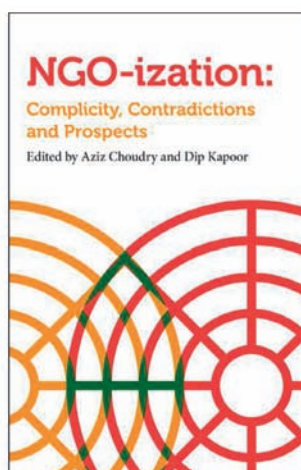


NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects

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Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor (eds)

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Non-governmental organisations have provided humanitarian aid and advocacy for human rights since the United Nations first coined the term in 1945. These critical essays shed light on the intriguing question of whether NGOs continue to pursue their noble goals. The book sets out how the advent of “NGOisation” – the professionalisation and institutionalisation of social action – has watered down the resistance struggles of grassroots social movements and communities. NGO intervention tends to support more “civilised” and “conformist” approaches that are cut off from local realities of popular struggles. The goal of NGOisation is to undermine the militancy of movements while ignoring or failing to address the systematic and global force of neoliberalism.

Even movements that are concerned about the needs of communities have been constrained by the neoliberal framework in which they operate, making it difficult to create a counter-hegemonic force that is controlled by

and rooted in communities. Some NGOs are therefore the products of neoliberalism, and cannot be viewed as neutral entities advancing humanitarian causes: they are highly involved in the socio-political environment. NGOs represent contested political and environmental interests.

The role of NGOs can also be linked with colonialism and capitalism – hence the inference that they are the “handmaidens of imperialism”. The book raises questions with regard to the relations between the NGO, the state and the market, which may be blurred by the complex roles played by some NGOs as they spread their wings across the globe. One writer remarks that contemporary NGOs are “one more institutional form through which class relations are being contested and reworked”. The authors show that NGOs, in complicity with state and private sector interests, have undermined local and international movements for social change and environmental justice. Delving into these challenges, the book provides a platform for disempowered communities whose voices have often been drowned out by those of the powerful. Numerous case studies drawn from various countries make for an interesting read.

While challenging the common belief that NGOs are a panacea for the problems facing communities, *NGOization* should not be seen as an attack on the existence of NGOs in society. Some have contributed



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immensely toward addressing socio-economic challenges. I think its intention is to awaken the critical faculty of the reader to the role of development agents in society, especially in a context where NGOs move across the globe to advance certain development goals and interests. The question worth asking is: "Does the NGO represent the interests of the communities and movements it claims to align with?" Given their role in

sensitive development issues in the host country, the possibility of meddling in local politics cannot be ruled out – especially given the fact that some NGOs continue to carry the flag of their countries of origin, and subscribe to their national agendas. Well-written and punctuated with relevant case studies and experiences that any reader can relate to their own country's situation, the book is a must-read.

