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# Knowledge Production in Social Movement Learning: Different Lenses, Different Agendas, Different Knowledge Claims

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## **Learning and Knowledge Production in Social Movement Learning: Different Lenses, Different Agendas, Different Knowledge Claims**

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**Abstract:** In this symposium, we provide several case studies of research into SML in an effort to expand what counts as research on SML and to also point to a wider range of theories and methodologies that deepen our knowledge of SML.

### **Introduction**

While social movement learning (SML) is a growing topic of interest in adult education research, Hall and Turay (2004) and Sawchuk (2010) argue there is little sustained attention by adult education or social movement scholars. One of the challenges in mapping the scholarship on SML is the breadth of approaches and also the diverse contexts of social movements. The purpose of this symposium is to expand the discussion about SML and recognize the diversity of SML research and the need for an enriched interdisciplinary theoretical framework and diverse methodologies.

### **Shauna Butterwick: Arts-Based SML, Filipino Feminist Activism and Performative Contradictions**

Working in partnership with various Filipino advocacy groups, including the Philippine Women's Centre of BC (PWCBC), my research on SML is exploring the role of arts-based methods and forms used by these groups. Visual and performative art has been central to their community based research and as a form of knowledge mobilization. The main goal of the research is to explore how the arts enables the development of activists' critical consciousness, community organizing efforts, and public education activities. The PWCBC's engagement with arts processes and forms involves, I argue, a kind of 'performative contradiction' which Butler and Spivak (2007) describe as acts of resistance undertaken in public spaces by those who have no status as citizens. Some of the PWCBC's arts-based practices being examined include *SCRAP: A Political Fashion Show to Stop Violence Against Filipino Women* which addresses the

lived reality of Filipino women working under Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program LCP). In this event, one of the fashions displayed is a shiny red cocktail-style dress which, upon closer inspection, we see is constructed with 1000 carefully linked together phone cards, all collected by one woman in her efforts to stay in touch with her family in the Philippines while she worked as a nanny in Canada. This form fitting and attractive dress illustrates the restrictions on domestic workers' lives under the LCP and points to the Canadian state's complicity in the creation of a "singular feminized identity" of an ideal domestic worker as "obedient, nurturing, complacent" (Khan, 2009, p. 29).

The PWCBC regards the LCP as fundamentally sexist and racist, arguing that the through the LCP a "re-feudalization" of migrant Filipino caregivers is occurring (Rosca, 2010, p. 6). One of the other arts-based projects being studied is *Maleta* (which means suitcase in Tagalog). Different sizes and makes of suitcases are painted with images of Filipino workers and family members, and like the fashion show, it provides a simple yet profound image of the commodification of Filipino labour through globalized capitalism. The non-citizen status of these migrant workers is captured well in a video which shows these painted suitcases circulating round and round an airport baggage carousel, caught in continuous process of arrival and departure. *Nanay* (which means mother) is an interactive theatre project exploring how Canadian families seeking affordable child and elder care, and Filipino families with no economic future in the Philippines, have become dependent on the exploited labour of women, a phenomenon that Sassen (2002) describes as "feminization of survival".

Feminist postcolonial and transnational theories are crucial to critically exploring the policies and ideologies constraining Filipino domestic workers' lives. Benhabib's (2004) explication of the global economy and its links to transnational cultural networks and transnational migration provides a fruitful perspective of the struggles and the resistance Filipino domestic workers and advocacy groups. Fraser's theorizing about civil society spaces and organizations (1997, 2005) and her questions about whose rights and privileges count in current manifestations of globalized capitalism, are also helpful. She critiques dominant and Western conceptualizations of the public sphere which have not recognized the work of women and racialized and working class groups. As evident in the PWCBC's arts-based resistance activities, there are significant popular education and participatory grass roots activities being undertaken by these Filipino activists who are creating "subaltern counterpublics"--spaces that enable the construction of oppositional discourse.

### **Donna Chovanec: Expanding analytical and methodological frameworks for studying SML**

In what follows, I draw upon my research conducted in the women's and students' movements in Chile (Chovanec, 2009). During the time of anti-dictatorship mobilizing in the 1980s, the Chilean women's movement was constantly negotiating the contested relationship between feminist (gender-based) and Marxist (class-based) approaches. Gouin's (2009) critique and extension of Foley's (1999) framework for analyzing social movement learning provides a new approach to understanding this tension. In the Chilean case, a feminist sensibility emerged amidst intense anti-dictatorship organizing by movements with ideological affinity to Marxism. Emerging feminists did not perceive an incompatible relationship between the two: "From the ideological point of view, the themes of gender and Marxism [are] coherent in regards to equality." However, many women who had traditionally centred class and capitalism, dismissed gender as a relevant analytical reference point. At an inaugural meeting of the women's movement in a northern Chilean city, the feminists were verbally attacked – accused of being

bourgeois, imperialists, lesbians and traitors. This merging of class, sexuality and gender signifiers is indicative of the interconnected oppressions that Gouin incorporates into a revised model for analyzing social movement learning. Drawing on anti-racist feminism from the Marxist tradition, Gouin decentres capitalism in Foley's framework and incorporates White supremacy and patriarchy (which includes male privilege and heteronormativity) to interrogate interdependent systems of domination. Gouin's analysis of a bullying incident that occurred in a girls' project in an underprivileged neighbourhood reveals the complex workings of oppression *within* social movements. In Chile, the gender-based organizing in the poor neighbourhoods was marginalized by the larger women's movement that mobilized protests and other direct action from a maternalist discourse.

Prompted by a recent eruption of student mobilizing in Chile, I have been exploring intergenerational learning in social movements through the use of video supplemented by interviews. The video diaries of two young women leaders now form the nucleus of a documentary about these questions (Chovanec, Smith Díaz, Cooley & González, 2010). One young woman begins her video while walking to her high school graduation. Although born long after the military coup of 1973, she incorporates images of Salvador Allende and music by Victor Jara into her video. She explains that she became a leader in the movement "because there exists two kinds of education here, one for the rich, the other for the poor" and being poor, "I'm not going to be able to [attend university] in my country." The combination of images and emotion provides a much more poignant understanding of the learning experience of this young student leader than could be obtained through text alone. The other young woman uses drawings penned by her grandfather to construct her analysis of the education system in Chile. The powerful drawings coupled with her passionate voiceover clearly demonstrate her anger and frustration about "the poor conditions of the classroom" and the "economic interest" of the private (yet partially subsidized) schools in Chile. She reflects upon her ambivalence about a highly publicized impromptu action wherein a young woman leader poured water on the minister of education as she walked out of a meeting with the students. The documentary medium allowed us to include diverse representations of the event including news footage and an excerpt from a television interview with the young woman. By also incorporating archival and internet materials in the documentary, we revealed the economic, historical and political complexities in which the girls' stories are embedded and at the same time, problematized issues of representation and voice.

### **Carolina Palacios: Freire, Gramsci and Habermas and SML**

Many critical adult educators have examined the contributions of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci and Jürgen Habermas to adult education and learning, and while several scholars have compared Freire and Gramsci's ideas (Mayo, 1999), comparisons of Freire and Habermas are scarce (Morrow & Torres, 2002). While there are significant differences between Freire, Gramsci and Habermas, the research I conducted with Chilean exiles active in the solidarity movement (SM) which sought to oust Pinochet, illustrate how the ideas of these different scholars can inform the learning and knowledge production processes in which social movement participants engage. SML and knowledge production occurs at various levels – within and across movements and by the groups and individuals of a particular movement. Because of social movement activities, learning and knowledge production also occurs among the wider public. Here I will focus on the latter and illuminate the relationships between conscientization,

hegemony and the public sphere.

After the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973 coup ended more than 150 years of liberal democracy in Chile, exiles and Allende sympathizers all over the world organized to denounce the grave human rights violations of the Junta, isolate it politically and economically, and to morally and financially support the resistance in Chile. Raising critical awareness among the public was, therefore, of vital importance. This was achieved through an array of activities which included, but were not limited to, hunger strikes, demonstrations, publishing newsletters, organizing concert tours of exiled musicians and *peñas*, gatherings with protest music, *empanadas* (traditional meat turnovers) and wine, and selling *arpilleras*, embroidered tapestries made by women political prisoners, families of the disappeared and shantytown dwellers.

Gramsci (1971) theorized that hegemony is “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life” (p. 12) by dominant groups. In his more recent formulations of the public sphere, Habermas (1996) maintains the public sphere is a social space comprised of an extremely complex network which extends to overlapping arenas – international to local and subcultural – and a multiplicity of public spheres open to everyday people (for example artistic, feminist and environmental publics). Just as consent and thus hegemony is organized through public spheres (Fraser, 1997), social movements and other civil society actors engage these publics to challenge hegemony. The process through which this occurs is conscientization, which Freire (1985) viewed as a never ending process of moving towards critical consciousness.

The Junta did not only use coercion to force the Chilean populace into submission; it was also concerned with securing hegemony. Theirs was a cultural project which sought to legitimate the regime and justify its repressive tactics. The Junta went about this through public spheres in Chile and abroad by claiming they had to save Chile from Marxism and restore law and order. They also sought to legitimate the new socio-economic order they established, making Chile a test case for neoliberalism. Through their actions, exiles and non-Chileans engaged the public in a process of conscientization. SM messages challenged the common sense notions the Junta and other hegemonic forces circulated in public spheres and Junta attempts to organize consent by creating a culture of silence in Chile and abroad. These messages sought to teach the public about and spark critical analysis of Chilean history, the coup and its aftermath, the Junta’s on-going human rights violations and to make known the commitment of the transnational SM. The Chilean SM illustrates the vital role social movements play in putting issues on the public agenda and generating public dialogue by sparking a process of conscientization among the public through the knowledge they produce and the learning that takes place through their activities.

### **Kjell Rubenson: SML and the Swedish Model of Popular Education**

Popular movements including their special structures for popular adult education is an important source to the understanding of the Swedish Model which leads to the question: how can we understand the affect of social movement learning on the Swedish Model? I will briefly hint at scholarly traditions that can help answer this question.

From having been located in the civil society, and in direct opposition to the state, the traditional social movements in Sweden gradually became closely integrated into the State. In contrast to the new social movements, they adopted strong centralized organizations struggling to achieve as much political power as possible. Similarly the movements built a large-scale system offering popular adult education, mainly in the form of study circles. The introduction of State subsidy for study circles fundamentally changed the nature of the operation. From mainly

having been a resource for the movement's own members and closely integrated into the general activities of the movement, it came to serve two masters, a resource for the movement and an instrument for the state. Thus, the Swedish case can add some insight into the relationship between civil society, state and the role of social learning. Of particular interest in this perspective is to look at the role of learning aimed at the members of the movement (internal function) and the learning efforts focusing on the general public (external function).

To understand the effect of internal as well as external social movement learning on the Swedish model it could be fruitful to draw on three fundamentally different layers of theory including: power-mobilization theory outlining the influence of social movement on the state and hereby on everyday life of citizens; political theory focusing on the learning aspect of deliberative democracy; and adult education theory focusing on the democratic potential of methodology used in the study circle. The theory on power mobilization (Korpi, 1978) provides a fruitful perspective on how the social movements with their study associations shaped the welfare state in Sweden. According to this perspective, it is the balance in power resources between major collectives or classes, in particular, capital and organized labour that regulates the distribution of life opportunities, social consciousness, public institutions and so on. Similarly, changes in power tend to be reflected in changes in social institutions and their *modus operandi*. The Swedish Model can therefore be seen as a result of having two strong classes, labour and capital, and not, as commonly is the case only capital. Contrary to the position of new social movements, it was in the traditional political arena and by integration of corporatism and political power, the social movements, using popular adult education as part of their weaponry, reshaped society and public conscience. This process speaks mostly to the internal dimension of popular adult education.

Looking at the external function of popular education, it is of interest to refer to the audit report from the *Swedish Democracy Council* that adopted a broad definition of democracy and chose to talk about democracy as dialogue. Habermas (1989) stresses that deliberation requires citizens' capacity to advance persuasive claims and initiate public discussions about concerns. Popular adult education provides such an arena where people can meet and dialogue in an informal way and transform their individuality to citizenship through participating (Larsson (2001). The findings from, *The Circle Society* (Andersson, Laginder, Larsson and Sundgren, 1996) suggests that while the circle fosters a communicative rationality, it is less clear that participants in external circles use this communication to coordinate collective action. The conclusion is that while the open circles mainly are places where participants pursue personal interest they also are a place for deliberation. In that respect, the authors conclude, study circle contributes to the forming of citizenship, to local democracy, and to the integration of the local community.

The external influence of study circles should further be examined from an adult education perspective. Larsson (2001), comparing the 'pedagogy' of study circles to the grammar of schooling, notes that while the latter in its operation reflects an instrumental rationality, the methodology in the former is less rooted in the system world. Further the grammar of the study circle, through its collective inquiry goals, has less of a focus on the individual than schooling and or the andragogical ideal.

## Pierre Walter: Buddhist Activists and Ecological Movements

In theorising new social movements (NSM), three theoretical traditions are commonly identified: (a) US- inspired Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), with roots in Political Science; (b) Classical Marxism; and (c) NSM Theory, based in cultural studies and critical sociology. RMT makes the assumption of ‘rational choice’ whereby NSM actors seek to maximize self-interest and mobilise resources in the pursuit of the collective good. European traditions of NSM Theory focus not on understanding collective interests, but on collective identity. In part, NSM theory is responding to a classical Marxism premised on economic determinism and class struggle. Beyond class, NSM theory posits other forms of collective identity and action found in the culture, ideology and politics of post-industrial societies (e.g. environmental, peace, feminist, GLBT movements).

In theorising adult learning in NSM, we find a few examples of Marxist traditions of class analysis (e.g. Holst, 2002), almost none framed by RMT, and many within the European tradition of NSM Theory. Feminist theorising is also present, although sometimes overshadowed by the other traditions. For Marxists, the main site of SML continues to be the workers’ party, with its aim to build a revolutionary proletarian consciousness to overthrow the state and capitalist class. NSM Theory traditions see NSM as catalysts for personal transformation and collective change, but not for class warfare. Instead, NSMs are viewed as cutting across classes, and as sites of identity construction, learning, and knowledge generation.

Environmental adult education (Clover, 2004, 2004), as part of SML, adopts many of the theoretical frames from the European tradition. These include Gramsci’s notion of the ideological hegemony of the state and large corporations. Counter-hegemonic environmental adult (popular) education disrupts and resists this hegemony. Habermas is also relevant as environmental adult education strengthens the lifeworld against colonisation, and promotes democratic civil society. Freire and feminism are important as well, in an environmental justice movement built on *concientización* and in peaceful direct action.

In light of this theorising, I will now consider the case of SML in the Buddhist environmental movement in Thailand (Walter, 2007a). Here, SML allowed the construction of an alternative ideology of ‘green thinking’ and activism in opposition to state and corporate ideologies and models of economic development. ‘Pro poor’, socially engaged Buddhist ‘ecology monks’ (*phra nak anuraksaa*) led villagers in a struggle against deforestation, land grabs, environmental degradation, consumerism and other destructive manifestations of what they termed the ‘greed-based’ economy. Vital to this was the educational practice of ritually ordaining trees and local forests (*buat ton maay, buat paa*) to protect them. The monks taught an ‘eco-dhammic’ ethics imbued with grassroots Buddhist socialism (*sangkhom niyom*), in which reside three primary Buddhist principles: (1) the interdependence of society, culture and nature; (2) restraint (from greed), social equity and generosity; and (3) loving-kindness and respect for the community. Following this ‘counter-hegemonic’ ideology, monks led villagers in protests against the planting of Eucalyptus for paper production, built model integrated farms, and organised cooperative rice and buffalo banks, thereby building a democratic civil society.

As peaceful and enlightened as these Buddhist activists were, however, they were often met with violence and killings. Despite nonviolent orientations which do not seek to overthrow the state, NSM actors still face the state’s repressive police and military apparatus. This has also been true in pluralist democratic countries such as Canada, where, for example, in the Clayoquot Sound protests of 1993, hundreds of protesters were dragged off to jail (Walter, 2007b), as was also the case in the recent G20 protests in Toronto. Thus cultural codes such as ecology monks,



eco-dhammic ethics, and Buddhist ordination of trees, as seen from the perspective of NSM Theory, may resonate deeply in forming a collective identity. NSMs may act as a rich site of learning, knowledge generation, personal transformation and collective change. But we cannot discount real and present state violence against NSMs, as highlighted in Marxist SML theorising on class struggle. It is also important to recognize gender in NSM: the Buddhists were a male monk movement, as opposed to struggles such as Clayoquot Sound, which were led and organised by women around feminist principles of direct action. That is, SML is a gendered arena of learning and pedagogy, and SML theorising should reflect this fact.

## Conclusion

The above discussion examined women's central role in the Chilean revolution, the significance of public education of that same revolution, the pedagogical power of visual and performance art created by Filipino feminist activists, Swedish study circles as forms of popular education, and the environmental activism of Buddhist monks in Thailand. Theoretically these cases employed the work of familiar SML scholars (Freire, Gramsci, and Habermas) and extended that framework to include feminist postcolonial and anti-racist approaches, political science orientations to resource mobilization, cultural studies and critical sociology focusing on SML and identity development. These studies draw attention to how SML is powerfully shaped by gender, race, culture and class.

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