Social Movement Research in/and Struggles for Change: Research for What and For Whom?

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Abstract

Research is key to daily organising and struggles for social, political, economic and environmental justice. If research is to be useful in organising and struggles for change, it cannot be something that metaphorically or literally sits on a shelf or behind a paywall, and is inaccessible or irrelevant to the communities, movements and publics whose concerns, issues and lives it engages with, and who may also well be the foundations of much of the knowledge it draws on. This article discusses some of the ways in which activist researchers—or activists who do research as part of their organising/activism—understand and practise research, and the purposes and processes of knowledge production. It offers guideposts for scholars and academics who are keen to do research *with*, *for* and *about* social movements. What are some of the sources of such knowledge? How is this knowledge produced? How do such practices relate to professionalised forms of research and expertise? How might such research practices foster the building or strengthening of collective agency?

Keywords: social movements; activists; research; archives; struggles

Introduction

Engaging with reflections of a number of activists upon their processes of research with social movements, building upon previous work (Choudry 2015), and other literature on research and knowledge production in social movements/activism, I draw upon interviews with activists, organisers and movement researchers from the Philippines, South Africa, Argentina, the United Kingdom and North America about research for resistance. In doing so, I am cognisant of the importance of context and caution against inferring that these experiences and reflections can be generalised to all social movements and struggles.

This study cannot claim to be an exhaustive overview of the topic. Rather, it selectively engages with several areas and aspects of research in social movements/activist organising to highlight and draw out some points for further discussion. It attempts to show that there are common threads and cross-cutting themes across a range of practices and across various movement/country contexts, as well as specific conceptual resources for thinking through what relationships between research in social movements and organising practice might look like. After this introductory section, the article discusses contributions to the systematisation of experiential knowledge, some approaches to people's science, research for organising in labour contexts, and activist archiving practices.

Fuelling the Tanks of Struggle

In 2008, the late British anti-racist activist and thinker, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, reflects on decades of anti-racist research, analysis and campaign work at the Institute for Race Relations (IRR). Never a university academic, Sivanandan (and the IRR) engages in critically important work to support daily struggles on the ground for racial justice. He says:

> If we could not be at the barricades in the fight for racial justice, we could, at least, be servitors in that cause. We could do research that spoke to the issues and problems confronting Black communities. We could be a servicing station. We could put gas in the tanks of Black and Third World peoples on their way to liberation. (Sivanandan 2008)

The Corner House, also based in the United Kingdom (UK), is a small organisation that, for several decades, has worked globally in research and advocacy on human rights, the environment and development, and aims to

> support democratic and community movements for environmental and social justice. We are interested in social, economic and political power and in practical strategy … [and hope] to stimulate informed discussion and strategic thought and link different kinds of activism and social movement. (The Corner House n.d.)

For Corner House founder and director Nick Hildyard, research

that doesn't put sugar in the tank, so to speak, is completely useless, I mean I'm not interested in it. And that does require a very intimate relationship and building trust between those you work with in order to identify what's useful. (Interview, 9 October 2014, London)

This article begins with these two reflections from Sivanandan and Hildyard because many activist researchers, in their commitments and collaborations with social movements and political struggles, have experimented and innovated with different ways, means, media and modes of both putting fuel in the tanks of struggles for change as well as sugar in the tanks of the forces of oppression and exploitation. Often these kinds of research happen in the course of ongoing organising work where the research "output" or "impact" is less tangible or measurable than a report, a policy brief or other typical research products, or perhaps popular education workshops or resources. But, in turn, research may have more effect being woven into and taken up in organising strategies where it is less visible *as research*, and not categorised as a distinct type of activity. Indeed, part of the value of the research may be the supporting or strengthening of collective agency in the process itself that goes beyond the impact of the knowledge produced.

Many of those interviewed identified conversations with activists in movements and relationships of trust as being the starting point and at the heart of how the research is formulated and developed, so that it is relevant and tied back to organising strategies rather than an abstract exercise. Many do not define or view themselves as being primarily researchers, but rather see research as part of what they do in the course of their activism and organising activities and commitments. What also seems clear is an expansive view of research that is closely connected to intertwined processes and practices of critical learning, popular education and collective consciousness.

Hildyard continues:

I'm not certain I see myself as a researcher actually. Although I do research. And in a sense I see myself more as an activist, in which at some points, what often is classified as research or seen as research is necessary to understanding the history of particular issues, to delving into the vulnerabilities of particular institutions or elite groups or companies or whatever in order to be able to confront them more effectively. … So I mean, the research isn't blocked off and I'm actually quite hostile to the idea that there are activists who are on the street—and that that's activism, and then there are people who sit in the universities or at their desk and do research … actually, one without the other doesn't make any sense to me. (Interview, 9 October 2014, London)

Along with many other movement researchers (Choudry 2015), Hildyard emphasises the importance of longstanding relationships with trusted allies in social movements to activist research and rooting the work in conversations with them. But, he also recognises that such research is never a one-way process of producing a report that is so

articulate about a particular problem that a decision maker who reads it will suddenly change their opinion.

As is often the case with dominant perspectives on education and learning, research is frequently viewed as something that is undertaken by professional researchers located in or affiliated to post-secondary institutions such as universities. Much of the literature on various forms of socially engaged research or "research for social change" presumes that researchers will be university academics or graduate students and may reinforce what the People's Knowledge Editorial Collective (2016, 1–2) vigorously contends are "the unjust and nonsensical hierarchies that exist … between formally trained researchers and grassroots-based researchers who draw expertise from experience". Hierarchies of knowledge and their perceived legitimacy are frequently related to the conditions, forms and sites of production, the qualifications and professional status of those who produce knowledge, the claims to neutrality and objectivity made about it, and the forms that the outputs take.

While a fuller discussion of the ways in which knowledge production is contested and the social construction of both hegemonic forms of knowledge production and insurgent "bottom up" forms is outside the scope of this article, I argue that there are rich and diverse research practices within and in support of social movements, community activism and struggles for change that are not located in, and independent of, universities and elite knowledge production institutions and processes. There are also practical examples of dialectical and dialogical relations between knowledge and analysis from ordinary people and specialist/professional forms of research and investigation. While these can be complicated and messy sites of tension between "experts" and "the people", there are also generative possibilities and lessons to be learned, which can in turn deepen and broaden our understandings of the social relations of research, the social construction of knowledge and make more visible the interests and assumptions behind knowledge claims and research (Narayan and Scandrett 2014).

Another facet of research for social movements is discussed by Canadian activist, educator and researcher Joan Kuyek on the role of "translating" in activist research. She recounts:

> [M]y research has ended up being mostly doing … what … is called a literature review and interpreting it in the language and form, the specificities of the issue people want to work on so all that knowledge is there somewhere—sometimes it isn't as accessible as it used to be—but it's still around and then being able to frame it, being able to understand it and frame it and make it accessible to people is the real challenge. (Interview, 4 June 2014, Montreal)

Paul Quintos of IBON International reflects on research in various movements and organisations he has been part of in the Philippines, including trade unions and a labour rights education and research organisation: "[I]t helps guide action, it helps unite groups, individuals to come to common positions about certain issues". He continues:

It's very integral to organising and mobilising so it's definitely not … a stand-alone or distinct category of activity, I mean, in fact and this was very prominent to me when I was in organising because the research, you can't really put boundaries in terms of "am I doing research now or am I doing education, or am I doing organising"; the lines are blurred, … that struck me more when I was in organising as opposed to when I was in a research institution because that's the daily work that we did in support of organising but because we were indirectly involved in, you know the boundaries were clear. … Picking issues and distilling lessons from the experience of grassroots communities, social movements towards basically guiding collective actions for social change, that would be my definition, the kind of research at least that we would like to be doing. (Interview, 12 December 2012, online)

Experiential Learning, the Systematisation of Experience, and Critical Reflection

With its roots in popular education and progressive social work practices in Latin America, the idea of systematisation of experiences is widely articulated in Latin American progressive movements. Discussing the meaning of systematisation, Peruvian-Costa Rican popular educator and sociologist Oscar Jara says:

> A new relationship between theory and practice appeared: instead of applying to practice what had previously been formulated in theory, theoretical approaches are built having as a starting point the systematization of … practices. (2006, 14)

So, through critical and analytical reflection on practice can come the creation of new insights and knowledge that can inform action, and reflecting on, interpreting and ordering these to understand the processes can produce lessons that will improve future practices (Kane 2001). As Liam Kane (2001, 20) puts it: "Crucially, though, the concept of systematization is not of dispassionate, detached, 'neutral' report-writing: those who collectively engage in systematization are also, unashamedly, part of the focus of enquiry, both 'subjects' and 'objects' at the same time".

In a conversation about activist research and popular education in social movements, Claudia Korol, Argentinian feminist, and anti-colonial, Marxist activist and popular educator with Pañuelosen Rebeldía,[1] and researcher with the Centro de Investigación y Formación de Movimientos Sociales Latinoamericanos, explains that any process of popular education is one that relates theory and practice of social movements as well as being a collective process of knowledge production:

> We do not think of education as only knowledge transmission, and one big concern we have is the issue of creation of new knowledge. In that sense, one of the aspects we work on is the systematisation of experiences. In the processes of systematisation of

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[1]   "Scarves in rebellion"—the group's name references different types of *pañuelos* (scarves) worn by Latin American women in their struggles such as the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Argentina) and the Zapatistas (Mexico).

experiences which we do along and together with social movements, we believe there is a moment of synthesis and theoretical production that is produced in dialogue with existent theory. It is not about rejecting theory, but I think that current theory is also a product of struggles, actions and knowledge which have been systematised. (Korol, interview, 2 March 2015, online)

Korol says that in comparison with other forms of knowledge production, the emphasis is on

the role of the social organisation in this process and on the role of intellectuals who are part of this social organisation, building that organisation as a collective intellectual. I mean, the quest we have is to not only build and guide personal and individual processes, but that other things also come into dialogue. And the other aspect we believe is important inside popular education processes as we are thinking about them, is the "dialogue of knowledges", the dialogue between experiences. (Interview, 2 March 2015, online)

In a similar vein, Diego Monton of CLOC Via Campesina la Coordinación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo (Latin American Coordinator of Rural Organizations) speaks of the value of a rich dialectical process of engagement between the movement of *campesinos* and politically committed academics and intellectuals who are open to theory being questioned by practice. He says that this engagement can help the movement to problematise its own practices:

Sometimes in the movement there are myths that are built during the struggles. There are also mistakes in the interpretation because the interpretations are also made from a subjective standpoint. (Interview, 1 March 2015, online)

Monton gives the example of the Escuela de la Memoria Histórica (School of Historical Memory) in Argentina: "In general, all of our practice has to do with the organisation of the community and the movement according to the type of struggles, for example land struggles. And from those struggles we have instances of collective training" (Interview, 1 March 2015, online). The Escuela is a national training school, which met annually for many years with 200 grassroots activists from the movement. Monton explains that in the school

we combine the experience coming from the life of the militant with the collective experience of the movement. Then, from the point of view of the life of a militant we analyse the concrete struggles of the present, but also the past and the history. The school has several moments, the moment of the individual history, the moments that marked us as militants, the moment of the history of his/her community, and the moment of the history of the movement. We see how every one of those struggles becomes related. This process also receives contributions from external fellows or some academic[s] or intellectuals who contribute information for every moment for a contextualisation of the historical moment that was lived. It is a more abstract contribution if you like. Then, we relate the individual experience with the collective experience and with an interpretation

of the different historical moments. We try to go back as much as we can into the historical memory. Then for example, people can tell stories of their parents or their grandparents, how they experienced the same situations, in relation to the struggles for their lands and the struggles for their rights. (Interview, 1 March 2015, online)

From this, Monton says, they work to systematise these moments.

Notwithstanding powerful insights and perspectives that can arise from people's experience, experiential learning and knowledge cannot automatically be enough. The assertion of "lived experience" as an authoritative position of knowledge often circulates quite broadly and it is often unchallenged in many activist networks. Taking seriously and validating experiences of those directly impacted by exploitation, social, political and economic marginalisation in the face of dominant official claims that obscure or deny them can be important and powerful. But there is a danger of romanticising rather than critically engaging with knowledge of ordinary folk, so to speak, or all activists, in part to challenge hegemonic forms of knowledge production and intellectual work. Jijian Voronka (2016, 197–98) suggests the following:

> Experiences happen, but how we as individuals make sense of them matters, because it informs the ways in which we set research priorities, our frameworks for meaning-making, how we collect, analyze, and interpret knowledge, and how we work through notions of truth in our own knowledge production. This matters now; it matters because lived experience as an essentialized category is suddenly being called on in a number of new ways. … Lived experience in and of itself does not dictate our approach to the topic at hand.

Foley (1999, 64) writes that the

> process of critical learning involves people in theorizing their experience: they stand back from it and reorder it, using concepts like power, conflict, structure, values and choice. It is also clear that critical learning is gained informally, through experience, by acting and reflecting on action, rather than in formal courses.

So, the argument here is that experience alone is not sufficient to ensure critical learning, and in turn research. Reflection and analysis, and collective, perhaps dialectical processes and spaces to do this, such as the approach to systematisation described above, are important. There is also perhaps a danger of overly dualistic, essentialist and simplistic constructions of research and expertise between academia/professional researchers and "ordinary people". This is contextual, but it is important to note that notwithstanding strong criticisms of the practices and limitations of university-based researchers, there are also examples of collaboration, particularly around specific forms of research expertise, scientific knowledge and/or strategic use of those deemed to be "experts" by officials, the media, and the private sector in campaigns. Thus, while there remains much work to be done in validating, documenting and critically appraising the internal research, education and knowledge production work of movements, there are

tensions around romanticising all popular/everyday forms of knowledge, experiential and informal learning. Yet, as I have noted earlier,

> social movement scholars located in academic institutions stand to extend their understandings about theory and methodology—as well as about the movements themselves—from the actual practices of movement researchers. For activists and organizers it is important to demystify "research" and restate that it is inseparable from struggles to build and sustain movements. (Choudry 2015, 150)

People's Science

A significant area of research in social movements concerns co-research in community environmental/health struggles that have collaborated with scientific professionals in the service of such struggles, and the politics of knowledge associated with these. Such "people's science", "citizen science" or "civic science" can mobilise and make accessible scientific knowledge that is co-produced by community members through the strategic use of scientific tools deployed along with the systematisation of lay knowledge and experience, as in struggles against industrial pollution by villagers in Tamil Nadu, India (Narayan and Scandrett 2014) and by the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) in the working-class, low-income community of South Durban (Scott and Barnett 2009; SDCEA n.d.). Citizen science or people's science generally refers to training community people without formal scientific training to become community scientists to monitor and effectively resist pollution, industrial agriculture, other environmental/public health impacts and/or forms of development that are causing harm to their communities. But this process should not be seen only as a case of translating or interpreting scientific knowledge for lay people to take action around. In some instances, and in a range of ways, different sources and forms of knowledge and expertise combine to contest and challenge state and private sector power. Some of these might be understood as dialogical processes of learning and knowledge production. These are not without their tensions or contradictions.

Desmond D'Sa, co-founder and co-ordinator of the SDCEA, recalls how people's science was developed and implemented in the South Durban community's fight for clean air, water and soil in their highly polluted neighbourhood. It is the location for about 70% of Durban's industry, including oil and gas refineries, paper mills, and agrochemical plants, with high incidences of cancer, respiratory and other diseases in the community, which is itself a legacy of forced relocations by the apartheid regime. As well as developing their own smell chart to identify specific toxic chemicals that they were being exposed to, community members started to take their own bucket grab samples of air and water without relying on expensive scientific equipment and outside experts, and then went to the laboratories in Durban asking for them to be analysed. He explains:

> We were doing it ourselves—all the oil spills—what oil is this? What petrol is that? Tell us what's going on here? Holding the evidence which we'd never done before so we

started to do our own [testing], which was a huge shift. In the past we relied on officials … and government to do it, suddenly we're doing it ourselves, suddenly we are telling community we can do it and you, we all can do it; we don't need all these people to do all these things. (Desmond D'Sa, interview, 17 November 2014, Durban)

Another example of putting scientific knowledge at the service of popular resistance can be seen in a long-term process of socially engaged scientists at the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (University of Cordoba) collaborating with the Madres de Ituzaingó (Mothers of Ituzaingó) (Berger 2013; Torrado 2016; Montenegro 2019) opposed to aerial spraying of Monsanto herbicide glyphosate on fields of genetically modified (GM) soy in Barrio Ituzaingó Anexo, a neighbourhood just outside Argentina's second largest city of Cordoba. Madres de Ituzaingó is a movement started by a group of mothers and their children who are victims of fumigations. They were directly exposed to pesticides through the air, water, and skin, resulting in a high incidence of cancers, respiratory and skin diseases, as well as children born with deformities. In an interview (15 March 2015, online), academic and activist Cesar Marchesino spoke of the collaboration in this case as an illustration that "the idea that the researchers go to investigate the social movements is being gradually abandoned, and instead that is a joint work". Narayan and Scandrett's observation reflecting on popular environmental struggles employing people's science in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, also seems pertinent here. They write:

> The ideal scenario is therefore scientific knowledge whose accuracy is judged by the ideological commitment to the people facing pollution of those who produce it: "really useful knowledge" (Johnson 1979). Such knowledge is based on the lay knowledge of communities affected by pollution, augmented systematically by observation and supplemented by the technical expertise of specialists who demonstrate their commitment to pollution victims. (Narayan and Scandrett 2014, 569)

Of course, this is not to suggest that all examples of "people's science" conform to the ideal scenario stated here. But there are many examples where "scientific knowledge", different forms of lay/community knowledge, including, or as well as, critical social, economic, and political frames of analysis are combined.

In her study on the knowledge production and community organising of the Madres de Ituzaingó, Torrado (2016) discusses the dynamics of the contestation of knowledge between the *Madres* and state/private sector actors in Argentina over agrochemicals, including the high use of pesticides in the context of state-sponsored production and expansion of the production of GM soy, connected with neoliberal and economic policies. The women bring community-based situated knowledge, lived experience and observation as women and mothers experiencing the effects of toxic chemicals sprayed in their community, mobilise and protest, and also collaborate with biologists, legal scholars and medical specialists. Torrado argues that the knowledge produced by the *Madres* is gendered and that the women

have appropriated a social construction of motherhood, contesting the state with the knowledge and experiences that their gender has provided them. Their gendered knowledge guides them into a politicized space that allows them to take care of their own, their community, and all of those who suffer the consequences of a fragmented state in tension between a planning vision based on economic expansion and the local implications that are generated by such planning. (Torrado 2016, 216)

In the Philippines, AGHAM (Samahan ng Nagtataguyod ng Agham at Teknolohiya Para saSambayanan/Advocates of Science and Technology for the People) is an organisation of scientists, engineers and science graduates that, among other activities, runs people's science schools and works with urban poor, rural, indigenous and other communities on a range of problems and struggles (Parel 2020). These have included support for campaigns over electricity pricing for urban poor communities as well as advocacy with mining-affected communities. After a request from impacted communities, AGHAM, along with other organisations, was part of an October 2012 environmental investigative mission following a massive mining disaster at the Philex Mining Corporation in August/September 2012 in Benguet when about 20,6 million metric tons of toxic mine tailings spilled into water channels. As Giovanni Tapang of AGHAM puts it, they are

essentially advocating science and doing science for the people. We're not limited to scientists. It's essentially [an] advocacy group but we organise scientists in the academe, in government offices, in research institutions as well as those who have been doing the practice of science. The difference from a professional organisation is that we do give service to communities where they would need scientists in different contexts. For example, if they would need a geologist to figure out what would be the impacts of mining, then we will send in geologists within the group. … So it's a whole range of activities involving making science and technology relevant to Philippine people. (Interview, 12 December 2012, online)

Gene Nisperos, from another progressive Philippine organisation, the Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD), comprising doctors, nurses, midwives, health professionals, hospital workers and community health workers, health science students and health advocates in the Philippines, explains that they

try to strike a balance between the rigours required by "scientific research" which is usually found in the academe and in scientific communities. But at the same time we try, we cannot be boxed in by standards of so-called objectivity and certain tools that do not measure a lot of things that are important for us. For instance, when you're asked, how strong is community organising in a certain area, now you can have 1001 instruments to measure that, but the most important parts are usually left out: How is the organising? How has it changed the lives of the people there? Most of the scientific papers will focus on specific values, specific indicators, but will not hit on what is essential for people. At the same time, research, I think, for it to be meaningful for us should also be meaningful for the people we work for, which means the poor, the ones

who are marginalised, the excluded sections of society. (Interview, December 2012, online)

Narayan and Scandrett (2014, 564) critically discuss the knowledge politics in people's/citizen science practice and they contend that the

> division between "lay" and "official" science, which has served the interests of the accumulation of capital, is not, however, a simple or uncontested split. While most "scientists" are also workers, employed by industry or public institutions to conduct research, monitor, teach etc., "laypeople" are scientists when they undertake rigorous accumulation of knowledge about the physical world through, for example professions such as farming or fishing, experiences such as childbirth or illness and through reflective observation. They also may access "official" scientific knowledge and bring insights from their distinctive experience. Challenging the polluting impacts of industrial development therefore becomes a struggle for hegemony of and through science.

Narayan and Scandrett (2014, 569) write that scientific learning in the context of the struggle against industrial pollution "does not involve the recognition or reproduction of a canon of scientific theory or methods, but rather involves the systematisation of knowledge and the synthesis of diverse knowledge sources derived from various specialisms—fishing, farming, laboratory analysis—whose reliability is ascertained in terms of a social analysis of power and interests". They also contend that these dialogical processes of learning and knowledge generation correlate with the pedagogical processes of popular education, participatory action research and social movement learning, which resonates with the earlier reflections of Claudia Korol and Diego Monton about movements and knowledge production in Argentina in this article.

A further South African example of the close connection between popular education, community/activist research and people's science is seen in work on energy justice in working-class neighbourhoods of the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality (Community Education Programme 2017). This drew on people coming together in community education learning circles, supported by the Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET) at Nelson Mandela University, to identify problems which concerned them, and to collectively work out actions to address these. Photographs were taken in walks through the neighbourhoods, which then served as a visual way of representing community problems, and to create critical dialogue in the learning circle, identify the issues, how to address them, and explore alternatives to the status quo together, drawing on community members' experiences, social interests and knowledge. Here the issue was energy access and use in working-class communities. Popular education, community organising and research were part and parcel of this process: "Many learning circles help people to improve their literacy, but they also help people to become critical thinkers, co-operative learners and confident investigators, so that they can continue to learn about things that interest them and work together to change their communities" (Community Education Programme 2017, 3).

Gene Nisperos's advice for academic researchers and students who want to connect their research with struggles for change at the grassroots is that

> if you want your research to be relevant, you have to first establish links with the people … spend maybe a month, two, three, six months in a community, listen to the language of the people, see what interests them, because then that would give you direction and what research you want to go into, how you're going to conduct that research. … Get grounded with what's happening at the grassroots. Whether it's the grassroots in your hospitals, health worker issues, or better yet, grassroots with your basic sectors, your farmers, your workers, your urban poor, indigenous people. I think that is important, otherwise you would be coming with research for policy that has very little practical use, which is already what government's doing; they come up with policy based on their own research, but it's not actually related to what the people need. (Interview, December 2012, online)

Militant Investigation, Workers' Inquiry and Their Cousins

Marcelo Hoffman has explored how research and organising were combined in a range of historical radical political struggles. He uses the term "militant investigation" to mean the gathering of information "about the conditions and struggles of workers, peasants, and other subalterns for explicitly political purposes" (Hoffman 2019, 2). For him, militant investigation is "a highly fluid and adaptable practice whose value resides in the production of forms of collective political subjectivity rather than in the extraction, accumulation, and publication of purely informational content" (Hoffman 2019, 3). The research/investigation process is not significant solely because of the knowledge it produces or seeks to produce, but in how it supports or fosters collective consciousness and collective agency.

A number of approaches draw on Marxist thought for research analysis frameworks in order to understand conditions of the oppressed and to inform and stimulate their political mobilisation. One strand is the tradition of workers' inquiry (Ovetz 2020; Woodcock 2014). A variety of heterodox activist research practices emerging from struggles of migrant/immigrant workers often organising outside formal trade union structures resonate with aspects of these traditions. In reviewing a range of attempts at workers' inquiry, a method of investigation of the workplace from the workers' point of view most often associated with Italian workerists (operaismo), Woodcock argues for a contemporary approach to workers' inquiry, which starts with an initial stage, an inquiry "from above" in order to develop theoretical insights and access to a workplace. He writes that this should be

> followed by a detailed investigation of the workplace itself, either through auto-ethnographic methods or with contact with workers. The aim is to move towards an inquiry "from below", a form of co-research that breaks down the separation between researcher and subject. At its core the project is one of knowledge production and political organisation, and there has to be an awareness of this tension. The workers' inquiry cannot simply be limited to an academic tool for refreshing theory. This

connexion between theory and practice is crucial for both the component parts. (Woodcock 2014, 510)

Discussing the CARE (Caregiver Research) Project, with Filipina/o migrant workers in the San Francisco Bay Area in the United States of America, US-Filipina sociologist and activist, Valerie Francisco (2016, 211), documents how "democratising research and scientific methods through research training, political education and participation of migrant workers can be a process in which critical consciousness and collective action is pursued".

She describes the project as a hybrid of community-based research, service provision and political organising components, with two projected outcomes:

> First, it sought to collect the stories of caregivers in the Filipino community and analyse the work conditions of immigrants in the care giving industry. Second, the research process aimed to integrate leadership development and popular education focused on topics such as US immigration policies, globalisation and forced migration. The aim was that the interplay between the two objectives would assist migrants in identifying relevant key issues and potential organising strategies for them. (Francisco 2016, 214)

Francisco refers to Freire's concept of *conscientização* (conscientisation) as background to how popular education can support participants honing their analysis about larger social forces as they produce problems and issues of marginalisation and oppression. "In the CARE Project, our PAR [participatory action research] process not only achieved the objectives to investigate and research the conditions, but also linked Filipino migrant workers' individual circumstances to structural inequalities" (Francisco 2016, 222). She recounts how the research trainings included long discussions about the political and economic systems that produced mass emigration from the Philippines and the demand for low-wage care workers in the United States. Seeing the patterns of inequality and exploitation that Filipino migrant workers experienced, participants wanted to understand more deeply the reasons for community members' suffering. Francisco writes (2016, 222):

> [T]he collective inquiry embedded in the research process provided researchers with fodder to ask critical questions about their work conditions and lives. Since many of the researchers had a stake in conducting research, they were not only interested in its outcomes, but it became important to them to provide analysis and explanation for the project's findings.

There are parallels between the example of the CARE Project and the experiences and analysis documented by Salamanca (2018) and Choudry, Henaway and Shragge (2020) in their discussions of the relationship between workers' experience, informal knowledge and knowledge production for organising and leadership development in the context of organising temporary agency workers through the Immigrant Workers Centre in Montreal, Canada. Salamanca (2018) discusses how processes of learning and

knowledge production by temporary agency workers in Montreal are combined with activists' and academic research on agencies, precarious labour, and im/migration policies. This information is usually shared in meetings, workshops, and other discussions, helping to build a broader systemic understanding and analysis of the role of im/migrant labour and the temporary agency industry in diverse sectors of the labour market. Here, research, knowledge production, learning, and education intertwine in a process that usually starts with individual cases and ends in stronger structural analysis.

Archiving Activism

Another form of movement knowledge production and research getting increased attention in recent years—although many of the practices and processes themselves are not new—concerns community, movement and activist archiving/archives, which encompass a diverse range of materials, approaches and practices (Choudry and Vally 2018; Flinn 2011; Rochat 2021). Many activist groups and social movement organisations produce a wealth of printed, recorded and digital materials. The importance of critically engaging with ephemera produced in earlier campaigns and phases of struggle, by using it as a resource through which to explore and understand radical politics and their histories in ways that inform present and future actions, is evident in this evolving archive. Such publications are important forms of documenting actions, campaigns, developments and debates, which are otherwise not always visible and accessible to those external to these organisations and their struggles as well as to newer generations. Whether in the form of pamphlets, flyers, posters or newsletters, many community organisations produce their own publications to make their voices heard, engage community members and wider audiences, and intervene in debates that often speak for or about them, without inviting them into the conversation.

Moreover, movement histories and associated historical materials can be a rich source of lessons and strategies for contemporary struggles for justice. Some activists are aware of histories—and historical silences—that exclude, misrepresent or ignore their communities, movements or organisations, or that obscure important internal tensions and debates within movements and organisations, and they are inspired to address this in ways that draw out lessons or insights to inform present and future struggles. There is growing interest in exploring the diverse ways that activists and social movements not only strive to document their struggles and experiences, but also how they critically engage with these histories, educate from them, and how these practices and processes inform contemporary struggles for change as well as imagining new and different futures.

As tools for advocacy and mobilisation, historical movement materials can illustrate the kinds of knowledge production, informal education, intellectual work and documentation that occur in the course of organising for change. A perhaps unintended outcome is that those publications often constitute undervalued resources that document and make accessible histories of struggle, and tools for understanding what might have

led up to particular conditions at particular moments, as well as resistance, including strategic and tactical questions.

While there are now more and more community-based and activist archives projects, archiving alone is not enough to fully make visible the political contributions of groups that have had to self-organise outside or against mainstream political systems. Ephemeral publications by community groups and movement organisations convey their politics to the public sphere and are used as resources for education, organising and outreach. Engaging in different, creative and critical ways with community or social movement publications should be understood as an integral part of current struggles for change, community education, and as an essential part of imagining a different politics.

Montreal-based Désirée Rochat's work in and on transnational diasporic community activism as a community worker, educator and scholar is notable here (Choudry and Rochat 2020; Rochat 2021; Rochat et al. 2020). While Nick Hildyard identifies as an activist who does research among other activities, Rochat describes herself as a community worker who does archiving (Rochat 2021), mainly in/with Caribbean diaspora community organisations in Quebec such as La Maison d'Haiti. She contends that activists know how to collect, but not to archive. She documents an individual and collective learning process concerned with how to merge community work and archiving practices to support current and future community organising (Rochat 2021). She engages in and documents community activist archival work that is at the same time community-building and educative as newer generations critically engage with previous times through both documents and oral history. For her,

> [t]he archives of community-based organisations reflect the connections between different groups and movements, whether they be of the same community in different diasporic spaces (e.g. Haitian organisations in Haiti and in the diaspora) or between different communities who rally together to mobilise for change in the same geographical space. Maison d'Haiti and its members are part of a constellation of organisations and activists that connect different places, communities and struggles. Mapping those connections and highlighting them in the archives is a way to put forth and highlight memories and histories of different moments of collaboration that sustain community organizing. (Rochat et al. 2020, 124)

For Rochat (2021, 5), archiving black diasporic activism through this methodology "is a way to simultaneously preserve and generate collective knowledge that belong[s] to, and further[s], the Black radical tradition". Archives, then, need to be activated for the process of engagement and reflection necessary to re-examine political struggles that activists have been part of. Morrone (2014) also documents the work of progressive librarians and archivists, some of whom identify as activists, in the United States and Canada, and their commitment not only to preserving histories but also developing pedagogical resources, running research workshops for activists and more.

In many parts of the world, there are activists, organisers, and educators inside and outside universities and institutions who are committed to and engaged in radical public history and independent activist archives efforts. Sometimes the impetus for these initiatives comes from questions that arise from everyday struggles and organising challenges and frustrations. There is sometimes an awareness of the loss of history and potential conceptual resources with relevance for today without direct intervention by the community. Sometimes it arises from a desire not to keep reinventing the wheel, or to think through questions of power relations inside and outside organisations and movements that undermine the work or prevent them from growing. While such initiatives have sought to create spaces of critical reflection and analysis in person or in physical community spaces (Flinn 2011; Halim 2018; Rochat et al. 2020), there are a growing number of digital activist archive projects that not only seek to digitally preserve these histories and make them more widely accessible, but do so in ways that incorporate pedagogical/educational tools and resources to help frame and guide (inter)active engagement with the materials (Archivists Against History Repeating Itself n.d.; Morrone 2014). Some, such as the Interference Archive in New York, are independent initiatives created by activists, while others are collaborations between librarians, archivists and academics based in universities and movement activists.

For example, there are online archives of ephemera such as the African Activist Archive Project housed at Michigan State University (https://africanactivist.msu.edu/), which preserves and makes available online "records of activism in the United States to support the struggles of African peoples against colonialism, apartheid, and social injustice from the 1950s through the 1990s" (African Activist Archive n.d.). The website includes: growing online archives of historical materials—pamphlets, newsletters, leaflets, buttons (badges), posters, T-shirts, photographs, and audio and video recordings; personal remembrances and interviews with activists; and an international directory of collections deposited in libraries and archives (African Activist Archive n.d.; see also Timbs 2015). Other online archives include: the Tandana Archive on Britain's Asian Youth Movements (https://www.tandana.org/) (see also Ramamurthy 2013); the Canadian Farmworkers Union Project housed at Simon Fraser University (https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/special-collections/canadian-farmworkers-union); the South African History Archive (https://www.saha.org.za/index.htm); and the Palestinian Revolution project (http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/) (see also Nabulsi and Takriti 2016; Salhab 2018), a bilingual Arabic/English online learning resource that explores Palestinian revolutionary practice and thought from the Nakba of 1948 to the siege of Beirut in 1982.

At the same time, from within the tensions around the social construction and politics of knowledge production, broadly between professionalised actors and forms of knowledge (scientists, professional archivists) and activists/practitioners, some important debates and challenges to thinking about expertise (Narayan and Scandrett

2014; Rochat 2021; Torrado 2016), the legitimacy, ownership and use of knowledge/research have arisen.

Concluding Thoughts

Much of what is written on research and social change tends to emphasise particular methodologies and partnerships between researchers in academia and community groups. A considerable portion of this literature focuses more on various dilemmas faced by professional researchers in doing this work rather than engaging the experiences of movement/community activists who carry out research and the ways in which they understand their work. Some practitioners claim that certain methodologies and approaches to qualitative research are inherently oriented towards social justice, but others challenge this idea (see, for example, Choudry 2015; Naples 1998), suggesting that the purpose to which the research is put and how it can be used may be a better indicator of what constitutes activist research than specific methodologies.

Just as there could be said to be a generative tension between informal and incidental "struggle learning" and more programmatic forms of political education, so too perhaps there are similar kind of dynamics between different forms of research and knowledge production. As with Foley's (1999) observation about the need to stand back, reflect and critically re-order the incidental, informal learning that takes place in the everyday work of activism, a number of the approaches cited here emphasise the importance of standing back, reflecting, and collectively systematising experiences, observations and analysis born through practice as fundamental to movement research. In addition, identifying and categorising a stand-alone activity called "research" is difficult when it is inseparable from action, learning, and sometimes key to building stronger bonds and collective consciousness among communities and within struggles. Often, as noted earlier, the research is directed back into, and forms part of, ongoing organising work and is less tangible than a report or popular education resources. But also arising from this work—what British community archival scholar-practitioner Andrew Flinn calls "making history of the struggle part of the struggle" (in Choudry and Vally 2018, 21) —can come important challenges about the power to control, define and use these independent archives and people's histories that may call into question dominant practices and understandings of professional archivists and historians. Moreover, some important contributions to redefining thinking and practice on research are emerging from actual practice in social movements themselves, and the value of such research may well be greatly determined by the organising that happens around it and the possibilities for fostering collective consciousness and agency, as Hoffman (2019) and Francisco (2016) contend.

Acknowledgments

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