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Gautney, Heather. *Protest and Organization in the Alternative Globalization Era: NGOs, Social Movements, and Political Parties*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 237 pp. \$80.00 (hardcover).

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For decades, activists have wondered how to challenge the social and economic implications of neoliberalism. The race to the bottom, as capital chases the cheapest wages, goods, and services across borders and trade blocks has robbed local communities of distinct characteristics, autonomous spaces, and sovereignty across the globe. George Ritzer has called it the McDonaldsization of the globe. Yet, in recent years, activists the world over have come to offer a counter narrative, a cry that another world is possible heard from convergence of movements and World Social Forums taking shape the world over. Many movements have found their identity within this open space, where ideas, counter proposals, and narratives of resistance intermingle. Some of these include the international turn of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power with their battle for drugs into bodies across the globe, the Zapatistas one no and a thousand yeses, and even the 1970's anti-IMF bread riots in Egypt over increases in the prices of bread. Many struggles intersect within this cry against the austerity programs born of an era of neoliberal economic theory and practice. Enter Fordham University sociologist and social movement scholar Heather Gautney, the editor of two previous works *Implicating Empire* and *Democracy, States and the Struggle for Global Justice*. Her current work considers the World Social Forum which has come to function as the heart and soul of this movement of movements.

Gautney situates her work with a close look at the phenomena of neoliberalism. “[I]t is primarily a political, social, and economic system characterized by the privatization of public services, deregulation of industry, lowering of trade barriers, and reduced public spending on social services,” writes Gautney (p. 1). “Its underlying ethos reflects a view of human freedom as best realized through free market activity, unregulated competition, and private property rights protected by the neoliberal state” (p. 1). “[T]he success of neoliberalism’s abstract individualism should also be understood as the historical left’s failure to address the tensions between people’s desires for individual freedom and organizational requisites for social justice” (p. 38). Neoliberal institutions, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Association have extended the system around the globe (p. 1). Yet, the process has not been without bumps, including tear gas, bread riots, street parties, protests, blockades, and literally billions and billions spent on security to secure most every meeting of these institutions. Many many suggest they are privatizing much of the world’s resources from water to air, while undermining the sovereignty of democratic institutions and communities worldwide.

In recent decades, opposition to the pattern of privatizing the public sector has expanded into a growing number of social forces and movements, taking on distinct and often unique forms. Gautney’s study considers some of the groups involved in this movement of movements. Perhaps the most influential of these

groups is the Zapatistas from Chiapas, Mexico, whose story is known world over. As Naomi Klein writes, “the strategic victory of the Zapatistas was to insist that what was going on in Chiapas could not be written off as a narrow ‘ethnic’ or ‘local’ struggle—that it was universal. They did this by identifying their enemy not only as the Mexican state but as ‘neoliberalism.’” Many have come to describe the Zapatistas as an “informational guerrilla movement” (Gautney, p. 40). Linking the power of the internet with an iconic conflict, this group rescaled a local struggle in transnational terms, channeling the global sentiment to challenge neoliberalism into a movement of movements, linking activism across borders, between a vast cross section of campaigns and struggles (p. 40). Along the way a small rebellion from Southern Mexico, birthed a new form of activism spread the world over.

It is this flurry of activism, in which Gautney situates her study. Narrated in the third person, only occasionally does the author identify herself as a first hand observer of the movement (as she does on p. 57 to corroborate a story). While other studies of the movement situate the researcher in the story (see Fernandez 2008; Juris 2007), here the reader is left without a word of who the author is or what were her methods. (To be fair, methods are often the first section edited out of such works.) And the story moves forward.

In 2001, members of the global justice movement or alter globalization movement (AGM) met in Porto Allegre, Brazil in a session described as a people’s alternative to the Economic Forum (WEF) attended by financial elites the world over. “The forum was a reaction to the criticism of the AGM was elevating protest to the status of politics and failing to articulate social and political objectives beyond resistance and opposition,” notes Gautney (p. 4). The World Social Forum (WSF) was organized to coincide with the movement to challenge the popular argument that “there is no alternative” to neoliberalism. Through the social forums, activists, church groups, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and the like would come together to hash out ideas, fashion political alternatives, ignite campaigns, and share resources. Not a protest space, rather it was seen as “open space” for dialogue, with roots in the movement’s emphasis on a “horizontal” or nonhierarchical approach to organizing. Participants “attempted to avoid privileging any one particular group and mitigate existing (and potential) inequalities among them by embracing their differences rather than ignoring or suppressing them,” explains Gautney. “The paradigm of open space was based on organizers’ desire to be as inclusive as possible—to create physical and virtual space for civil society groups and movements opposed to neoliberal globalization, to socialize, discuss their respective projects, debate alternative economic and political models, and develop decentralized direct action and advocacy networks” (p. 5). Through such open spaces, those who take part are free to imagine alternative solutions, ideas, and organizational models that “prefigure the political community and social forms that the WSF and its constituents sought to create” (p. 5). In contrast to the economic emphasis of the WEF, the WSF was organized as a “social forum.” The “social” aspect of the WSF and the AGM reflects the movements’ emphasis on building

networks of ideas, people, and collective futures of those involved. Jeffrey Juris (2008) takes on a similar theme in his new work *Networking Futures*, an ethnography of the AGM. "For contemporary movements and activist projects, networks have become the prevalent mode of organization precisely because they enable participation of large numbers of heterogeneous actors and can function effectively (in protest situations and beyond) without necessarily compromising the autonomy of each," explains Gautney (p. 179).

For Gautney, the stew of movement influences of the counter globalization era can be broken down into three distinct organizational models: nongovernmental organizations, social movements, and political parties. The utility of Gautney's work is its detailed examination of these distinct social and organizational forces and their efforts to offer realize social change, the other world many have long claimed was possible. Each constituency comes with its own its organizational tradition and history. Through subsequent chapters Gautney explores the limitations, possibilities, and strengths of each organizational approach and history.

The third chapter of the study considers the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that participate in the WSF. Many in the movement have come to distrust such NGOs as agents of imperialism and corporate dominance (see Davis 2002). NGOs were quick to distance themselves from the more radical elements who participated in direct action and even property destruction during the Seattle WTO meetings in 1999. Many suggest NGOs view themselves as holders of exclusive providence to social knowledge and policy expertise as consultants and technical advisers to groups such as the UN.

Yet, it was the direct action types in the streets who helped cultivate the strength and power of the AGM's ascent and the few concrete policy victories the movement has achieved. After Seattle, the right wing could no longer call the left an impudent political consistency as they had in previous years. In contrast, the NGOs were viewed as bridesmaids of the status quo, a group with many divided loyalties, particularly to their funders and the state which used coercive power to reel in the political ambitions of these groups. Here, NGOs are seen as "agents of neoliberalism that perform legitimating functions for privatization and even warfare within the context of capitalist liberal democracies . . ." (p. 94). "Many lobbyist NGO's elevate states as ultimate authorities over social life and guarantors of freedom and social welfare, rather than focus power on redirecting and self determination to everyday people" (Gautney, p. 178). While the NGO's provide vital services, while preserving what is left of a social safety net, critics charge, "that social democratic NGO's are beholden to moderate political agendas by warrant of their political relationships" (Gautney, p. 108). Yet, "NGO's cannot provide services at the level and consistency of the states," notes Gautney (p. 95). With little else, "large numbers of people have come to depend on international organizations and statues and institutions, which often make decisions that are divorced from the realities of everyday lives" (p. 95). Given this void, other less professional groups have called for different social and political participatory engagement. Many call for more direct democratic expressions than

hierarchically organized NGOs and professional advocacy groups, which divorce the process from the outcome. Others aspire to more egalitarian social relations and forms of democratic political participation.

Anti-authoritarian groups view the WSF as a “free space” in which to develop “anti-statist and horizontal social relations” (p. 83). Through such gatherings, they aspire to prefigure the egalitarian society they hope to create. Gautney is most savvy at highlighting the ways each camp—social movements, NGOs, and anti-authoritarian groups—aspire to create change, build movements, balance organizational demands with a desire for freedom and self-determination, as well as a sense of social liberation (p. 83).

Countless observers have come to describe those involved with anti-authoritarian organizing as anarchists. This is fine for some; yet many resist such categorization. Many simply share a set of prefigurative practices and anti-authoritarian approaches to living, whether they “identify as anarchists” or not (Gautney, p. 112). Many share core assumptions built around “organizational dynamics that characterize anarchist praxis, decentralized organization, voluntary association, mutual aid, direct action, and a general rejection of the idea that a movement’s goals could justify authoritarian methods for achieving them” (p. 112). And there is a good reason for this.

The game of politics often leaves people cold or embittered (Zinn 2002). And all too often the way we play the game is no fun (Duncombe 2007). This is part of why us anarchist Emma Goldman is famous for a quote she did not actually say: “If I can’t dance, it’s not my revolution.” So, many look to a more free flowing, rambunctious ludic approach (Shepard 2011). Take French social theorist Henri Lefebvre. After being expelled from the French communist party, for example, Lefebvre developed an increasingly festive, exuberant, even playful Marxist urbanism. Asked if he had become an anarchist, he is known to have replied, “I’m a Marxist, of course . . . so that one day we can all become anarchists” (Merrifield 2002, 72). This playful disposition churns throughout many anti-authoritarian organizing circles. Rejecting the coercive approaches to organizing seen in NGOs or state party politics, anarchist inspired organizing tends to dedicate its energies toward “movement building and challenging illegitimate forms of authority that deflect power away from everyday people,” notes Gautney (p. 112). She continues: “Many autonomists and anarchists believe that radical change and ultimately, freedom and the good life, can be discovered through direct action (protests, but also ‘squatting’) and the development of cooperative projects and counter cultural communities, and not through the realization of predetermined revolutionary movement or participation in electoral processes abstracted from the conditions of everyday life” (p. 112). This movement is better understood as a set of practices than any one social or political movement.

The roots of anarchism date back to Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. The anti-statist, authoritarianism of Mikhail Bakunin’s work was hugely influential for the movement (p. 126). Flashpoints include the nineteenth century Haymarket Affair, when labor activists were shot down in Chicago, the Spanish Civil War in which anarchists fought fascists, and Emma Goldman’s

struggles against efforts to control the body as well as the social and political imagination statement. “The activists of 1960s were critical not only of capitalism, but also the patriarchal state and all forms of authority, over regulation, and social control” (Gautney, p. 113).

Throughout the period, the do-it-yourself ethos of anarchism overlapped with countless movements, including Italian Autonomism and feminism. “Feminists of all stripes founded their own abortion clinics, shelters for rape, and victims of domestic violence, and formed consciousness raising groups to deal with issues specifically related to patriarchy and its manifestations in the lives of women,” notes Gautney (p. 122) in her astute overview of the movement’s eclectic, diverse, and often complicated social, political, and cultural roots. “[T]hey also gave birth to punk, which resisted the cultural consensus of the conservative 1980s and on the level of style” (p. 113). And the movement infused an energy and ethos of direct action into the alter globalization movement of the 1990s and 2000s. Much of the practice of anarchism is informed by this history.

Gautney does a striking job of outlining the affirmative dimensions of the anarchist practices in direct action and world-making. She notes that while the movement is traditionally viewed as anti-statist, today many “acknowledge that states can play an important role in providing social welfare services and protections against the detrimental effects of unregulated capitalism” (p. 126). Anarchists have long been involved with anti-authoritarian, radical social services (Gilbert 2004). “While anarchists concede that states are oftentimes more well-equipped than grassroots movements to ensure a sound infrastructure and social welfare for ordinary people,” Gautney is quick to note, “they are critical of the system of coercion that undergirds state authority, which for them ultimately limits its potential to serve as an agent of liberatory change” (p. 127).

With this in mind, many strive to create alternate structures, in spaces such as abandoned buildings, warehouses, and schools as outlets for social networking, art, organizing, bike repair, community meetings, and even radical forms of social services centered in social centers. “Social centers involve a diverse array of social subjectivities,” notes Gautney (p. 130). “Nevertheless, a common thread among contemporary social centers is their desire and effort to take back what neoliberalism has taken away” (p. 130). To this end, “social centers tend to offer as assortment of vital services, including housing and documentation services for immigrants and homeless people, condom distribution for prostitutes, daycare or housing for homeless children, counseling and care giving for battered women, and many others” (p. 130). Many such projects thrive within a do-it-yourself ethos, which says make what you can with the tools you have (Holtzman, Hughes, and Van Meter 2004). Perhaps the most famous example of anarchist inspired social services is Food Not Bombs, a group which has distributed free food, even in the face of multiple objections from state authorities. “FNB chapters are indeed diverse, and they do not employ formal leaderships or central apparatuses,” explains Gautney (p. 131). “They recover food that would otherwise be thrown out and serve fresh, vegetarian meals to hungry people free of charge” (p. 130).

In addition to many of these efforts to build social relations outside of capital, many still consider the state a primary target for social change efforts. In the sixth chapter, "States and Movements" Gautney sets her eyes on such organizing. Here, she considers the case of the campaign to stop the U.S. Navy from bombing Vieques in Puerto Rico. Combining legal, direct action, media, research, coalition building, and the use of a wide range of activist tools. Celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez and Ricky Martin joined the cause as did Robert Kennedy and the Reverend Al Sharpton, who ended up spending ninety days in jail after a civil disobedience action. And by 2003, activists with roots dating back to the Young Lords party of the early 1970s could declare success when U.S. Navy announced its withdrawal from Vieques. "The announcement signaled a glowing victory for the antimilitary movement" (p. 175). But the victory was bittersweet, as knowledge of the cancer rates and environmental damage from the bombings grew. For Gautney, the campaign was not only against imperialism, it was also a flashpoint in a struggle against neoliberal social control. "As neoliberalism posits individuals as self-managed 'autonomous' citizens-consumers, it also annihilates or renders illegitimate forms of life that cannot or will not be converted into its framework," writes Gautney (p. 176). "In this regard, it depoliticizes social life into a series of individual pursuits and cost-benefit analyses, rather than toward ideas of the good life as collectively defined" (p. 176).

Borrowing from Gramsci, Gautney suggests that while direct confrontation with state power is basically untenable, "in nontotalitarian societies *a war of position* could be waged within the sphere of civil society" (p. 148). For Gramsci, civil society functioned outside, even "autonomous from the state and market" (p. 148). Many of the stories of *Protest and Organization in the Alternative Globalization Era* take shape within this "war of position." More than a movement, political philosophy or organization, the author argues the WSF functions as an ever expanding network of ideas and approaches to living. "Along with the AGM, the WSF has fostered the same kind of network-building and transnationalization of anti-neoliberal projects that enabled the people of Vieques and Chiapas to articulate their struggles in broad terms as the resistance against globalization of military violence and neoliberalism," Gautney writes in the conclusion (p. 177). Much of this work thrived within "a new radically democratic form of organization called 'open space,' in which groups and movements of 'civil society' can socialize, network, and develop their respective projects without having to adhere to a central body or party line" (p. 177). Gautney's contribution is to ask us to consider the various approaches to social change which take shape within these networks of ideas, to pause for a second to ask what they mean, what are their roots, traditions and theoretical understandings? What happens when we cross borders, transcend ideologies, and join a truly open space? Is this enough to realize utopian dreams? If not, what is to be done? Considering a series of difficult questions, Gautney opens up a vital conversation about the nature of social change. Throughout the work, the author thoughtfully grapples with the organizational and theoretical traditions of the World Social Forum and the pulsing movement it represents.

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