



## University and social justice: struggles across the globe

Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally, edited by, 2020, 272 pp., £12.49 (eBook), ISBN 9781786805751

Kristina Hemzacek

To cite this article: Kristina Hemzacek (2021): University and social justice: struggles across the globe, Global Affairs, DOI: [10.1080/23340460.2020.1871303](https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1871303)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1871303>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 31 Jan 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 66



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## REVIEW

 OPEN ACCESS

**University and social justice: struggles across the globe**, Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally, edited by, 2020, 272 pp., £12.49 (eBook), ISBN 9781786805751

“University and Social Justice: Struggles Across the Globe”, edited by Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally, provides an array of accounts about student (and faculty) movements across 12 different countries: the UK, India, Turkey, Canada (specifically Quebec), Chile, the USA, Palestine, Mexico, France, South Africa, Nigeria, and the Philippines. Interestingly, even though the accounts are from all over the world, there are some underlying themes. All of the authors discuss privatisation of the universities (in most places starting in the 1970s), austerity measures and the negative influence that the IMF and the World Bank have had on higher education globally (especially in the so-called developing countries), in several accounts there are strong underlying issues with settler colonialism and neocolonialism, which are accompanied with calls for de-colonisation and diversification of higher education.

In the introductory chapter, the editors inform us that “across the world, universities are confronted by renewed privatisation, intensive marketisation and a challenge to the very notion of the university as a mechanism for addressing social inequality and facilitating the circulation of knowledge” (Choudry & Vally, 2020, p. 12). Considering the fact that, as is mentioned in several of the chapters, universities have, until relatively recently, been exclusive and elite institutions, it is difficult to agree that they have ever inherently been a mechanism for addressing social inequality. Conversely, I would

argue, as do many of the authors, that access to universities does not ensure future social mobility. This is especially important to note because out of the 12 different accounts, women, who have historically had limited access to universities and are still suffering severe economic inequality globally, are mentioned in only three (India, Chile, and Mexico).

While the chapters do offer quite a useful historical overview, detailing circumstances as well as methods and tools used by activists (many of the authors are self-proclaimed activists and many participated in the movements that they were discussing), the book is biased in its approach. Luckily, all the authors are aware of their own position and state it clearly, but no alternative views are offered, which is a shame considering that there could have been space for that. An initial reaction to this might be that no alternative views or positions on student activism exists, but although almost all the chapters talk about leftist student movements, chapter three (“Insurgent subjects: Student politics, education and dissent in India”) contains a very different story. The student movement in India is coloured by nationalism and traditionalism, the higher castes organise themselves to disrupt access for the lower castes. There is nothing progressive, democratic, or inclusive about the Indian student movement, but even this account is presented from the position of a proponent of progressivism, democracy, and inclusion. It is included to remind us that even students can be regressive.

The chapters that are, arguably, the most useful for activists are chapter ten (“How Did They Fight? French Student Movement in the Late 2000s and Their Contentious Repertoire”) and twelve (“Revolutionary Vanguard No More? The Student Movement and Struggle for Education and Social Justice in Nigeria”). The former

because it offers an analysis of specific practical tools, or “means of action”, and their legitimation that the student movement in France has been using. The latter because it outlines the pacification of the Nigerian student movement and offers practical suggestions to revitalise it.

Conversely, there is one chapter in particular that is, perhaps not less useful, but more problematic. Chapter seven, titled “Resisting the US corporate university: Palestine, Zionism, and campus politics”, is intended to be a critical assessment of the influence that wealthy Zionists have in certain Californian universities, but in reality, it dances on the line between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. The critique of wealthy Jewish entrepreneurs and investors who allegedly have great influence in Californian universities feels more than shallow when the authors reveal that most of the donations are not from Jewish donors and that the San Francisco State University allows Nazi rallies. While the discord between Zionists, or supporters of the Israeli state, and pro-Palestinian activists is not a black-and-white issue, it is much better handled in the following chapter that focuses on the Palestinian student movement in Palestine (chapter eight, “Palestinian student movement and the dialectic of Palestinian liberation and class struggles”).


While reading this book I was reminded of the Jordan Peterson and Slavoj Žižek debate, especially the exchange in which Peterson talks about so-called cultural Marxism, and Žižek half-seriously asks: “Where are the Marxists?” It is hard to shake off the feeling that they are, somehow, both right. Every chapter in this book is critical of neoliberalism and touches upon themes such as privatization of universities, settler colonialism and neo-colonialism, austerity, the influence of the IMF and the World Bank, especially in so-called developing countries. Every single chapter mentions class, income inequality, wealth as a problem... but most of the

time, the words ring shallow. There is never any serious economic analysis to base the words on. They are empty. This is perhaps the most obvious in chapter eleven, “The mustfall mo(ve)ments and Publica[c]tion Reflections on collective knowledge production in South Africa”, which is one long legitimation of why the authors decided to publish a non-academic magazine disguised in deconstructivist speech.

Although I strongly disagree with many of the chapters in this book, I do think it’s an important addition to understanding student movements not only because it covers the history, methods and tools of the movements themselves, but rather because the book itself could be examined as a glimpse into common underlying assumptions about universities, student movements, and more generally the world that all of the authors and many of the student movements they were describing share. Importantly, students and academics can not only learn new modes of organisation and action, but also rethink their own notions of the university and its role in wider society.

## Reference

Choudry, A., & Vally, S. (2020). *University and Social Justice: Struggles Across the Globe* (1st ed). London: Pluto Press.

Kristina Hemzacek  
*Department of Global Political Studies,*  
*Malmö University*  
 kristinahemzacek@gmail.com

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
 This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1871303>

