny to the "Global South" the benefits available to "higher-caste nations," the public schools and utilities that suddenly must be privatized in order to secure needed infusions of aid and investment. The various authors do yeoman work in pointing out this overlap of empire-acknowledging that these are not "*separate* regimes of control but... a *culture* of empire... a colonisation not just of our minds but of our imaginations and our very being" (p. 17)-but they only tangentially extricate what lies at the bottom of all these empires, which is a project (on the part of elites) to make human beings more exploitable by separating them from the natural world. Both patriarchy and caste/race

regularly claim biological foundation but instead misrepresent biology in order to serve ideology. Nationalism draws pretend boundaries upon the landscape and requires its adherents to attach unnatural significance to them.

Fundamentalism requires that followers concern themselves with the next life rather than the present. Likewise, globalization seeks to make human beings dependent upon commodities produced thousands of miles away rather than those produced within the more immediate lived environment, especially those which they might be able to produce themselves.

Understanding this, one possible solution to these various empires becomes clear—concentrating economic and cultural efforts at the local and regional level. In one of the “open forum” sections, Swami Agnivesh touches upon the need to turn to the lived local existence, remarking, “Industrialisation has been glorified to such an extent that development has been made synonymous with industrialisation, and agriculture is now considered backward. But the fact is that it is the agrarian life style that is most in harmony with nature and fellow humans” (p. 209). Indeed, a connection with one’s fellow beings within a locality can undermine larger empires. As novelist and historian Vilhelm Moberg relates in the second volume of his *A History of the Swedish People*, residents of southern Sweden frequently resisted the call to war against their Danish neighbours because they relied upon them for trade. All empires depend upon translocal bases of power. Even the empire of patriarchy—which is regularly imagined as provincial, contrary to transnational cultural movements—depends, to some extent, upon broader, international networks. Perhaps this is best exemplified again by the Roman Catholic Church, the leadership of which has been able to resist calls to opening up the priesthood to women or undertaking other reforms by filling empty pulpits worldwide, especially in progressive countries, with priests from more conservative nations.

Imagining Alternatives provides a thematic sequel to *Interrogating Empires*, tackling the hard question of what sort of world or worlds should be summoned forth to replace the empires that have proven so toxic to human freedom—alternatives that go beyond the present political system. As Dipankar Bhattacharya proclaims, “When people say that politics is the art of the possible, actually they are warning you to prepare for the worst. All kinds of things have been perpetrated in the name of the art of the possible. So, for me, politics is not merely the art of the possible; it is the science of the desirable, and of necessity” (p. 46).

The three alternative means of co-existing advanced by the contributors in this volume are: socialism, cyberspace, and the university. In the first section, Dunu Roy and Bhattacharya outline a compelling case against the current capitalist regime, while Kumkum Sangari explicates how the demise of socialism in the twentieth century has negatively impacted the lives of women specifically, with an ongoing regression toward un-freedom disguising “itself in the notion of a new individual subjectivity, which in reality lacks freedom and posits freedom as merely a choice between commodities” (pp. 56–57). Recalling the socialist vision of international solidarity, and seeing modern computer networks as the

latest iteration of communications technology, Shuddhabrata Sengupta asserts that "it is the boundaries of nation-states that keep people from creating networks and solidarity," and therefore cyberspace offers a forum for finally transcending artificial borders (p. 82).

The contributors to the section on the university extol more the potential than the present reality of the university system as an open space. Anita Ghai confronts the culture of ableism, while Nandita Narain argues that "the university is becoming progressively more restricted... [and] if the different identities and categories in the university do not understand that what is happening affects all of us and do not unite soon to fight for these spaces, we will lose them" (p. 117). Likewise, Oishik Sircar presents a lengthy essay emerging from her experience as a human rights education activist and trainer who has conducted workshops at universities, places where students exist in a liminal state even as they are disciplined, sometimes unknowingly, into becoming respectable citizens; the necessity for creating true open spaces, she asserts, is that such "will make us challenge our own mental hierarchies that prefer certain kinds of ways-of-life, be it sexual or otherwise, and that in doing so completely invisibilise the myriad, plural lifestyles that all of us live within and outside our functional and performative spaces" (p. 172).

How do these three "other worlds" fare as true alternatives to the existing structure? As engaging as the various contributors are, this volume falls somewhat short on imagination. For example, socialism may indeed be the only humane way of organizing an economy, but what does it mean to have the people share ownership of the means of production when, at present, it is scientific fact that our practices of production threaten the habitability of this planet? Swami Agnivesh's call for a restored agrarian economy is not explored in this particular volume, and any analysis of the present crisis from only one perspective (such as that of class) will only perpetuate antagonisms between those who should be allies, as regular conflicts between labour and environmental activists across the world demonstrate. Likewise, the contributors to the sections on cyberspace and the university give short shrift to the class divide that limits access to both, as well as how such institutions have been-and are still-used by empires to pull individuals outside the realm of the local lived experience.

But this is the conundrum of how best to respond to the empires of world and mind. After all, older, more localized models of community could prove fairly repressive of their members, especially those expressing "non-standard" sexualities and those of different ethnic and religious backgrounds-one should not idealize an agrarian past as perfect in all respects. Therefore have human rights activists mimicked, in part, the very empires they seek to dismantle by building a broad-based critical mass of support in order to challenge structures of oppression? Likewise, though nationalism has produced horrors nigh unimaginable, nations remain the only means by which people have legal rights, and nationalism can produce a sense of genuine care for other people who are otherwise complete strangers. Negotiating some of these perpetual

contradictions requires the critical development of open space, of liminality, advanced by these volumes. As C. K. Raju writes, a classic clockwork cosmos has "no hope of ever producing order, because there is a 'law' against it-the second law of thermodynamics, or the entropy law-which prohibits the production of order in this entirely mechanical world, unless... accompanied by the production of more disorder elsewhere.... The genuine production of order-in the sense of negentropy-requires a different kind of mathematical model, which permits *spontaneity*...." (87). Or as Razib Khan argues in the October/November 2012 issue of *Free Inquiry*, what might be needed is less a new rationalist system-that is, one designed from *a priori* principles and based upon broad goals-but more an empirically informed system which might produce several answers to a single question, depending upon the unique conditions on the ground and the variety of personalities composing any particular group.

Despite any shortcomings, these two books provide critical models for the sort of open space necessary to combat empire and build a world with justice and love at its core, for the conversations within their pages will continue after the books are closed. If humanity ever gets to witness the advent of such a world, it will be due, in large part, to the hard work of people like the contributors to the *Are Other Worlds Possible?* series for their devotion to the cause of human freedom.

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About the reviewer

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Conway, Janet M. (July 2012). *Edges of Global Justice: The World Social Forum and its 'others'*. Routledge: London. 224 pages , Hardback (£80.00).

Reviewed by **Mandisi Majavu**

Much has been written about the top-down leadership structure of the World Social Forum (WSF). In 2003, Michael Albert argued that those who brought the idea of the WSF into reality made a courageous political leap and inspired effective work, but, overtime, they became "a leadership in a tighter, more determinative, and less exemplary manner."

In her feminist critique of the WSF, Sonia Corrêa (2002) characterises this leadership as 'Porto Alegre Men'. In *Edges of Global Justice*, Janet Conway echoes Sonia Corrêa's argument pointing out that the leaders of the WSF are cosmopolitan males who are multi-lingual in European colonial languages. According to Conway, the marginalisation of women and feminism in the WSF leadership is a serious problem that "appears deeply rooted and resistant to change" (p. 120). Feminists have responded by exploring whether the best way to engage the WSF is to create their own autonomous spaces outside or within the WSF, "and whether and how to intervene in and over the WSF itself as a whole..." (p. 46).

Addressing race issues is also not the strength of the WSF. Conway is of the view that there is a "generalised and enduring silence about 'race' in the WSF" (p. 60). Conway argues that this inability to talk about race in the WSF amounts to a refusal to recognise the whiteness of the WSF project.

However, Conway notes that the WSF which was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2007 differed in this regard. According to Conway, the Nairobi WSF was strongly pan-Africanist in orientation. Be that as it may, grassroots activists pointed to the middle-class character of the event and felt that the Nairobi WSF was an NGO-dominated affair. What partly gave rise to this situation is the fact that many African delegates who participated in the Nairobi WSF and who have participated in all WSF events before and after are dependent on sponsorship from European NGOs and aid organisations (Conway 2012). Furthermore, "participation by Africans in the WSF's International Council and the functioning of the African Social Forum are also dependent on such funding..." (p. 54).

Conway's discussion of the class dynamics that have shaped WSF processes is insightful. However, I feel that what is missing in her argument is the explicit acknowledgement that one of the challenges facing left movements worldwide is the ineffective strategies that movements use to explain and counter the tendencies of the professional class within the left. In my own work I refer to this professional class as the 'coordinator class'. The coordinator class is a class made up of professionals; it is a class that exists between labour and capital. This class relates to the capitalists as intellectual workers, and, therefore, has

greater bargaining power and status than working class people. The members of the coordinator class tend to be highly educated; they derive their power from monopolising knowledge.

In my view, it is this class that Conway identifies in her book. Thus, she repeats Peter Waterman's argument that the WSF and with it global civil society represents not a globalisation from below, "'but a globalisation from the middle'" (p. 156). Interestingly, even though "autonomist impulses are at the heart of the WSF" as Conway puts it, the WSF remains a coordinator class led forum. According to Conway, autonomism's values include anti-authoritarianism, horizontalism and self-management. Within the WSF, the proponents of autonomism tend to be white anarchists from the global North. In Conway's words, the autonomist discourses in the WSF remain the 'unself-consciously' privileged white youth.

It should be noted, however, that young people do not have power to influence decision-making in the WSF. Conway points out that "despite the valorization of the youth anti-globalisation demonstrators from the North in the global spaces of the movement, and the generalised diffusion of many of their values, they remain marginal to a political culture of organising that remains dominated by a much older generation of men of the Latin American and European old and new lefts" (p. 92). This leads Conway to argue that autonomism is therefore simultaneously at the leading edges and outer margins of global justice at the WSF, "and uncritically relying upon and reproducing global patterns of power and privilege" (93).

It is the recognition of these contradictory political forces within the WSF that compels Conway to argue that the WSF is a conflictual and contradictory work in progress. Further, she explains that her aim in writing this book is not to assign a single and authoritative meaning to the WSF.

Activists will find Conway's book useful because, unlike other books that discuss the WSF, it interrogates the WSF from a post-colonial, anti-racist feminist lens. And, Conway makes it clear that she wrote this book with the aim to produce critical, committed and useful knowledge to support activist practice.

Activist scholars will appreciate the intellectual rigour that Conway displays in engaging with the scholarly literature on this topic. Conway attempts to disrupt the current wave of scholarship in which white male anarchists from the global North are often the privileged subject. She seeks to undermine the current knowledge production of the WSF which reflects the global coloniality of power and knowledge. Indeed, Conway's book enriches the debate around the WSF.

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About the reviewer

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Bourke, Alan, Dafnos, Tia, and Kip, Markus (Eds). (2011). *Lumpencency: Discourses of Marginality | Marginalizing Discourses*. Ottawa: Red Quill Books. (444 pp).

Reviewed by **Chris Richardson**

One of the most understudied yet overused words in the humanities and social sciences these days is marginality. On a fundamental level, the term refers to groups of people who are outside or on the edges of society. This inequality can stem from differences of class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or any other significant distinction. While fighting such inequalities is a noble act, the danger, as the authors of *Lumpencency: Discourses of Marginality | Marginalizing Discourses* point out, is relying too heavily on static conceptions or simplistic binaries when pursuing critical, thoughtful, and potentially liberating work aimed at understanding and challenging this problem.

For the last few decades, it has become *de rigueur* in academic discourses to take up such causes, calling for equality and understanding from those in more powerful social positions. Of course, it is difficult to be on the side of the "marginalizers" within this framework, so it seems that everyone in academe is fighting for the underdog. But the authors of *Lumpencency* suggest that too often liberatory rhetoric can "satisfy a voyeuristic urge to participate in the 'real world'" (p. 23). Thus, Alan Bourke, Tia Dafnos, and Markus Kip have put together this collection in order to prevent such work from "the reification or even aestheticization of conditions of marginality" (p. 23) and becoming "lip-service to the semantics of equality, social justice, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and so on" (p. 412).

Part One of the edited collection, "Contesting Discourses of Marginality," examines such issues as: 1) Obama's rhetoric about urban poverty, which Wilson and Anderson argue "both challenges and maintains this poverty" (p. 69); 2) discourses regarding the urban poor of Turkey, where Gönen and Yonucu argue the media create "fears of the criminal threat supposedly posed by an animalized and racialized class of 'criminals'" (p. 76); 3) neoliberal conceptions of homelessness, which Willson argues can undermine social justice when pursued uncritically; and 4) representations of marginality by science fiction writer Samuel R. Delany, which Estreich argues represents a valuable mapping of low-income worlds, foregrounded by gender and sexuality.

Early in the book, the editors introduce the term "activist-scholarship" to encompass a diverse range of political practices that include challenging oppressive discourses, the scholarly ways of knowing that sustain them, and the analysis and clarification of goals, strategies, and tactics for collective action. Bourke, Dafnos, and Kip argue that activist-scholars cannot—and should not—maintain an objective, distanced, relation to marginality. Instead, they call for a committed and critical reading of the representations and real-world conditions that affect marginalized groups.

The second part of the text, "Contested Representations," consists of: 1) Tomiak's exploration of Indigenous histories within urban spaces—or the lack thereof; 2) Pasquetti's ethnographic observations of the daily struggles of Palestinian collectives both within West Bank refugee camps and urban Israeli settlements; 3) O'Connor's insightful accounts of the tensions between police and sex workers in Machala, Ecuador; and 4) Kip's analysis of Frankfurt trade unions' failure to mobilize against neoliberal reforms. The most powerful aspect of this section is its inclusiveness both theoretically and geographically, supporting the editors' assertions that lumpencity is a potent, comprehensive term that applies to wide arrays of marginalized spaces and conceptual schemas.

The term "lumpen" is inspired by Karl Marx's concept of the lumpenproletariat, which he describes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* as a political category for the "scum, offal, the refuse of all classes" (p. 16). For Marx, lumpen described the lowest of the low. Such groups tended to live in the most decrepit parts of cities, scavenging, begging, spreading disease and social decay. As the editors write, "the prefix 'lumpen' should not necessarily be held as synonymous with poverty and marginality," rather, they suggest, the term's openness is the sources of "both its danger and appeal" (pp. 17-18). As many authors within the collection note, the numbers of those included within such a category continues to rise with the alienating practices of late capitalism. And, before adequate responses can be formed to these global issues, activist-scholars must think critically, reflexively, and perhaps subversively when facing cemented views of marginalized people.

The final third of the book, "Methodological Reflexivities," explores issues of 1) community-based research (CBR), 2) institutional ethnography (IE), 3) the challenges of researching institutions of power such as the police; and 4) one author's experiences with the Ottawa Panhandlers' Union. While this section is primarily focused on methodological questions of positionality, ethnographic relationships, and self-reflection, it provides a number of useful examples that help readers—even those unfamiliar with academic debates—understand how such methodological concerns apply to contemporary activist projects. The book concludes with a call to activist-scholarship in order to "expose the normative disguised in the descriptive, the subjective judgement veiled as impartiality, and the value judgements concealed in expressions of methodological rigour and researcher objectivity" (p. 414).

The editors acknowledge that many activist-scholars stand accused of poor research practices, usually because they question the traditional methods for seeking and arriving at truth. However, they assert that it is possible to develop critical and nuanced accounts of socially complex situations not by becoming objective observers, but by critically and meaningfully participating in social struggles. They argue that "the contradictions of engaging in radical praxis while situated with/in the academy can be productively exploited" (412). So how do you fight marginalization without contributing to it, without fetishizing it, without making it sound like an intellectual experiment that must be explained

by a degree-holding professional? *Lumpencity* raises these issues and provides examples of projects that attempt such work. But, ultimately, the collection does not fully answer such questions.

This problem may be due to the very subject of the book. While the editors are conscious of and reflexive about the problems encompassing marginality, they nevertheless remain trapped within them. They argue that "the diversity of activist-scholarship assembled here assists in combatting the tendencies of specialization and narcissism systematically encouraged in academic culture" (p. 35). But the sheer fact that many contributors spend the bulk of their chapters reflecting on their own academic work and their own specialized fields of knowledge makes it difficult to avoid appearing as exercises in navel-gazing. One sees this most clearly in the last chapter. McLennan, a graduate student in philosophy at The University of Ottawa, joins a group of panhandlers, then goes to a conference at York University as their representative to tell other scholars about his comrades through theoretical discourses of liberation and solidarity. The fact that the author recognises this strange relationship-he writes "I nonetheless benefited, as a researcher and a career academic, from the critical insights and methodological comments of other conference participants" (p. 390)-does not remove his privileged position within this relationship. And it is this sense of academic voyeurism that, although frequently acknowledged, does not dissipate after being recognised as such.

Ultimately, *Lumpencity: Discourses of Marginality | Marginalizing Discourses* argues that "activist-research can only be sustained through the maintenance of an ongoing dialectic of praxis, critique, and reflexivity" (pp. 29-30). What this actually looks like remains open to interpretation.

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Calhoun, Craig (2012). *The roots of radicalism: Tradition, the public sphere, and early nineteenth-century social movements (paper)*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (425 pp).

Reviewed by **Mandisi Majavu**

In *The roots of radicalism*, Craig Calhoun traces the themes in popular radicalism that have been obscured by dominant theories. Calhoun points out that political positions that seek systematic and fundamental societal changes are normally referred to as radical. However, a movement need not aim to achieve this sort of thoroughgoing transformation to be dubbed radical, according to Calhoun. He explains that some movements are radical in their own way by challenging the existing power structures through demanding proposals that are deeply at odds with the dominant directions of social change.

Central to Calhoun's book are five themes which he critically teases out from an historically informed perspective. Theme one explains that the notion of progress, "informs a misunderstanding of the relationship of tradition and resistance to social change" (p. 8). Calhoun points out that although the relationship of tradition and resistance to social change may be "conservative" under most circumstances, these may, nevertheless, also serve as bases for social movements that are radical in their challenge to the status quo and directions of social change.

Calhoun bases this claims on his research which shows that:

"Much radicalism is based on tradition and local communities-including sometimes intentionally created communities of religious or political converts-yet when successful, it both disrupts tradition and displaces power toward the center of society and its large-scale system of control" (p. 285).

According to Calhoun, we understand radicalism poorly if we seek to perceive it only through its contributions to dominant trends in history; however, "we understand it better by grasping its paradoxes, its multiple and contradictory potentials, and its lack of guarantees" (p. 284).

Theme two basically argues that much radicalism has been shaped by the attempts to maintain local levels of organisation that make it possible to perpetuate local cultures and social networks. This claim leads straight to theme three, which argues that there is no necessary correlation between the degree to which ideologies are philosophically radical and the extent to which social movements put forward materially radical challenges to social order. Calhoun explains that 'material radicalism' depends on social actors who can maintain large-scale solidarity in the face of risk and pressure. One of the factors that help sustain such a large-scale solidarity is the commitment of social actors to ways

of life that are threatened by social change, thus leaving social actors with no choice but radical resistance.

It is against this backdrop that Calhoun points out that the growth of labour or class consciousness was only one of at least four major orientations to popular radicalism. Other radical orientations include utopian socialism, the craft communities which were deeply rooted in ways of life that capitalism was destroying, and the Republican citizenship which, although it centred on the virtue of citizens, was conceived in a variety of ways. What these radical orientations reveal is that radical challenges to power often come about because of the combination of two factors-attempts to defend threatened ways of life, as well as populist outrage at corrupt government.

In discussing theme four, Calhoun basically explains that the process of social change is driven by many factors, ideas, programmes, and movements which all attempt to influence the trajectory of social change. He explores theme five by investigating the emergence of a public sphere. He argues that the modern public sphere has always been shaped by struggles over inclusion and exclusion. "The idea that the workings of government must be transparent so that citizens can debate them was not intrinsic to elite politics but pressed on it by popular mobilisation" (p. 10).

It is worth pointing out that Calhoun's research also shows that the modern social movement was pioneered in late 18th and early 19th century Europe and America. Hence, the roots of the modern social movement can be traced back to the religious mobilisations during the Protestant Reformation in Europe, as well as the Great Awakening in the American colonies. Calhoun points out that by the early 19th century the social movement was a form of collective organisation transposable across issues that was utilised by ordinary people "to express a variety of claims, grievances, and aspirations and to do so often with little stimulus or guidance from above" (p. 43).

Although I am of the view that Calhoun's book is a useful contribution to the study of radicalism, I feel that Calhoun's attempt at resituating radicalism is Eurocentric in its scope. For instance, although Calhoun assesses ways in which different European thinkers such as Karl Marx and Robert Owen contributed to the development of popular radicalism, he does not explore the contribution made by black radical thinkers to the tradition of radicalism. Consequently, the contribution of radical thinkers and activists such as Frederick Douglass, Toussaint L'Ouverture and Sojourner Truth is not discussed in this book.

Even when Calhoun mentions the Jacobins, he does not talk about the 'Black Jacobins'-one of the major orientations to popular radicalism to have developed in the Western world. The Black Jacobins showed that the 18th century social democratic theory was not only classist and sexist, but was fundamentally a white supremacist project. Black radicals pointed out that "white supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world..." (Mills 1997: 1). This was a radically new insight into how liberal democratic societies function.

To be fair to Calhoun, he does explain in the beginning of the book that he started this project as an historical research on early 19th century England, although his scope eventually expanded to include 19th century France and the United States. He writes that, "...though this book offers historical sociology informed by each of these cases-mainly England-it is not a full-fledged history of any of them, let alone an adequate comparison of the three" (p. vii).

Looked at from this angle, it is reasonable to argue that what Calhoun's study lacks in breadth, is compensated for in depth of what it actually covers. I reckon the book will be of interest to both radical academics and radical activists. Although this is an academic text, it is presented in a fairly accessible language.

References

Mills, C. W. (1997). *The racial contract*. New York: Cornell University Press.

About the reviewer

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