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Globalizing Citizens: New Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion (Claiming Citizenship: Rights, Participation and Accountability Series)

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BOOK REVIEW

Globalizing Citizens: New Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion (Claiming Citizenship: Rights, Participation and Accountability Series)

John Gaventa & Rajesh Tandon (Eds)

London, Zed Books, 2010, xii + 266 pp., index, £70.00, ISBN-978-1-84813-471-3 (hardback); £19.99, ISBN-978-1-84813-472-0 (paperback)

As processes of globalization permeate our disparate lifeworlds, scholars of social movements are rightly asking whether and to what extent our existing theories of citizenship, claim-making, and democratic participation still matter. In response, *Globalizing Citizens* offers a realistic appraisal of how ordinary citizens, activists, donors, and policy-makers are enmeshed in multi-layered, multi-dimensional, and intertwined matrices of power and resistance. Co-edited by two prominent scholar-activists based in the UK, the volume avoids the excessive enthusiasm of some theorists of globalization and advocacy networks as well as the undue pessimism of others who lament the passing of a more heroic age of local grassroots activism. By adopting a middle path between overly enthusiastic and pessimistic accounts of contemporary social movements that operate across multiple scales and spaces, the case studies in this volume enable readers to appreciate the authors' perspicacity in highlighting the complexities and contradictions as well as the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at work within these movements.

The tripartite politics of mobilization, mediation, and knowledge that have often illuminated older, more conventional forms of activism and advocacy are extended in this volume to the study of transnational movements. The principal difference lies in the multiple scales or layers of contentious politics and governance alike in the study of transnational claim-making practices. These multiple scales are, as papers as different as those on AIDS awareness in South Africa and land rights struggles worldwide reveal, experienced vertically by ordinary citizens. Multi-scalar mobilization, mediation, or knowledge production is anything but a smooth process, as each of the papers in this volume demonstrates clearly. There are, unsurprisingly, tensions between actors at different scales and at different moments in the process of claiming rights as citizens. Yet *Globalizing Citizens* does not give us a clear theoretical or practical understanding of how and why some forms of transnational activism are more efficacious than others. Is globalization kinder to forms of civic engagement concerning HIV/AIDS over others focused on, say, land rights or gender equality? Do issues determine efficacy entirely or do other factors such as effective mediation and mutual translatable knowledge matter more? The contributors to and editors of this volume seem to suggest that we simply do not know. This is, to say the least, disappointing.

What is equally disappointing is the lack of attention in this volume to the technologies or media of knowledge transmission that make transnational activism possible today. The contributors draw on their extensive knowledge of particular movements and/or fieldsites to explore interactions between different scales and actors. But most of these interactions are described as simple face-to-face transactions. We do not learn, for instance, how the Internet structures vertical or horizontal forms of communication or the ways in which globally televised images, whether electronic or print, produce particular kinds of citizenship aspirations and claims. Mobilization, mediation, and knowledge production are each affected by technologies of communication, and these may, much like other aspects of transnational activism, be fraught with blindspots and contradictions that empower some and exclude others. To what extent activists and movements overcome these blindspots and contradictions is, of course, a matter of both theoretical and practical interest.

The strengths and weaknesses of *Globalizing Citizens* are difficult to appreciate without an understanding of the circumstances that gave rise to it. The contributions to this volume, the foreword explains, emerged out of a working group at the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation, and Accountability at the University of Sussex. The Citizenship DRC, as it is known, serves the immediate goal of the UK's Department of International Development in determining the factors underlying claim-making and participation across countries where it funds projects. This goal is met not only by academic research but also by institutional collaborations with governmental and non-governmental partners in the Global South. While laudable in some respects as a kind of North–South dialog on development and democracy, the politics of research funding must be understood in terms of the power relations that bind together different developmental actors, including researchers, across the North–South divide. The politics of knowledge explains the volume's particular choice of terms ('stakeholders,' 'engagement,' 'participation'), its somewhat turgid, technocratic prose, and its deep-seated ambivalence toward the multi-layered structures within which transnational activism occurs today. What appear at first glance as caution and realism turns out on closer examination to be more a matter of complicity in structures of funding for development, activism, and research on both.

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