

Nangwaya, Ajamu, and Michael Truscello, eds. *Why Don't the Poor Rise Up?: Organizing the Twenty-first Century Resistance*. AK Press, 2017.

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This book offers an excellent and wide-ranging contribution linking poverty to resistance from a variety of radical theoretical and geographical perspectives drawing examples and inspiration from very diverse social movements. Whilst most of the chapters appear to be broadly anarchist or autonomist, they cover a very broad spectrum. It might have been useful for the sake of coherence, had the editors provided a more explicit overview of the theoretical diversity of the book and the basis upon which contributions were selected, and given some consideration to theoretical affinities and tensions across the chapters. This might also have given more of a clue as to the contribution of the book to wider debates in anarchism and radical thought.

Nonetheless, the diversity of perspectives taken as a whole provides an intersectional critique that does not privilege class nor any single identity category as a primary axis of oppression but rather offers multiple perspectives on complex and overlapping forms of oppression and resistance.

I genuinely enjoyed reading this book, in large part due to the diversity and vibrance of the movements and contexts that it examines. Some chapters focus on case studies of grassroots, leftist and anarchist movements and communities of resistance (e.g. Vasquez; Khasnabish; Araujo; Pilar and Wilson; Wood); some on understanding the conditions which promote undesirable/right-wing ideology or movements (e.g. Berardi; Cummings; Jun); whilst others engage in structural critique in order to understand why movements have failed to emerge, or were unsuccessful, in specific contexts (e.g. Chimurenga; Nangwaya; Brucato).

The book is divided into two sections, 'The Global North' and 'The Global South'. It is great that the editors have attempted to incorporate geographical diversity, as it is certainly true that poverty has many levels of meaning which are complexified at a global scale. Without wishing to undermine the diversity and appropriateness of the examples, it is worth pointing out that of the 17 chapters of the book, North and South America are very strongly represented, with most of the chapters drawing on examples based in North America, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. Berardi's brief chapter nods towards Europe and the final three chapters of the book are based in Africa.

As the title might suggest, the anthology is constituted by a series of replies to the question: 'Why don't the poor rise up?'. The provocation was posed by Thomas Edsell in a New York Times editorial,ⁱ whose own response assumes an electoral approach which the editors take to belie the autonomy of the poor (Truscello and Nangwaya: 8). The question itself is not unproblematic, and many of the chapters in the book begin by unpacking or problematizing its terms.

Khasnabish offers the most sustained critique of the question, arguing its terms are awash with 'liberal sentiment and capitalist alienation' (120): 'the poor' implies a 'they' which is a homogenous entity, which is objectifying and class-reductionist (Khasnabish: 120), and like the language of 'allyship' relies on 'an endless deferral of responsibility on the part of the socially privileged speaker' (120). Selemeczi in conversation with Eloff cautions against naming the political subject in advance (Eloff and Selemeczi: 247), arguing that the collective political subject emerges from the moment of disrupting the order of assigned categories (248). Araujo also problematizes 'the poor' as a category of resistance, arguing the terminology and associated metrics of poverty are essential to the functioning of capitalism (Araujo: 201) and promote a policy discourse which ignores and represses other definitions of richness such as resourceful and well-organized community life (202). Other chapters question whether 'rising up' is the terminology one might wish to use for an anarchist revolution (Khasnabish 121; Nangwaya 155). Furthermore, as several of the chapters argue and illustrate, 'the poor' frequently *do* rise up, but often their struggles are misrecognized as apolitical, because those who are rising up are black and historically portrayed as 'anti-citizens' and criminals so they are violently repressed (Brucato); or they are misrecognized as apolitical because they deal with grassroots struggle or they lack demands and are therefore incomprehensible to representative politics (Eloff and Selemeczi: 252); or they are subdued or quashed through censorship and repression (Vasquez). Khasnabish argues a better phrasing of the question might be: 'why are robust, powerful, and resilient mass movements for radical social change so conspicuous in their absence in the global north?' (121).

Whilst a recurring theme is therefore that the poor do, in fact, rise up frequently; chapters in the book also provide an array of answers that tackle the question whilst questioning the terms. A recurring theme is division, separation and alienation. Many of the chapters address the idea that the attitude of the economic and cultural centre is to 'divide and rule' that much larger group which constitutes the 'margins' (Sheikheldin: 234). Examples of dynamics which divide this potentially revolutionary force include neoliberal ideological constructions of religion (Jun); culture (Nangwaya; Sheikheldin); race (Brucato; Chimurenga; Akuno; Cummings); gender

(Cummings; Carlson); the pitting against one another of public and private sector workers (Cummings). The division of the left by identity politics is also seen to be a problem; and one which not only weakens the left but creates a script which can be flipped and appropriated by the Alt Right (Cummings p. 103). Only Jun explicitly uses the language of ‘false consciousness’ (134) but many of the chapters deal with the idea that ideological factors are a particular obstacle to sustainable organizing (Brucato; Chimurenga; Cummings; Khasnabish; Berardi; Nangwaya)

The book is sparser on solutions for praxis than elaborations of the problem, which is predictable given the negative phrasing of the question. In some ways, this is a real lack given that the strength of anarchism lies in its connection of theory with living movements. Indeed Eloff and Selemeczi foreground the issue of epistemology (246), encouraging deep examination of the relationship of academics to the movements they write about. Whilst the book is replete with excellent case studies of living movements, sometimes chapters slip into the trap of writing about, rather than for these movements. Nonetheless, I think that the anthology as a whole does have an implicit coherence which unites many chapters and develops the praxis of the book itself (if one takes publishing to be a practice, which of course it is), and this coherence lies in the importance of developing and building a conscious and critical political culture. Some of the chapters touch upon this explicitly, simultaneously addressing themes of a divided left and of a divided and alienated ‘poor’ by thinking through the conditions for developing political culture. Suggested means for doing so include connecting to other struggles and radical ecology (Khasnabish); telling stories of prior struggles (Khasnabish; Kimara); and through political education and pedagogy (Phillip; Sheikheldin). It is here that the contribution is strongest; because the book itself can act as a critical act of culture and a pedagogy for movement organizing.

ⁱ Thomas B. Edsall “Why don’t the Poor Rise up?”, *The New York Times*, June 24, 2015. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/why-dont-the-poor-rise-up.html> accessed 24 May 2018.