

Shinichi Shigetomi and Makino, Kumiko. (eds), *Protest and Social Movements in the Developing World*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2009. 256pp.

This book aims to rethink theoretical approaches and understandings about social movements in ‘developing’ countries. The book’s editors, and all but one of its contributors, are affiliated with the Japanese government-related Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO (*IDE-JETRO*).

The book’s introduction discusses some dominant approaches in social movement theory: resource mobilization theory, political opportunity theory, framing theory, new social movement theory. It argues for a social ecological approach which considers institutional and environmental factors (e.g. regulatory environments) in understanding forms and mechanisms of social movements in the global South.

The book’s first part, concerning resource mobilization, comprises two chapters, on community-based local development and the Program for Development and Peace in Middle Magdalena (Colombia), and provincial development forums in Thailand. The second part focusses on the “structure behind political opportunities” discussing the environmental protest movement in China (mainly environmental NGOs), AIDS activism (the Treatment Action Campaign) in South Africa, and Argentina’s unemployed and poor people’s movements since the early 2000s. Part III brings together studies on frame- and identity-making in Indigenous Peoples’ mobilization around education and autonomy in a Mixe village, Oaxaca, Mexico, a discussion of competition and framing in the Indian women’s movement, and a study of opposition movements and youth in the Niger Delta, Nigeria’s oil-producing region. A concluding chapter returns to the themes of the introduction and attempts to draw insights from the case studies to rethink theoretical approaches to understanding social movements in the global South.

The book’s premise is that constraints on economic resources and political freedoms in the Third World mean that social movement theories originating from ‘developed’ countries are inadequate to explain social movements in the former. The editors contend that “[i]n developing countries, ordinary people are often faced with threats to their personal security, and such threats include poverty, violence, the suppression of rights and freedom, and deprivation of resources”

(p.1). Yet while social political and economic conditions and their impact on particular forms of protest and social movements vary from country to country (and within nation-states themselves), one might contend that shared socio-political and economic structures and processes of global capitalism also lead to commonalities between some conditions and struggles across North and South. However, this book's approach tends to lack a clear understanding of ways in which historical and social relations shape contexts and forms of resistance.

The depth of analysis across the collection is patchy. The book departs very little from dominant strands of social movement theory and fails to engage with some of its emerging critiques which question the usefulness of analysis which imposes particular typologies and criteria on social movements, as well as their irrelevance to activists (e.g. Bevington and Dixon, 2005). A further problem arises from the selection of case studies; many focus on NGOs or even quasi-state community development initiatives rather than social movements. There is also a reticence to move away from typologies which apply a relatively narrow set of criteria to categorize "successful" or "effective" mobilizations.

Some chapters, like the first two, are largely empirical/descriptive case studies, and do not engage the theoretical concerns alluded to in the introduction, offering instead a superficial account of the geo-historical context. The selection of case studies tends to skew the way the global South and its diverse social struggles are viewed. The Colombian and Thai cases refer to NGO/quasi-local government community development initiatives rather than social movements. Moreover, both countries have produced recent militant social movements (e.g., cross-sectoral movements against free trade agreements with the USA); their existence might challenge the book's central premise that such movement forms cannot arise in these countries due to the political, economic and other constraints emphasized by the editors. While the chapter on South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is well-written, engaging literature and debates about AIDS activism in the post-apartheid context, it does not contribute new insights. This limitation is shared by the chapters on India, Argentina, and Nigeria: they traverse ground already covered elsewhere.

In sum, the 'developing' world is presented as a rather uniform, essentialized space, set up in a binary fashion against the

‘developed’ world. For a book seeking to place environmental and institutional factors in the foreground in the examination of social movements, to overlook the role of ‘developed’ states in supporting repression in the global South is frustrating. The Colombia chapter virtually ignores the USA’s major historical and present-day support for the Colombian military and other repressive forms of state power. No attention is paid to the impact of the Cold War in shaping Thai society and activism, nor to the role of Western governments in influencing this. Such omissions re-enforce a view which pathologizes the countries, politics and peoples of the “developing world”, and obscures the global historical and social processes at work.

The editors assert that “more constraints on economic resources limit the surplus which may possibly be mobilized for social movements; more direct authoritarian control on citizens’ political behavior limits the choices of collective action; and stricter control of the mass media and communication constrains the means of frame dissemination” (p.227). This is not only an extremely general statement, but it is also striking given that so many contemporary social movements and protests against development imperialism or autocratic rule take place precisely in these countries, notwithstanding enormous difficulties. The 2011 popular mobilizations against authoritarian regimes in the Middle East come to mind. Indeed, Asef Bayat’s (2009) excellent work on social action and social change in the Middle East highlights the limitations and conceptual weaknesses of approaches framed around notions of marginality which disregard or render invisible different ways in which people in different socio-political contexts fight back. Bayat’s work on political agency in times and contexts of constraints, and his caution towards overlooking forms of social and political action which do not fit into prevailing categories and conceptual imagination are important. The editors of this volume might take note of Bayat’s reminder that many authoritarian regimes are “soft states” with a limited capacity to impose full control, even if they want to.

Finally, in response to this book’s totalizing, binaristic portrayal of North and South, one might highlight monopolistic media control in the global North, and perhaps argue that many Southern countries have far livelier media than North America or Japan – and social movements! We should problematize the simplistic equation

made between “economic resources” and the existence of mass-based movements (rather than their institutionalized, NGOized forms) and social struggles in both North and South. Let us remember that state repression, criminalization and surveillance of many activists and movements also exists in Japan (Shigematsu, forthcoming 2012), Europe and North America, as the crackdown against 2010’s G20 protests and ongoing repression of Indigenous sovereignty struggles shows in Canada.

### **Bibliography**

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**Aziz Choudry**  
McGill University

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Paul T.K. Lin with Eileen Chen Lin, *In the Eye Of the China Storm: A Life Between East & West*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal & Kingston, 2011.

This review will be less a standard book review than reminiscences about a precious friend and colleague who I knew at McGill University for fourteen years.

I first encountered Paul and Eileen Lin outside the Stephen Leacock Building looking deeply sad. They had just returned from the cemetery on the anniversary of their son Christopher’s death. He died in a car crash in the U.S. just south of the Canadian border while driving back to the University of British Columbia where he was a student. To this day a cloud of uncertainty hangs over his death as the U.S. investigating authorities failed to provide a forensic report. Six months earlier a journalist of Chinese origin, sympathetic to the Chinese government, had been murdered in the San Francisco area with a strong but unproven suspicion it was a hit arranged by