



*Review of **Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice.***

William K. Carroll. 2016. *Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice.* London: Zed Books. 236 pages, ISBN 978-1-7836-0603-0 Paper (\$19.95)

Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice is the new book by the renowned sociologist William K. Carroll. In this recent contribution, Carroll turns his attention to the political roles of a key set of civil society organizations, which he calls “transnational alternative policy groups” (TAPGs). The goal is to analyze whether these groups are facing up to the challenge of “producing and promulgating counter-hegemonic strategies, policies and visions capable of winning broad popular support and of serving as cognitive and cultural resources for a political shift: a transition from episodic defensive resistance to responsible radical proactivity” (7).

The book brings together a passionate commitment to this political agenda of change-from-below with rigorous research that combines social network data and in-depth interviews. It makes the book an important read not only to those who sympathize with Carroll’s political views, but for anyone interested in the dilemmas faced by the organizations he studies and, in fact, by anyone interested in debates about global governance and social justice.

The book is organized in eight chapters. These chapters can be read separately, but they complement each other very nicely, with surprisingly little repetition across the manuscript. The book presents readers with a rich account of the main challenges TAPGs face and how they are



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responding to them, the knowledge being produced by these actors, the practices they implement in building this knowledge, and their goals.

With the help of colleagues who feature as co-authors of three of the eight chapters, Elaine Coburn and J.P. Sapinski, William Carroll takes on the daunting task of presenting an in-depth analysis of sixteen key TAPGs, located in all regions of the world. In selecting the groups to be studied, the author made a conscious effort to divide them evenly between the global North and the global South. The goal is not to have a representative sample of TAPGs, and probably most readers will ask themselves why Carroll did not include other cases (I, for one, could name several interesting cases from Latin America). However, those that did get included in the book constitute undoubtedly a diverse and important group within the universe of organizations targeted by the author—that is, those whose mission is to produce “alternative knowledge.” The list ranges from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation to the Third World Forum and Focus on the Global South.

Carroll situates these TAPGs in the broader field of “global civil society” by presenting data on their ties with hundreds of other organizations (chapter 3). He also shows the broader networks of ties between TAPGs and think tanks and nongovernmental organizations, foundations, international governmental organizations, and “alt-media organizations” (chapters 5 and 7). The main source of the network data presented in the book is the Yearbook of International Organizations (YIO), sometimes complemented by other sources, such as organizations’ webpages and interviews. However, as the author readily admits (footnote 2 on page 84), the YIO data can be incomplete and even inconsistent at times. Most importantly, ties among organizations were loosely defined as any type of tie in the YIO dataset, so much so that in the sociograms presented along the book it is often unclear what these connections mean and what we can conclude from them.

These problems of missing data and an under-elaborated definition of “ties” would be more important ones if the book relied solely on social network analysis to draw its conclusions. However, this is not the case. Discussion of the insights derived from the social network analysis is interwoven with the author’s own insights and with countless quotes from the interviews.

No stone is left unturned by Carroll in these interviews. He asked tough questions, for instance on the issue of funding, to which he received candid responses. In fact, the book is filled with thoughtful quotes from high-ranked individuals in the selected organizations. In some cases, this candidness shows how deep divisions within the left run, and the enormous distrust these individuals and organizations have of some of the largest international NGOs.

In fact, the section entitled “Nuance in Understanding NGOs” (chapter 5) is an especially interesting part of the book. As the title promises, it offers a refined and critical analysis of the so-called “NGO-ization” process. Quotes from interviewees show contradictory reactions when asked about this process, from sweeping declarations on how “you can’t trust” some of the largest

international NGOs, to more subtle arguments on the need to identify “particular kinds of apolitical organizations whose goals increasingly get defined by their funding.” instead of talking about NGOs *per se* (132-133).

The topic of the potential impacts of new digital technologies on the work of TAPGs is mentioned briefly in chapter 7. However, in spite of acknowledging the relevance of these new platforms, Carroll does not engage in the debates about whether or not these initiatives are having a positive impact on the mobilization and construction of knowledge. But maybe this is a topic for Carroll’s next book.

Many of the challenges discussed in this book are faced not only by TAPGs, but by civil society organizations in general, including grassroots social movements and labor unions. It should not be read, however, as a book that offers a single path ahead. In fact, the contrary is true: it denies that one, clear way ahead exists. As an interviewee stated, “we have a common vision in that there is not a common vision” (195). And that is a good thing.

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