

KATHARINE HAMNETT  
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MAKE POVERTY HISTORY

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# Interface

A journal by and for social movements

VOL 1 ISSUE 2: 'CIVIL SOCIETY' VS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

## **Interface issue 2: civil society vs social movements**

**Interface: a journal for and about social movements**

**Volume 1 number 2 (November 2009)**

**ISSN 2009 – 2431**

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The *Interface* website is based at the National University of Ireland Maynooth.

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## **Resist all degradations and divisions**

### **S'bu Zikode in interview with Richard Pithouse<sup>1</sup>**

*As we go to press the Kennedy Road settlement, where the Abahlali baseMjondolo shack-dweller's movement had its office, has come under violent attack from government supporters. In the presence of a passive police force and the local ANC councillor, the homes of 27 Abahlali leaders, including Zikode, were destroyed in a 24-hour rampage, leaving 2 dead and many wounded, and hundreds of people displaced. Many Abahlali activists are now in hiding; 21 have been arrested (but none of the attackers); and death threats issued against Zikode and other elected leaders in the movement including Mashumi Figlan and Zodwa Nsibande. The settlement remains under the control of armed government supporters who are backed by the police and continue to threaten remaining Abahlali activists with the demolition of their homes if they do not publicly renounce the organisation. For updates and details on how you can support Abahlali, please see [www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org)<sup>2</sup>*

#### **Tell me something about where you were born and who your family were.**

I was born in a village called Loskop which is near the town called Estcourt. It is in the Natal Midlands. I was born in 1975. I have a twin sister, her name is Thoko. We are now the last born. I have two other sisters. I also had a brother who passed away so I am the only son.

And when we grew up, very early, at the age of 7 years, when Thoko and I started school, our parents separated. We grew up with mother who used to work as a domestic worker. She would mostly be at work and we would remain with her sister most of the days. We did not have mother close to us. She would come once a month. And then we grew from different hands. When we were doing primary school we went to more than four schools. My mother would be away and it would be hard for her to support us so we grew up with different families. They were all good to us.

When I look back I can see that that helped me a lot; learning at different schools, living with different relatives.

#### **Where was your mother working?**

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<sup>1</sup> This interview took place at the Kennedy Road settlement on 25 January 2009. Zikode made some minor edits and additions to the interview transcript on 8 April 2009 following which the explanatory footnotes were added by Pithouse. Zikode made some final additions to the transcript on 24 April 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See also the discussion of Abahlali's emancipatory politics in Michael Neocosmos' article elsewhere in this issue.

In Estcourt, in town. From town to Loskop, today you are paying R9. The distance is 32 kilometres. She would come once a month.

**That must have been very difficult for the children.**

Ja, very difficult. Very difficult.

**How was she treated by the people she worked for?**

No, they were quite good people. Sometime we would visit her and I remember that they bought me a bike. They were good people. The problem is this system where so many women have no choice but to leave their homes and wash and clean for other families.

When I was older they also found me a job. When I was at school they found me a job too. I was working with their boys as well, in one of the bottle stores, pushing trolleys. They'd call me over the weekends and I'd do some temporary jobs.

**But you were well looked after by the wider family.**

Yes, and when I was doing Standard Three I joined Boy Scouts. I had the opportunity to go on camps and other trainings and I learned a lot about manhood. Scouting was about training future men, future citizens. I was lucky to be appointed as a leader and to have the opportunity to attend even more trainings. I remember one of the trainings that I attended in Pietermaritzburg, Lexden<sup>3</sup>.

**I went to Lexden as well!**

Ey, you know! The Patrol Leaders' Training Unit! There was a lot of growth and learning. It was winter time. I can remember very vividly, it was difficult. And you had to decide whether to continue with this or to resign from being a Boy Scout. I remember when I returned back to the school and reported to the principal, because I would report directly to the principal who knew more about Scouts, he laughed a lot and I knew that he knew exactly what was going to happen. He asked me if I would still continue and I said 'Ja'. A lot of lessons I learnt from there, from the hardship. It was preparing me for the worst to come and I have seen it in recent years. I am sure that I was shaped and made to be able to face the challenges that we are now facing.

But it wasn't just the hardship at Lexden. It was also the focus on responsibility and involvement in the community. I remember the Scout Motto: 'Be Prepared'.

And there was also a Scout Promise; that you promise to do your duty to God and to your country, to help other people at all times and to obey the Scout's Law. I was still young and fresh at that time. I learnt the Scout's Law. A Scout's honour is to be trusted, a Scout is loyal, a Scout's duty is to be useful and to help

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<sup>3</sup> Lexden is a campsite where the Boy Scouts run two week leadership training programmes. In the 1980s and early 1990s it was run along the lines of a boot camp with physical exhaustion, sleep deprivation, cold showers in the winter and so on.



others, a Scout is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout, a Scout tries his best to do at least one good turn to somebody every day.

The things that I do today, for me are something that grew up in myself; my understanding of society, the social context, what the expectations are and what kind of society we are looking for.

So there was no politics but leadership was in my veins. Even at the high school level I was invited to start a Scout's movement at my school, which I did because I was growing with other boys, and then there was also a demand from the girls to start their movement. I only met the Girl Guides at the jamboree. The jamboree is a big event that brings all the Scouts and Guides together. It is one of the happiest days of your life as a young person to get to meet all different people from different spaces. It's like the WSF<sup>4</sup>....(laughing).

The Jamboree took place in Howick, at the Midmar dam. It was mostly outdoor activities and this is how I became interested in the outdoor environment. There was a lot about how the environment is a heritage to be cherished and protected - to be enriched by our future generation - and I became very interested in plants and animals.

After the jamboree we sought the assistance from other schools to form the Girl Guides. We had seen all these boys working together, learning skills that were unknown in the community and the girls demanded the same. They had seen their brothers growing and wanted the same pride. It really shaped me a lot.

At the high school level I became more interested in ideas. I found that I could grasp things quickly and easily, especially in English and History. The teachers would often ask me to read ahead to prepare the lesson. I remember vividly how I was asked to learn about the Voortrekkers – how I learnt that to the dictionary. I had to analyse the meaning of each word all by myself ahead of others. I remember how I had to start by cutting this word Voortrekkers and to understand the word 'voor' and then 'trekkers'. Doing all these analysis it slowly became clear that we were learning about the Boers who travelled or came first in Natal. But, still, I was lucky to be given this opportunity because I learnt how to analyse things on my own and then to share the ideas. History was really about remembering dates and I found that I had a good memory.

Things were positive. I was still too young to understand the outside politics, even the family related stuff, what problems were at home. And I was fortunate in being able to finish high school, from Standard Six right through to Matric, in one high school. But in the primary school it was really difficult being circled in one family.

**When you were growing up in Estcourt it was the time of the transition with Mandela being released and the ANC being**

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<sup>4</sup> The World Social Forum.

**unbanned. Did you think about politics much or was there much politics happening around you?**

There was a lot of fighting, heavy fights. I remember my friend was shot just in front of me when we were together in a rural farm - you know these plantations where crops such as mealies<sup>5</sup> get planted and grow very high with grass in times like autumn. In summer, as the grass began to grow very high, there was this fighting and shooting. Sometimes the army would boost the other side. In politics and fighting I was not involved but in the area where I stayed there was a strong presence of Inkatha<sup>6</sup>. And in the Zulu tradition we believe that you do not run away in times of war. This was also the culture of Inkatha. So when there is a gunshot they would quickly mobilise and everyone goes - every man and every boy. It's compulsory. You were not asked whether you joined the party or not but you had to defend your vicinity, your surroundings. So we were involved in that way knowing that the fight was between Inkatha and the ANC. Mostly from the ANC side there would be soldiers hiding, and also shooting. You would think that you'd be fighting the other side only to find that you are fighting the army because the army would also be taking sides. They made it clear that they were not there to make peace. So, I mean, I was involved in that battle in the real fighting, in the life and blood of that time. The only way to free oneself was that one would hide when one gets shot. When someone needed an ambulance you could quickly assume that responsibility of facilitating first aid and calling or waiting for the ambulance to come. That could be a way out of the battle.

At school there wasn't much politics but I used to take part in the debates. Formal debates were mostly on politics but the idea was to learn to speak English - that was the whole point. But obviously the speeches that we wrote - I remember that we often learnt more from Lucky Dube, from Mzwakhe Mbuli, and so a lot of our quotes were generated from their music and poetry. It had a lot of politic. Although we were still young to understand the outside world a clear message would come. There was also the study of *Ubuntu*<sup>7</sup>. It was learnt at school at that time. But when we fought, when we were involved in the fight, our lives were completely independent from politics.

Scouting was also a completely non-political movement, although there were a lot of accusations from outside. People were calling us Gatsha's sons<sup>8</sup> because you wear this khaki uniform which was nearly the same as the IFP uniform at that time. But we did not balk because we had nothing to do with that.

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<sup>5</sup> Maize.

<sup>6</sup> A Zulu nationalist movement that became complicit with apartheid.

<sup>7</sup> Ubuntu is the word, in a number of South African languages, for humanism and a set of beliefs and practices animated by a conception of humanism best known through the saying a person is a person through other people. It has been put to a range of political uses.

<sup>8</sup> Gatscha is a nickname, which became derogatory, for Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Zulu Prince and leader of Inkatha.

A year later when I finished school the fight was also involved at my school. I remember that some of my friends had to pull out of school because of the fighting. But in my day it didn't reach the schools. We also felt that politics was outside the school, it was something that was difficult to understand. I remember the content of the debates; the concepts and arguments were shaped by that. But we were more judged by the fluency of the language.

But we would fight the battles that we didn't understand. The mobilization tactics that were used, by the nature of being Zulu you were forced to join Inkatha. I do not remember any membership cards or even how they looked like but you would never be asked. You would be forced to come out and fight. We didn't know what we were fighting. Many people were killed at that stage. At that stage we attended a lot of funerals. In our culture we were not supposed to be attending funerals as children but it became a normal thing to attend funerals. If you didn't attend those funerals you would be accused of siding with the other party - with the ANC. It was just a difficult and confusing situation. I mean we were still very young to understand. I strongly feel that a lot of people died for no course, they did not know what they were fighting for, except that they were forced to go to war bare handed - no strategy, no politic, no ideas, no education. I strongly feel a lot of innocent died for nothing.

I remember that you once said to me that that some of our politicians, people on both sides of the ANC and IFP divide, can only understand politics in terms of killing. The history of all this killing is usually told in a very simple way with all the good people in the ANC and all the bad people in the IFP – but there were warlords on both sides.

I remember even the terminology of Scouting, how it was used in the fighting. There would be a group of volunteers, amongst a group of men, who would volunteer to launch an aggressive attack and the terminology that was used was that they were scouts. And then we'd know for sure that the next day there would be mourning and blood, there would be dead bodies. My understanding was that to be well known, to be well respected as a person who is fighting, who is struggling for the country, you had got to kill. It was not only that you had to defend your community – you also had to be aggressive, to launch some attacks on the other side. You become known like that, you become respected.

The other dirty thing that used to happen, that used to influence the whole thing, was that if you are a school boy you would be perceived as an ANC member. So to be well recognised and well respected you must not go to school, you must not have a bath, you must not be involved with water, and you must not be smart. You must become a nasty and clumsy person. I don't know where this idea came from but a lot of smart people with tranquillity were killed not because they were members of the ANC but because they looked good, because they looked different from the others, the ones doing the fighting. From that time it was when I began to think that this was just about killing. The only reality is that people were dying. People did not know what they were dying for, what they were fighting for or what they were killing for. Even elderly people in the struggle did not understand politics. If such people were to be interviewed

now I'm not sure if they could say clearly what they were dying for, being killed for.

As Zulus we were encouraged not to hide, not to run away. Instead we must face the war. What became clear was that the IFP did not have guns. Most people who had guns were ANC members. With shields and sticks it was quite difficult to fight people with guns.

I've talked so much about the IFP because I was in Loskop, a stronghold of the IFP. I remember also going to Wembezi, a township in Estcourt, and a lot of people were shot in our presence.

I know that a similar strategy was used on the other side. A group of people would be trained to attack. You know those massacres that are often referred to - they were part of a well planned fight. But this fight also killed innocent people and those that were killed did not know what they were killed for. Once a son was suspected to have been involved he was killed – being suspected was what you died for. That was the horrible situation. I cannot imagine how some of the people who are now in government, with blood in their hands, have never regretted.

As Zulu people you were mostly respected for being a good fighter. It was the whole initial tradition – that being a good fighter gives you respect. As a good fighter you would be given a position as a commander of an aggressive group – that was the whole idea. When there were these mass attacks it was always organised. When there were funerals, where there were services, prayers, or any other traditional gatherings - a lot of people together - they were just seen as an opportunity to kill people. What counts is how many people were killed. That was the whole idea. When people praised themselves they talked about how many people they had killed, not about why they were killing, not about any politics.

Because of the South African history you still ask yourself if people in power are now matured to really understand politics. They assume that if we don't have similar ideas to them that automatically make us enemies. I doubt if people are yet in the position of understanding politics. If you do not agree with my ideas then you must die. I am sure that it is going to take time for people to understand that politics is about ideas, about discussion, should be about love and passion for one's country, so any tactic should be about how to serve the world better, how to win minds and heart of the majority. It is going to take even longer for people to understand that those debates should be open to everyone, that a real politics is not about how many people you are willing to arrest, threaten or kill; that a real politics is not a fight to be able to abuse state power but that a real politics is in fact about how many people you are willing to listen to and to serve – and to listen to them and to serve them as it pleases them, not yourself.

### **When did you first come to Durban?**

I began matric in 1996 and that was also the year that I first came to Durban. During the weekends and when the schools were closed I stayed with my

brother-in-law in Moore Road, in Glenwood. There's a flat behind Berea Centre, 264, it's called Cardigan Mansions. He was paid well. He was working as a mechanic. I worked temporary in Victoria Street in one of the stores that sells clothing, its called Smilesen's. And I worked for City Girl's stores in Greyville, in Game City Centre. I spent a lot of years working for City Girl stores.

### **How was it to be in Durban compared to Loskop?**

Ja, it was peaceful. I was living in this rich area, Glenwood. It was different. From work I'd go directly to the flat. I had no friends in Durban. As such life isolated me away from ordinary people a lot of thinking began. I began to realise how poor I was.

### **And university?**

Well I finished my matric that year and I did well, but not as well as had been expected. There had been a lot of hope for me at the school but, you know, as you grow you begin to reflect back on things, you come to be aware of a lot of things. When you begin to reflect on the environment a lot of things begin to disturb you, to disturb your intelligence. It was also the time when I realised how I had survived the very trying circumstances over the past few years.

And obviously there was never any guidance at school so it was very difficult to proceed with tertiary education. But the following year I was fortunate to be admitted at the former UDW, the University of Durban-Westville as it used to be called. I enrolled for law. All I wanted was to become a lawyer.

### **Why Law?**

In school a lot was said about teaching and being a policeman for the boys and a nurse for the girls. Those were the only chances and that is why we have a lot of teaches nurses, and policemen. I was encouraged at school to be a teacher but I decided to differ.

### **What was it like to be student?**

I was not under any parental care so it was difficult. When I arrived here I had no friends. It was hard to imagine how life could be so difficult. My brother-in-law gave me a place to stay but obviously I was not his burden so I could just appreciate his accommodation. My studies were a separate deal that was beyond his burden.

I was very lonely. It was not interesting at all because I was still new in the institution without knowing anybody. It was difficult to get used to the institution and I was a very shy person; in fact when I grew up I never used to talk. Through the Scouting thing then I began to slowly become more confident. Even people who sometimes see me on the TV often don't believe it, that that man used to be so quiet in the class and now he can talk everywhere.

When I saw the challenges of being grown up that's when I began to realise that in fact school days were the happiest days of my life. I didn't want to stress people. I had to find ways of surviving. With school it was completely different. Now I had to study and I had to think of all of this, financing my studies,

accommodation, and food. And so I had to withdraw from the university and continue working as a security guard.

In 1997 a teacher went on maternity leave at my school and they wanted me to stand in. They wanted me because the well respected Circuit Inspector had promised me after coming back from Lexden that should I fail to proceed with tertiary education he would find me a school to teach. This was public commitment and promise in a gathering full of teachers, parents and scholars. I was highly congratulated for this personal commitment of a Circuit Inspector. They looked all over for me but by the time they found me it was too late – and so I carried on working as a security guard. I was all by myself.

### **Being a security guard, how was that?**

No, that was terrible. I was still young. The people that I was working for were robbing me, sometimes they wouldn't pay me. I was like earning R500 a month, sometimes this guy would give me R300. I was just well grown up, having dropped from school and then being treated like that. It was difficult but of course when I found this job at the petrol station it was much better. So even today I listen when Mashumi<sup>9</sup> shares his stories of being a security guard.

### **Was the work dangerous?**

It was. It was, ja. There were organised groups, like shoplifters, in town. They would go into the store together. One of them would keep you busy and the others would start stealing. Some of those shops, like City Girl, would have this alarm, so I would just stand by the door and watch people passing because each garment would have this alarm. That was much better. After the security job I was employed at the petrol station.

### **And working at the petrol station?**

Well in 1997 I met Sindy<sup>10</sup>. We were working together at the petrol station. She had good parents. Her mother is still working here at Tollgate, in Manor Gardens. She is working for nice people. In Sindy's family there are ten of them, eight girls with two brothers. She was staying with her mother there in Tollgate and came to work in Springfield Park. She had also finished her matric and then had to find a job. With us, in our growth, the most important thing was to finish matric then the other stuff, well, that would be an additional luck.

### **When did you come to the Kennedy Road settlement?**

Before I came to the settlement I lived in Umlazi. It was difficult to travel with trains. And, also, I had no friends there. It was difficult, it was difficult. Then in 1999 I started living here in Elf Place<sup>11</sup>. Because I was working at the Springfield

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<sup>9</sup> Mashumi Figland, elected to the positions of Chairperson of the Kennedy Road settlement and Deputy President of Abahlali baseMjondolo in 2008 and 2009, works as a security guard.

<sup>10</sup> Sindy Mkhize. She is Zikodes life partner.

<sup>11</sup> Elf Place is in the suburb of Clare Estate, near to the petrol station where Zikode was working and near, also, to the Kennedy Road settlement.



Park Service Station station, it is just here, opposite Makro. But I couldn't pay my rent. I would just work for the rent. You don't get paid much at the petrol station. As a patrol attendant you earn like R200 a week.

Then I was promoted to cashier and then they started teaching me computer at the back office. That's how things moved. After five years we moved to the PetroPort, in Queen Nandi Drive which is on the N2 Freeway, just before the Gateway Shopping Mall.

### **What was it like when you first came to the settlement?**

Well when I was still attending at the UDW and passing the shacks I hadn't known what the shacks were looking like so I couldn't believe it. Later when I was working at the petrol station and living here in Elf Place it was easy to use the spaza shop here in the settlement and life was quite good. Obviously I could feel shame that people were living this life because I did not believe that one day I would be living here. It was tough. But coming here to use the shops I began to meet people and then as the rent was going high we started talking to people and I found a place to rent here.

I remember that we started renting here at R80, it was R80! (Laughs) In Elf place the rent was R600 a month and we had to share the rent with other people living there. We ended up having to pay R200 a month. So this was much better. We had our own place and we could even save some money. When we came here we were much relieved. Life was much better because we could live close to work and schools at an affordable cost.

But I told myself that this was not yet an acceptable life. Although I didn't know politics that much I felt that the community did not do enough to struggle for housing, for toilets, enough water. It was not acceptable for human beings to live like that and so I committed myself to change things.

### **What kind of organisation was there in Kennedy Road at that time?**

Well the chairperson at that time was Jarphas Ndlovu. He had been chairperson for like 6 years. There were no elections.

Meetings would be called and one or two people would be known to be the committee but one man would do everything – that's how it used to work. Only one man was respected in the community. Everything had to be reported to him. There was no committee meeting. Community meetings would sometimes be called but not committee meetings. I involved myself and attended these meetings but only to find that only one man was talking and that people were failing to cope with the politics and development issues that were being spoken about. They were not given the information that you need to participate. Even the committee, if they would go meet with City they would just stand outside, while he was inside. He would also meet with the ratepayer's association<sup>12</sup> on his

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<sup>12</sup> Rate Payers Associations represent residents of an area who own formal accommodation for which they pay municipal taxes i.e. middle class and wealthy residents. They usually agitate for shack dwellers to be evicted from their suburbs.

own. He had some shops, and he rented out some shacks. People feared him. You know that old tradition of the Indunas<sup>13</sup>. There is a kind of respect but it is not a democratic respect.

I realised that if the community was going to be able to participate in their own development then we would have to create a democracy in the settlement, to elect a committee. It made no sense that we were voting for politicians to sit in parliament but in our own communities we still had to listen to Indunas.

### **What was the political affiliation of the Induna?**

He was an IFP. But the settlement was always made by different groups of people.

It was difficult to get rid of the old leadership. We mobilised the young people. We started with youth activities, like clean up campaigns, and then when the people were mobilised we struggled to force that there must be elections, that there must be democracy.

### **How did people respond?**

They were well relieved. After that first democratic election, it was in 2000, we restructured everything in terms of democracy. We had a lot of discussions about democracy.

### **Was that when you were first elected as chairperson?**

Yes.

### **How old were you?**

I was still young. 25.

### **And what was your political affiliation?**

When I came here I was not interested in party politics. I had begun to hate party politics from what I had learnt from the IFP while I was still at home. For me politics was a dirty game. And there wasn't really much interest in politics in the settlement. Most people just saw it as this dirty game.

But these guys from outside, led by Mabeneza<sup>14</sup>, started to come to the settlement, to organise meetings, campaigning for the ANC. That's when I became interested because of the way that they were engaging and approaching the young people. They were saying that we could mobilise ourselves for a better life. We had all seen the transition to democracy at the national level. The ANC was the party of Mandela. But at the local level what I liked was what I hadn't had since my school days – an opportunity to meet other young people and to

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<sup>13</sup> In precolonial times this term referred to a person mandated to represent a community to the Zulu king. However it was later co-opted into the governance of colonialism and apartheid as political systems as well as the management of mines, factories and so on. It is now often a pejorative term.

<sup>14</sup> A local ANC leader.

engage. And it was also a platform to engage on political matters which was an opportunity to work for the changes that I was looking for.

And seeing that the ANC was in government I thought that it could be an easy tool to transform this community. I thought that the ANC would be a platform for the shack dwellers and that it would be able to deliver.

As residents of the informal settlements, we were considered as temporal communities. There was an inference that we were not entitled to full citizenship in this area. We thought that all we had to do to secure our place here, here in the city, was to take the initiative to support the ANC.

So in 2002 I joined the ANC and was elected to the Branch Executive Committee (BEC). The following year I became the Deputy Chairperson of the ANC branch in Ward 25.

For some years I was in the BEC. The reality is that we did not understand politics. Baig<sup>15</sup> was brought in from the outside, imposed from the top. He was not known to the community. But because he was an ANC we did not question that. We did not question the wisdom of the party and so we did not worry about it that much although it was clear that there wasn't any fairness, any democracy.

This wasn't like Inkatha when I was growing. I wasn't made to do it. I was very active. I did it because I had my own ideas, because I thought that we should mobilise the people for a better life. But I was mobilising for the party and we made compromises for the party. Of course we discovered that mobilising for the people and mobilising for the party is not the same thing.

### **How did the break with the ANC come about?**

Well a lot was happening. Former housing minister Dumisani Makhaye introduced the Slums Clearance programme with a budget of R200 million. A Slums Clearance committee was set up in partnership with the eThekweni Municipality, it included a number of wards. I was also elected to that committee. Kennedy Road was one of the communities that was meant to benefit from this programme. There was a settlement down there by the bridge, it was called eVukani. Those people were moved to Welbedacht. Some of the people from the Quarry Road settlement were moved to Parkgate<sup>16</sup>. I remember taking a tour to Parkgate with the Slums Clearance committee. It was before the houses were built there, it was still sugarcane.

That is when I became conscious, that is when I became a conscious activist. I remember when we were getting into this microbus from the metro with nice air conditioning. I remember how we were told to get into those kombis but not told where we were going. I remember as we went past all those bridges that you pass as you leave the city. The further away we moved the more worried I was.

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<sup>15</sup> Yakoob Baig is the ANC councillor for Ward 25.

<sup>16</sup> Welbedacht, like Parkgate, is an out of town relocation site to which shack dwellers living in the city are being removed, often forcibly and unlawfully.

We had been very excited but the comrades all became quite as we went further and further away from the city. We became very shocked. Then we arrived at a farm and we were told that this would be where our houses would be built.

Even today I do not understand the link between the BEC of the ANC and the development that took place. These projects had never been discussed with the BEC. Even when the minister announced the Slum Clearance programme it had never been discussed at the branch level. It was a top down system, a completely top down system. For this reason I continue to question the relevance of the BEC. I continue to see it as nothing but a way for the party leaders to control the people. The only job of the BECs is to keep branches vibrant for elections. They are not there to bring about development, they are not there for any political education or political discussion. They are not there to take the views of the people up. Rather they are there for people to be enslaved and to remain slaves for the benefit of those that have been ruthless enough to rise up.

All of us in that committee had hope. We had a good heart to see change in our communities. But we did not know how politics worked. The first problem was that we had been promised that Kennedy Road would benefit but when it didn't it was hard to question that within the ANC structures.

When the promises became lies we felt that we had been used – just used to keep the people loyal while they were being betrayed. We had been used so that the people in power could fulfil their own ambitions, their own project. We were used as ladders so that they could climb up over the people to their positions. The way the system works makes it impossible for people to call their leaders into account. The resources are there but the system allows leaders to only think for themselves. There is no mechanism for accountability. There is always budget for elite projects but each and every year nothing is spoken about how to achieve real change for ordinary people.

### **When did you become a police reservist?**

When I was working at the petrol station. I was ordered to work at least eight hours a month and to attend some police courses at the Edgewood College<sup>17</sup>. I did a lot of volunteer work in the charge office there. I worked for, like five years, as a reservist. This was part of the decision I had made to fulfil my duty to my country.

I was forced to this. It was not that I liked to be a policeman. I was still new at the settlement and I arrived at the charge office and saw a women crying. She had a baby on her back. I asked her why she was weeping outside and she said that she had been chased out because she couldn't speak English. I asked her to come inside with me and I translated. I was touched and angry - worried about how many poor people like her would not be assisted because they could not speak English. That's when I took the decision to become a reservist. I thought

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<sup>17</sup> A former teacher's training college, now one of the campuses of the new University of KwaZulu-Natal produced after a series of mergers aimed at rationalisation the higher education system.

that with my English I could ensure that people would have their dignity respected.

It wasn't easy. There were interviews and tests. But when I finished it all I was never given a chance to learn at the charge office. I was just made to cook for the prisoners and to dish out for them. I was annoyed. I became to be suspicious and conscious about what was happening at the police station. The Superintendent wasn't Nayager<sup>18</sup> at that time – it was Senior Superintendent Marais.

I remember our first march on the police station – it was in 2005, that march where we were saying 'release them all or arrest us all'. Superintendent Marais met with Baba Duma, Chazumzi<sup>19</sup> – I still have minutes of that meeting. Shortly after that march Marais left and Nayager came.

### **Was the racism the same?**

Oh yes. It wasn't just the senior officers. The racism was just a normal thing. It was an Indian police station – not a police station for everyone. As an African you were treated like a servant, like dirt. I could not stand it. I made a small contribution where I could. Because, you know, people are victimised and go to that police station and are just further victimised by this racism at the hands of the law. When I could I helped people but I could not transform the station. I was a victim there myself. It was quite difficult. I resigned from the police force in 2004 because of the racism. It blocked every possibility for bringing about some little progress. The only time that I ever got to do anything there beyond being a servant was during weekends where there was family violence or students having parties, any kind of noise or fight. I would be deployed to deal with drunkard Africans. It was believed that they would understand me better than any Indian police men.

But, you know, those experiences did help me.

**So, given that you'd been a police reservist, and that you were on the BEC of the local ANC did the road blockade in 2005<sup>20</sup> come as a surprise?**

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<sup>18</sup> For some years Glen Nayager, the current Superintendent of the Sydenham Police station, waged a campaign of often violent harassment and intimidation against Abalali baseMjondolo. In 2007 Nayager had himself filmed by fellow officers as he assaulted S'bu Zikode and the then Deputy President of Abahlali baseMjondolo, Philani Zungu while they were cuffed at the wrists and ankles.

<sup>19</sup> Baba Duma and the late Cosmos 'Chazmuzi' Bhengu both held positions on the Kennedy Road Development Committee in 2005 and later became activists in Abahlali baseMjondolo.

<sup>20</sup> On 19 March 2005 hundreds of residents of Kennedy Road blocked the nearby six lane Umgeni Road and held it for four hours resulting in fourteen arrests. This event inaugurated a sequence of political events that culminated in the founding of Abahlali baseMjondolo seven months later.

No, it wasn't a surprise. The Kennedy Road Development Committee (KRDC) shaped this. In 2004 the KRDC declared that 2005 would be the year of action. We said that we were tired of this, tired of all of the lies and deeply disappointed with the previous engagement with the City. We would not compromise our future because of our loyalty to the ANC. So the road blockade was not a surprise but what did become a surprise was to see a protest becoming a movement, to see other settlements joining us.

**In 2004 there were road blockades and protests all over the country and these protests became even more common in 2005. Were people in Kennedy Road inspired by what they saw in the media?**

In my personal experience no. It really came from a very personal experience of betrayal. But I always asked myself how it was that 2005 became a national year of action. I am not too sure with others but for me it was not that one read about other road blockades and became motivated. The anger here in Kennedy Road was growing and growing – it could have gone in many directions but people decided to block the road.

**How was the day of the road blockade?**

It was good. We were all so full of anger that there was no regret. It was difficult to turn against our comrades in the ANC but we weren't attacking them personally. We wanted to make them aware that all these meetings of the ANC - the BEC meetings, the Branch General Meetings, they were all a waste of time. In fact they were further oppressing us in a number of ways. They were just there to keep the ball rolling up until the next election. Our job as local leaders was just to mobilise people for the ANC.

It had become clear that the only space for the poor in the ANC was as voters – there was no politics of the poor in the ANC. The road blockade was the beginning of a politics of the poor.

**As you know I first came to Kennedy Road the day after the road blockade. People had just tried to march on the police station and had been beaten back. The settlement was occupied by the police and there was a very strong sense of people being on their own. That must have been a heavy weight to carry.**

Ja, definitely. That was not easy. But we had to stand firm. That was the reality.

I had no idea that a movement would be formed, no idea. And I didn't know what form would be taken by the politics of the poor that became possible after the road blockade. I didn't know what impact it would have. That is why it is quite difficult when I get interviewed. Most people think that this was planned – that a group of people sat down and decided to establish a movement. You know, how the NGOs work.

There has been a lot of analysis and interpretation of the movement – sometimes we read it in papers. But all we knew was that we had decided to make the break. To accept that we were on our own and to insist that the people could not be ladders any more; that the new politics had to be led by poor



people and to be for poor people; that nothing could be decided for us without us. The road blockade was the start. We didn't know what would come next. After the blockade we discussed things and then we decided on a second step. That's how it went, that's how it grew. We learnt as we went. It is still like that now. We discuss things until we have decided on the next step and then we take it. Personally I have learnt a lot.

**There was a tremendous collective excitement and pride in the beginning. Did you share that? Or were you, as a leader, under too much pressure?**

Ja, although I was very angry with everything from a political point of view, very angry with the way the ANC was treating the people, very angry with their policies, I felt very confident when we began to rebel. I found my inner peace. The real danger when things go wrong like this is being silence. When you voice out, cough it out then you can heal. You can find this faith in yourself. There is all this frustration and humiliation. Humiliation from the way you are forced to live and humiliation from the way you are treated. When it is expressed it is like taking out a poison. You become free to act and you become angry and that anger is the source of an incredible energy.

So even though we didn't have the houses we had found our voice. We didn't have all the answers. But the fact that we had built this platform, that on its own was a very remarkable progress.

**Was it difficult to move from being one settlement in rebellion to linking up with other settlements and building a movement?**

No, it wasn't difficult to link up with other settlements. From my experience in the ANC, and on the BEC, I knew people in the other settlements, and we were all having similar problems so it was actually easy to build up this movement.

You had worked with the ANC, the BEC and their councillors.

**Now you were leading marches at which the councillors were being symbolically buried<sup>21</sup>. Was that difficult? Were you under a lot of pressure?**

Not really. Of course things were said and threats were made but I was very confident because I knew that I was now fighting for what I strongly believed was right. And of course we were not alone. When you are thousands you are not intimidated. So, regardless of politics, of who said what, we just carried on. And for me personally I had nothing to lose. My involvement with the ANC, my position on the BEC, had done nothing for the people. In the party you make compromises for some bigger picture but in the end all what is real is the suffering of the people right in front of you. In fact it had become a shame. To

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<sup>21</sup> In the period between the road blockade organised by the Kennedy Road settlement and the formation of Abahlali baseMjondolo a series of marches were organised against local councillors at which they were symbolically buried – the point being to declare the political autonomy of the settlements from top down party control.

say that 'enough is enough' is to walk away from that shame. Instead of the party telling the community what to do the community was now deciding what to do on its own.

The only pressure came when people were arrested. And in the first arrest there were two teenagers amongst the 14 that were taken to Westville Prison so there was also pressure from the parents.

**Today you have over ten thousand paid up members and many more supporters. When the decision was taken to form the movement, that was on the 6th of October 2005, just after the Quarry Road march<sup>22</sup>, did you have any sense of what the movement would become?**

No, not that much. But what I knew, what I was aware of, was that the coming together of these settlements would turn us into a collective force. That it would strengthen the rebellion that was started in Kennedy Road. I didn't have a picture of how the movement is now. But I understood what democracy should be about and that our voice would become more louder the more we are. I knew that it would become a heavy political force.

**There has been a lot of academic speculation, much of not researched at all, about where the politics of Abahlalisms comes from. Some people have said it comes from the popular struggles of the 1980s with their stress on bottom up democratic practice, others have said that it comes from the churches with their stress on the dignity of each person, others have said that it is something completely new. Where do you think that it comes from?**

When things go wrong silence speaks volumes. Silence is the voice of the defeated, people whose spirits have been vandalized. It is a big danger to be silence in times of trying circumstances. Condemning injustice, calling it by its real names, and doing this together; that on its own does a lot. That on its own is a kind of change, a lot of change.

The movement comes from recognition of this danger in conjunction with our cultural beliefs. It is a common sense that everyone is equal, that everyone matters, that the world must be shared.

My understanding is that this common sense comes from the very new spirit of ubuntu, from the spirit of humanity, from the understanding of what is required for a proper respect of each person's dignity, of what they are required to do.

Our movement is formed by different people, all poor people but some with different beliefs, different religious backgrounds. But the reality is that most people start with the belief that we are all created in the image of God, and that was the earliest understanding of the spirit of humanity in the movement. Here in the settlements we come from many places, we speak many languages.

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<sup>22</sup> The Quarry Road settlement marched on and symbolically buried their ward councillor, Jayraj Bachu, on 4 October 2005.

Therefore we are forced to ensure that the spirit of humanity is for everyone. We are forced to ensure that it is universal. There are all kinds of unfamiliar words that some of us are now using to explain this but it is actually very simple.

From this it follows that we can not allow division, degradation – any form that keeps us apart. On this point we have to be completely inflexible. On this point we do not negotiate. If we give up this point we will have given up on our movement.

It is not always clear what that should be done. We are not always strong enough to achieve all of our demands. This is one reason why we are sometimes quite flexible in our tactics. Sometimes we are blockading roads, sometimes we are connecting people to water and electricity, sometimes we are forcing the government to negotiate directly with us instead of the councillors, sometimes we are at court having to ask a judge to recognise our humanity.

The collective culture that we have built within the movement, that pride of belonging to this collective force that was not spoken about before, becomes a new concept, a new belief - especially as Abahlali in its own nature, on its own, is different to other politics. It requires a different style of membership and leadership. It requires a lot of thinking, not only on what is read, but on what is common to all the areas. Therefore learning Abahlalism demands, in its nature, the form that it takes. It doesn't require one to adopt some ideas and approach from outside. When you pull all the different people together and make sure that everyone fits in, that it is everyone's home, that's when it requires a different approach from normal kinds of politics and leadership. By the nature of its demand it requires a direct flexibility of thinking, able to deal with its uniqueness. It gives us the strength to support each other, to keep thinking together, to keep fighting together.

From what I have seen Abahlali is original but it is also natural – it gets generated from different people, with different ideas, who have grown up in different places, in different levels of space. Putting all this together requires its own genius. It's not the same like other movements that take their mandate and understanding from ordinary politics.

It requires learning the demands that come from all the areas – its nature demands the form that the movement takes. It doesn't require one adopting some other ideas and approach from outside. Then when you pull all the demands together and try and make sure that the movement is everyone's home it requires a different approach from normal kinds of politics. By the nature of its demand it requires a direct flexibility to be able to deal with its uniqueness. The movement is not like an NGO or a political party where some few people, some experts in politics, sit down and decide how other people should be organised, what they should demand and how.

Other movements take their mandate, or their understanding, from what has been read. We did not start with a plan – the movement has always been shaped by the daily activities of the people that make it, by their daily thinking, by their daily influence. This togetherness is what has shaped the movement.

I am not too sure where our ideas would come from if there was no daily lives of people, a living movement can only be shaped by the daily lives of its members. I strongly believe that. This is where we formulate our debates and then our demands. We are going to court on Tuesday – winning or losing will affect how we go forward. It is the environment that we breathe in that shapes how we carry our politics forward. But it is who we are, human beings oppressed by other human beings, that directs our politics.

**My next question was going to be: “What is your understanding of a living politics?” but I think that perhaps you’ve just answered that.**

No, that is a simple one because we are all human beings and so our needs are all, one way or the other, similar. A living politics is not a politics that requires a formal education – a living politics is a politics that is easily understood because it arises from our daily lives and the daily challenges we face. It is a politics that every ordinary person can understand. It is a politics that knows that we have no water but that in fact we all deserve water. It is a politics that everyone must have electricity because it is required by our lives. That understanding – that there are no toilets but that in fact there should be toilets - is a living politics. It is not complicated; it does not require big books to find the information. It doesn't have a hidden agenda – it is a politics of living that is just founded only on the nature of living. Every person can understand these kinds of demands and every person has to recognise that these demands are legitimate.

Of course sometimes we need formal expertise – we might need a lawyer if we have an eviction case, or a policy expert if we are negotiating with government. But then we only work with these people when they freely understand that their role is to become part of our living politics. They might bring a skill but the way forward, how we use that skill, if we use that skill, well, that comes out of a meeting, a meeting of the movement. By insisting on this we have found the right people to work with.

**You’ve also spoken about a living communism before<sup>23</sup>. Can you tell me what you meant by that?**

For me understanding communism starts with understanding community. You have to start with the situation of the community, the culture of the community. Once you understand the complete needs of the community you can develop demands that are fair to anyone; to everyone. Everyone must have equal treatment. And obviously all what needs to be shaped in the society must be shaped equally and fairly. And of course if everyone is able to shape the world, and if we should shape it fairly, that means that the world must be shared. That is my understanding. It means one community, one demand.

To be more simple a living communism is a living idea and a living practice of ordinary people. The idea is the full and real equality of everyone without exception. The practice, well, a community must collectively own or forcefully

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<sup>23</sup> Zikode first made a public call for a living communism in an address to the Diakonia Council of Churches Economic Justice Forum on 28 August 2008.

take collective ownership of natural resources - especially the water supply, land and food. Every community is rightfully entitled to these resources. After that we can think about the next steps. We are already taking electricity, building and running crèches, insisting that our children can access the schools. We just need to keep going.

Again I do not think we should be thinking away from ordinary people, having to learn complicated new ideas and ways of speaking. Instead we should approach the very ordinary people that are so often accused of lacking ideas, those who must always be taught or given a political direction. We need to ask these people a simple question: 'What is needed for your life, for your safety, for your dignity?'. That simple question asked to ordinary people, well, it is a kind of social explosion. From that explosion your programme just develops on its own.

Of course a struggle always starts in one place, amongst people dealing with one part of the human reality. Maybe they are, like us, living like pigs in the mud, strange pigs that are also supposed to survive constant fires. Or maybe they are being taken to Lindela<sup>24</sup> or maybe they are being attacked from the sky, being bombed. You have to start with what is being done to you, with what is being denied to you.

But for me communism means a complete community. It does not mean a community that is complete because everyone in it thinks the same or because one kind of division has been overcome. It means a complete community that is complete because no one is excluded – a community that is open to all. It means a very active and proactive community – a community that thinks and debates and demands. It is the universal spirit of humanity. Obviously this starts with one human life. We know that if we do not value every human life then we would be deceiving ourselves if we say that there is a community at all.

We are communists here in the mud and fire but we are not communists because of the mud and fire. We are communists because we are human beings in the mud and fire. We are communists because we have decided to take our humanity seriously and to resist all degradations and divisions.

**You have suffered in this struggle. You have lost your job, you've been arrested, slandered, beaten. Why do you think that the state reacted so badly to the emergence of Abahlali baseMjondolo?**

I think that it is because the system is such that it makes it impossible for equality. It makes sure that it divides in order to retain the status quo. It has created its own empire for its own people that matter to it, that are accountable to it. The system itself makes other people to be less, to be not important, not to matter.

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<sup>24</sup> Lindela is a notorious detention centre to which undocumented migrants are taken prior to deportation.

What I was trying to do was to invade their territory and to show that we all have the power to do it.

It is a capitalist system and it is also a political system in which the few dominate the many. So it has to make certain people better than others, to be privileged over others. If you want to join the winning team then you have to fight. And it's not easy. They want us to think that we can never beat them and that the only hope is to join them. But the system makes these different layers and it makes it very difficult, almost completely impossible for a certain layer to penetrate. That's where the issue of blood and death first comes in. This is a very strong empire.

If you decide not to join the winning team, if as a poor person you decide to change the whole game, well, then you are invading their territory, territory that is too good for you. They will first ask 'Who the hell are you?'. That is always the first question – from the councillors, the police officers, the officials, the politicians, everyone. And if you have an answer, well, sometimes intelligence is not enough. Blood and death come in again. And when you are challenging the system rather than trying to get inside it there are still these layers. Even if you pass the first layer it will ensure that you do not reach the next layer where clever people belong, people who count. If you are born poor it is taken that you are born stupid. But if you invade their territory you don't find clever people. You find that it is greedy people and ruthless people who seem to count. You find that they want to control the world. They will defend their greed. I am very clear that if you try to pass into the forbidden territory you will have to pass certain tests, certain difficulties.

I always wonder how the system can divide people. I always say that the strongest thing that the system can do is to be able to divide people which is why we all struggle in our own confined dark corners, separated from one another. At the end of the day we are the majority, not the system. But it is such that it manages to divide us, to divide our struggles. This is why the big question that most people ask is 'how few hands can remote so many people?'. Those few people in the system are able to remote the world. How do they do this? How can hundreds of people remote millions? The answer is the division of our struggles. That is why I understand why Kennedy was such a big threat. The collectivity that we built, first within Kennedy, and then between the settlements that formed the movement; on its own it is a threat to the system.

When I was growing up it was the Cold War. Although I did not understand it properly then this struggle for global supremacy affected individuals, people's neighbours, families. Moscow was struggling for power with Washington and children were fighting and dying in Loskop.

It is interesting that we send comrades to this WSF with a clear message that another world is necessary, necessary as a matter of urgency. We hear that everyone agrees that another world is possible. This is good but that no one has ever asked when this will happen, when we will all take a collective step towards this change.



I am not too sure at what stage our own intellectuals will understand the system and why ordinary people still don't have a way of changing the society. I still wonder at what stage a new communism will become necessary. I don't know when it will become clear that poor people themselves can and must come up with a new living, an autonomous life, a completely independent stance where a new order would be about alternative ways of living and working instead of trying to compete with each other or limiting our demands to the return of what is already stolen. But it is possible. Already the struggles of the poor have created a situation where everything is done in the name of the poor. The state, the NGOs, academics, the churches, the World Bank all of them are saying that what they are doing they are doing for the poor. Now that the poor themselves are saying 'not in our name', now that we are saying that we will do things for ourselves, that we will think and speak for ourselves and that we will keep going until we find our own way out and a new society is born we have opened a real space for discussion. Our first duty is to keep this space wide open. Our second duty is to encourage as many people as possible to take their place in this new space.

But it is interesting that some people are already living according to the values of the new society where one person cannot eat up while other people's children have not eaten. Some people, like Mr. Jagarnath in Reservoir Hills<sup>25</sup>, is already doing this as a business man.

Intellectuals are also called upon to serve our little world. It is difficult to analyse and change the world, to change its format, to turn it upside down. I always remember Bishop Rubin Philip's speech when he said that the first shall be last and the last shall be first<sup>26</sup>. It is easy to say it, and it's acceptable to most people, but it's not easy to make it real. But to be realistic we must start from where we are, with what we have, from our families, by teaching our children, and then to our schools, to our little neighbourhoods and communities before we say anything at the world level like the WSF. We must not fool ourselves and produce ideas that are not grounded in any soil.

**Its one thing to explain why the state reacted so badly to Abahlali but why do you think that some NGOs reacted so badly<sup>27</sup>? Was that a shock?**

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<sup>25</sup> Vishnu Jagarnath has, for some years, provided all the food that is cooked for the children each day at the community run Kennedy Road crèche.

<sup>26</sup> Anglican Bishop Rubin Philip has been a longstanding supporter of Abahlali baseMjondolo. The speech referred to here was given at the Abahlali baseMjondolo UnFreedom Day event on 27 April 2008.

<sup>27</sup> In December 2006 Abahlali baseMjondolo, together with the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign declared their independence from the Social Movement's Indaba and, thereby, from the control of an authoritarian faction of the NGO/academic left. Some of the luminaries of this left responded by rushing to declare the movements as 'criminal' in the press and elsewhere.

It was a shock but for me it was a learning. I have learnt that your enemy will not only be the state. We found a situation where people that we expected to be comrades were turning on us. But I began to understand why. When you talk of capitalism it is really not only the state. It is obviously a system, it's a system that creates its own empires. These spaces may say that they are on the side of the poor but they accept the rules of the state. They also accept the basic logic of capitalism because they are spaces that are accountable to their own interests and that protect their own interests.

So in the NGO sector you find the same system. It's everywhere. I mean, it's in the social movements. People have their own spaces and they protect their own interests. There are all kinds of spaces. Obviously Abahlali has created its own space where it is able to protect its own interests, our dignity, where we can do our activities without fear.

The NGOs are not all the same. But in the NGO sector I see a lot of empires. An individual can create his own empire so that he can be ruler for life.

**For many people around the world Abahlali is best known for the position that it took against xenophobia. How did the movement come to take the position that equality must be universal?**

This is a bigger question, a question of people who are in this world. But we've already talked about ubuntu, communism and what makes a complete society. It is true that this could be in the sense of belonging. But belonging where? It could be in one country but it could also be in the world - that it is acceptable for everyone in the world to live freely without any boundaries, without any colour or any other restrictions.

Obviously if you were to talk about a just society then it is the human culture, ubuntu – that makes a complete human being. The culture, where a person comes from, the colour - this does not count. Therefore it was clear for Abahlali that we have to take a very strong side in defending human life - any human life, every human life. It is acceptable and legitimate that one person protects another. It is as simple as that.

There are no boundaries to the human life. Therefore the attack on people born in other countries, the so called foreign nationals – it was inhuman. It was very easy to take a position on this.

Obviously you have got to look at the perpetrators of this, at their intelligence, their conscience, their consciousness - their intelligence really. What ever they say about their reasons for the attacks clearly shows how the world was corrupted. People breathe a poisonous air. They get caught up, in their whole life, in a way of living where you turn an eye to one another. It is a terrible situation. This is a very big challenge for South Africans who have lived most of their life during apartheid, whose teaching was about boundaries, segregations - that not everyone was a human being. At that stage only whites were considered to be human by the system. A proper opposition to that system would reject its segregations completely and insist that everyone is human. But some of the opposition to that system has been about fighting to take a place in that system,

not doing away with it. So now black people have turned on other black people, against their brothers and sisters. It is a disgrace. This is one of the damages the past laws have installed in some people's minds. A lot needs to be done to change the mindsets of those whose frustration is unsound.

**The other thing that has really attracted attention was the decision that Abahlali took in 2006 not to vote. How do you understand this decision?**

I think that it was a very practical decision in our politic. For a number of years we have voted but not seen any change. In 2006 Abahlali realised that we have power. We had always been asked to shout 'Amandla! Awethu!'<sup>28</sup> but refraining from voting was a way of showing that Amandla is ours. Basically we had decided not to give our power away. It has a simple message – that we had no confidence in politicians and that we believed that we could empower ourselves - that we really do believe that the people shall govern.

It was also a tactical action; a warning to the government that if they exclude us from shaping the country then we will exclude ourselves from giving them support. And it has been a way for us to start thinking about our own alternative governance.

**Has the formation of the Poor People's Alliance last year given you hope?**

Well I was just explaining that the strength of capitalism is how it has managed to divide our struggles. So if we are able to come together, not just nationally but also internationally, then I think that we are on a good track. This is the only way that it will really become possible to face and to contest the system. None of us will succeed on our own.

**What has been the most difficult thing for you about being involved in Abahlali, and what has been the best thing?**

The day when I had to choose from no choice. Ok, losing the job was the second aspect of it<sup>29</sup>. The first aspect of it was that I was given a choice, to either align myself with the eThekweni people, with City Hall and, you know, to have a career, opportunities or to remain with the poor. Offers were made to me. They ask you some questions the main one being 'What is it that you want in order to keep quiet?' They always see it as an individual trouble maker. Remember when Mabuyakhulu<sup>30</sup> said that 'Zikode must educate his people'. That's the belief that they had. They can't understand that I am educated by the people. But when you have four children growing here in the mud and the fire...

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<sup>28</sup> "Power! It is ours!"

<sup>29</sup> On 5 February 2007 S'bu was forced out of his job at the petrol station as a result of political pressure from the Mayor of Durban, Obed Mlaba. He wrote an article about this experience titled When Choices Can Not Be Choices.

<sup>30</sup> Mike Mabuyakhulu is the Minister of Housing in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

But I have no regrets. Working with people is not easy. And it's not just dealing with your enemies, even working with your comrades, trying to satisfy everyone is not easy. The time and the energy that is involved create a real pressure. But aside from that I have peace of mind, the inner peace.

I am more informed than I was, I am more vigorous than ever before. I am more vigilant and conscious than ever before. There is a lot of variety of things in life, more than just the politics. I have no regrets.

### **And the best thing?**

All the victories we have won. I don't just mean victories in court, or evictions that have been stopped, or water and electricity connected. I am talking about seeing comrades becoming confident, being happy for knowing their power, knowing their rights in this world. Seeing comrades gaining a bit of respect, seeing people who have never counted being able to engage at the level at which they struggle is now fought. Young comrades are debating with government ministers on the radio and TV! Seeing the strength of the women comrades in the movement. Seeing poor people challenging the system, because it's not just about challenging Bheki Cele<sup>31</sup> or Mabuyakhulu, it's about challenging the whole system, how it functions.

### **Would you like to say a little more about the strength of the women comrades in the movement?**

Well I am very satisfied and proud to see how some of the Abahlali settlements are chaired and led by women. This is evident in Siyanda A, B and C sections in Newlands in Durban. This is also evident in Motala Heights in Pinetown, in Joe Slovo and other settlements. From the very beginning women have been elected to the high positions of leadership in the movement and it is impossible to imagine the movement without the strength of women comrades. The Abahlali office itself is headed by a young woman, Zodwa Nsibande, who has earned herself a high respect from both men and other women for her role in connecting the movement and the outside world. But there are also many projects that don't get the same public attention and most of these projects, such as crèches, kitchens, sewing, bead work, gardening and poetry are run purely by women.

The strength of women comes from the fact that women are expected to carry our love, not only for their children and husbands but for the communities too. Women are raised to be sensitive and caring. We are all told that a home that has a woman is often warm with love and care. A person that is given responsibility for this love and care will fight like a lion to protect her home and her family. It is not surprising that women are often in the forefront of struggles against eviction, for toilets, for electricity and against the fires. Sometimes in Abahlali women feel that men are very slow and too compromising.

Over the years many women have faced arrest and police beatings. Women have confronted police officers, landlords, shack lords, BECs, councillors, NGOs,

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<sup>31</sup> Bheki Cele is the Minister for Security in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

academics – everyone that has to be confronted in a struggle like this. The fact that Abahlali women have given away fear and decided to confront the reality of life tells us that there is something seriously wrong with our governing systems – that another world is necessary. Women don't risk their safety when they have children to care for unless they have a very good reason for doing so. The fact that women have stood up to and faced the barrel of guns during our protests is an indication that indeed another world is possible because without women nothing is possible and without courage nothing is possible. Our hopes are dependent on the courage of women.

We know that in the past that in times of any war women were never and under no circumstances touched by the physical pain associated with any war. But today poor women are shot by the same police who are meant to protect them by law. I wish to salute the role that our mothers are playing in not only raising us under these trying circumstances but in also having to face this violence from the state while fighting for a better world for us. Their motherly does not count because they are not the wives of the politicians and of the rich.

But we know that their strength changes their subjectivity to vulnerability putting them in the forefront of our struggle. We know by nature that their tears can never be ignored by a natural person for ever and ever.

**I know that it's a Sunday night and your family are waiting for you. This will be my last question. What does it mean for you when you say that Abahlalism is the politics of those that don't count, the politics of those that are not supposed to speak.**

I think that I have a clear understanding of this. I know from my own personal experience how I came to have enemies that I did not have because now I am speaking. When you are quiet, when you know your place, you are accepted and you are as safe as a poor person can be. But the moment you start talking you become a threat.

When one talks about the politics of those that do not count one must start from the fact that the system makes it impossible for everyone to count. If ordinary people counted it would collapse immediately. The way to hide the fact that ordinary people do not count, and that the system depends on this, is to ensure that ordinary people are taken as being unable to think and therefore unable to say anything intelligent. We are supposed to be led.

The politics of those that do not count makes no respect for those who are meant to think for everyone else, to lead. This turning the tide, when the life turns one at the front and takes him to the back, it is like you are doing a chaos because you want to do away with the status quo. You want to be innovative, you want to be creative, you want to live your life but it seems that the only way is to undermine those who have led the way. So you do not accept that someone must be a slave and work for someone else. No boss will find this acceptable. You do not accept that someone must be a good boy or a good girl, an obedient follower who does not think and act for themselves. No politician will find this

acceptable. They will fight up until those tides are turned back. So we must face the difficulty of this politics.

The understanding is just that simple. In order for those who count to defend their own territory someone should not talk, someone should just be led, someone should not question, someone should just be a beneficiary of those particular services that are meant to be given.

The moment that you begin to question then you are threatening the system. You are not supposed to do that, and your intelligence and capability are not supposed to allow you to voice or to take the space. The system keeps people separate. If you want to unite and to make a culture that people should be equal then you are invading the space that is forbidden to you, you are threatening the system.

**That's very powerful. Thank you.**

### **About the interviewer**

Richard Pithouse teaches politics at Rhodes University. He holds an MA in philosophy and worked as an academic for many years. He has published widely in academic and popular publications and in recent years has been particularly interested in popular struggles for just cities.

### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/zikode.pdf>



## **Who speaks for peasants? Civil society, social movements and the global governance of food and agriculture**

**Nora McKeon**

### **Abstract**

*This article features excerpts from The United Nations and Civil Society: Legitimizing Global Governance - Whose Voice? by Nora McKeon (UNRISD with Zed Books, London, 2009)<sup>1</sup>.*

*This work emerged from a research project of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), UN World Summits and Civil Society Engagement, which looked at the way and extent to which different civil society actors have used the opportunities created by United Nations summits and related processes to advance their networking activities and advocacy impacts<sup>2</sup>.*

Interface spaces with international intergovernmental institutions constitute important terrains for confrontation between social movements and the defenders of the neoliberal agenda that has dominated the world community's discourse and action over the past three decades. These spaces are shared among a variety of social movements and a broad range of NGOs and other civil society organizations. Some institutions, like the WTO and the G8, are clearly illegitimate as global governance forums in terms of their undemocratic and non-transparent procedures, and contested in terms of the measures they propose. The stance of social movements in the case of these institutions is normally one of denunciation.<sup>3</sup>

The United Nations system constitutes a different kind of global space. Whatever its considerable weaknesses and limitations, the UN is the only international institution in which the "one country-one vote" rule holds, and the only one whose mandate and charter dedicate it to the defence of human rights and common goods. In the words of one long-time analyst of social movements and global governance, 'those hoping to bring about a more just, peaceful and equitable world must work at many levels not the least of which is within existing *global* institutions...to make the UN Charter and international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the key

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, visit [www.zedbooks.co.uk/book.asp?bookdetail=4306](http://www.zedbooks.co.uk/book.asp?bookdetail=4306).

<sup>2</sup> For further information, visit [www.unrisd.org/research/cssm/summits](http://www.unrisd.org/research/cssm/summits)

<sup>3</sup> While some NGOs hold that there is scope for reforming them and that dialogue and negotiation is in order.

principles around which our world is organized' (Smith 2008). The UN system offers terrains in which social movements may well find it opportune to move from denunciation to proposals and negotiation, and strategic alliances with NGOs and other civil society actors can play a strategic role in this regard. This article will examine experience in crafting such alliances in the key area of the global governance of food and agriculture.

### **The UN and civil society: who gets to the table?**

The United Nations' perception of the world of civil society has evolved substantially since it was founded in 1945. The UN Charter specifically provided that 'the Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organisations which are concerned with matters within its competence.'<sup>4</sup> Although the Charter foresaw that such arrangements might be extended to national NGOs with the agreement of the concerned Members of the UN, in fact consultative status was confined to international NGOs (INGOs) for the first 50 years of the UN's life. The organisations on which this status was conferred at the outset were well-established non-profit, a-political international councils grouping people or associations which felt themselves to be families on the grounds of their professions, their academic fields, their beliefs, their activities, their experiences. The term 'NGO' remained dominant for four decades. It stretched uncomfortably over the years to cover new generations of national development, advocacy and solidarity NGOs in both the North and the South, and local people's associations in the "developing" world. One reason for the persistence of this terminology was undoubtedly institutional consecration. 'NGO' figured in the constitutions of the United Nations and its specialized agencies and procedures were in place for recognizing and dealing with such organizations. The term also tended to increase the comfort level of UN officials by delineating a parallel universe with which they themselves could communicate directly through their own professional or religious affiliations.

Increasingly, however, the category was contested by pieces of the universe it was expected to describe. Tensions developed between Northern and Southern NGOs as the latter sought to gain greater autonomy. People's organizations became impatient with the NGOs' habit of speaking (and fund-raising) on their behalf. Contrasts grew between the INGOs, to whom access to the United Nations had been reserved through the mechanism of consultative status, and the broader range of actors who began to show interest in the international arena. At the same time, within the United Nations the term was felt to be inadequate to comprehend the kinds of more complex roles and relations that were emerging in the early '90s. The terms that began to come into use to replace it were 'civil society' and 'civil society organizations', of which NGOs were assumed to be one important variety. The concept of civil society, of

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<sup>4</sup> Article 71 of the United Nations Charters, the result of determined lobbying by a group of US and international NGOs.

course, was not a new one. It had come into vogue in the West in the early modern period to describe the space that opened up between the household, government and the market place once all-invasive monarchies began to wane, in which people began to organize to pursue their interests and values. There was a neat correspondence in the fact that it was being elevated into global usage in the late twentieth century in a moment in which the state's role and its relation to the two other actors were once again undergoing redefinition. The end of the cold war was very much a part of the story, as regimes which had occupied all of the space up to the threshold of the home collapsed and Western powers and foundations rushed into Eastern Europe with recipes and resources to promote the growth of civil society. But so was structural adjustment in the developing world with its effect on the state's sphere of action, as well as the subsequent discovery on the part of the underwriters of the Washington consensus that markets cannot function in a social and governance vacuum.<sup>5</sup>

There was – and is – a considerable amount of confusion within UN circles as to just what is in and what is out of the civil society basket. The World Bank defines it as 'the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations.'<sup>6</sup> But as late as 2003 the document establishing a UN Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons to examine UN-civil society relations included the private sector in its terms of reference as falling within the category of civil society (United Nations 2004:74). However clearly the frontier may be drawn, there are ample areas of overlapping between civil society and the private sector. Small farmers' organizations pursue the economic interests of their members but, at the same time, promote social values and visions that go far beyond the profit motive. To compound confusion, institutional procedures have not kept pace with the changing terminology. Accreditation and consultative status continue to be accorded to 'NGOs' rather than CSOs. Private sector interests normally reach UN meeting rooms via business associations, which are formally non-profit NGOs, or through the delegations of member governments, which may include for-profit enterprises.

While the United Nations was still trying to digest the new terminology of "civil society", the crowds hit the streets in Seattle in 1999 and the intergovernmental world discovered social movements. The UN's relationship with this social phenomenon is ambivalent in the extreme. On the one hand, social movements are feared because they threaten established bases and forms of international interaction. On the other, they are courted since the values they defend, the energy they mobilize and their capacity to attract young people seem to hold a key to the re-legitimation of the United Nations. Just what is meant by the term within the United Nations is far from clear. At times a superficial shorthand

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<sup>5</sup> See Higgott (2001). Kaldor (2003) presents a clear and succinct discussion of the development of the term 'civil society' and the breakdown of its composition.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, *Defining Civil Society*, <http://go.worldbank.org/4CE7W046K0> (accessed on 30 July 2008).

operates and social movements are equated with noisy and sometimes violent anti-globalization advocates. At times it is used as a synonym for people's organizations – peasants, fisherfolk, workers, slum dwellers and others – as contrasted with NGOs. Or, again, it is understood to refer to phenomena of social change that include structured organizations but go beyond them, like the student and women's movements of the 1960s or, today, the conglomeration of various kinds of organizations and groups that populate Social Forums. In this latter sense social movements are equated with what a growing literature terms 'global civil society'<sup>7</sup> or 'transnational advocacy networks'.<sup>8</sup> But most UN staff are unfamiliar with the literature and encounter the phenomenon in the course of their work with the same cognitive preparation as the average citizen.

However it is defined, civil society interface with UN global policy forums took a giant step with the world summits of the 1990s, starting with the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. This was hardly the first time that non-governmental organizations participated in UN meetings, but the changing political context in the post cold war era of globalization helped to open up the space of international deliberations and offer a more visible and effective role to a wider variety of civil society organizations. The contribution of non-state actors to solving world problems was increasingly recognized in a paradigm of structural adjustment and redefinition of public/private spheres and responsibilities. As a study of NGOs, the United Nations and global governance conducted in the mid-1990s put it, 'NGOs are emerging as a special set of organisations that are private in their form but public in their purpose', particularly relevant to the 'low politics' issues that were rising on the international agenda (Weiss and Gordenker 1996:364). The world community looked to the summits as occasions to frame emerging global issues and mobilise political will to deal with them. They were expected to establish international standards and commitments which would guide national policy and to set in place monitoring mechanisms enforcing accountability. They represented an effort to sidestep the stifling institutional setting of UN deliberations and experiment with more effective approaches to global governance. A civil society presence was essential for all of this to happen.

### **NGOs, People's Organizations and the United Nations**

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** are voluntary, non-profit intermediary organizations. They provide services of various kinds to disadvantaged sectors of the population and conduct advocacy on issues that concern them. However, they have not been established by these sectors. They do not represent them and are not accountable to them. NGOs may relate to the UN system in various ways ranging from operational cooperation in

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Walzer (1995), Kaldor (2003), Keane (2003), Anheier et al (2001).

<sup>8</sup> Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Marchetti and Pianta (2007).

humanitarian relief operations and/or development action to advocacy. NGOs often act as service-providers in UN programmes and are the category of CSOs with most presence in UN system policy forums.

**People's organizations (POs)**, unlike NGOs, are established by and represent sectors of the population like small farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, slum dwellers and others. POs take a wide variety of forms and exist at various levels.

- **Community-based organizations (CBOs)** mobilize and represent local populations and directly address their immediate concerns. Examples include neighbourhood associations, water-users groups, women's credit associations. Over the past decade they have become widespread partners of UN programmes at the local level.

- **People's organization platforms** structured above the local community level have been built up by marginalized sectors of the population, over the past decade in particular, in order to defend their members' interests in policy and programme negotiations at national, regional and global levels. These platforms are not yet sufficiently recognized and engaged by the UN system in country programmes and projects and in global forums.

On their side, CSOs were attracted to the summits by the spaces they opened up, the opportunities they offered both to influence the substance of the discussions and the decision-making processes themselves, and to build their own networks and alliances. They achieved the first objective to varying degrees in different venues, and the second beyond expectations.<sup>9</sup> But who - in fact - within the broad category of "civil society" - actually entered into the UN arena with the advent of the summits? The global meetings themselves were populated with organizations of all kinds, shooting holes in the studiously bureaucratic and state-controlled UN procedures for granting consultative status with ECOSOC. An ECOSOC review of consultative status procedures was launched in the aftermath of UNCED with a view to updating the rules to take account of a broader panoply of CSOs. It came to a hotly contested close in 1996 with a recommendation that extended the possibility of obtaining accreditation to regional and national NGOs. This measure broke the monopoly of Western-based international NGOs and opened the door to national associations of all regions including, in theory, people's organizations (United Nations 1996). Although it was expected to democratize access to UN policy forums, it has had less impact than had been foreseen since national organizations in the South most often lack the resources to attend international meetings. UN outreach to people's organizations, as distinct from NGOs, has been and continues to be marginal, due not only to deficiencies on the part of the UN but also to the reluctance of some well entrenched NGOs to share access to UN bodies with

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<sup>9</sup> See Foster and Anand (1999) for a detailed, careful and well-documented account of the interaction towards the end of the summit cycle, and Pianta (2005).

social movements.<sup>10</sup> According to system-wide research undertaken in 2004-2005, five years after the close of the “summit decade”, only three of the twenty-four UN family agencies and programmes surveyed report strong success in reaching out to social movements and organizations.<sup>11</sup>

Two of these agencies – the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) – operate in the area of food and agriculture. It is not a coincidence that this is a particularly fertile terrain for UN-social movement interface. The food and agriculture nexus of issues plays an exceedingly important role in the world policy arena. Food is perhaps the most basic human need. Agriculture provides a livelihood for most of the world’s population and the majority of the poor who have been the object of so much UN summit attention. The geopolitical and corporate interests that revolve around these issues are enormous, as demonstrated by the difficulties encountered during the WTO Doha Round negotiations and by the food crisis which erupted on the global scene in late 2007. For these reasons, the World Food Summit organized by FAO in 1996 and its follow-up have attracted considerable attention on the part of organizations representing social movements of the South, a category of civil society that has been underrepresented in most other summit processes.

FAO, in particular, has been the locus over the past 15 years of an innovative experiment in UN-civil society relations. This experience constitutes a laboratory for studying both terrains of conflict between NGOs and social movements, and ways in which such conflicts can be composed in common opposition to the neoliberal agenda. The history of this interaction and the lessons we can draw from it is the focus of this article.

### **Civil Society and the FAO World Food Summit (1996)**

International attention to food and agriculture was low at the beginning of the 1990s when a new Director-General, the first from Africa, took office. The proposal to insert a high-level summit on food issues into the UN calendar of global conferences was a central piece in Jacques Diouf’s strategy to reinstate agriculture on the world’s agenda and FAO on the global institutional map. As phrased in the resolution adopted unanimously by the FAO Conference on 31 October 1995, the Summit was expected to ‘serve as a forum at the highest political level to marshal the global consensus and commitment needed to redress a most basic problem of humankind - food insecurity’ and ‘establish a policy framework and adopt a Plan of Action for implementation by governments, international institutions and all sectors of civil society’. The resolution ‘stressed the importance of ensuring a process which involved all stakeholders’ and authorised the Director-General to invite to the Summit and to

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<sup>10</sup> Some International NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC were among the opponents of the 1996 resolution opening up accreditation to national NGOs.

<sup>11</sup> Reported on in McKeon (2009).

preparatory meetings 'observers from relevant non-governmental organizations and private-sector associations' (FAO 1995).

Like other summits, the WFS constituted an important occasion for various sectors of civil society coming at the issues under examination from different angles to build a practice of networking and joint planning. The process was not easy or automatic. Certain dynamics emerged with particular force in the arena of the WFS and the parallel NGO Forum, in addition to the well-documented confrontation between northern and southern organizations. One of these was the tension between international NGOs and the emerging variegated universe of local and national groups and regional and global networks concerned in one way or another with food security issues. The most powerful voices in planning and running the NGO Forum were undoubtedly those of this emerging civil society world. A second area of conflict was that between the non-profits and the private sector business associations, which are technically classified as non-profit NGOs within the UN system but in fact most often represent the for-profit interests of their members. This kind of tension was particularly strong in the WFS-NGO Forum process because of the power of multinationals in the agri-food chain and the impact they have on small producers, consumers and the environment, and business associations were excluded from the 1996 civil society forum. A third important civil society dynamic that began to take shape during the preparatory process was that between NGOs, which had heretofore tended to position themselves as spokespersons for the rural poor and the marginalized, and the people's organizations that were emerging in a context of globalization and liberalization and questioned the right of others to speak on their behalf. A prime example of the latter was the newly established global peasants organization, Via Campesina.<sup>12</sup> The fact that this dynamic was so evident in the context of the 1996 forum was due to the very particular efforts which the organizers made to ensure that people's organizations were involved and played a protagonist role.

Core participation in the NGO Forum was limited to 600 delegates, 50 per cent of whom represented local or national organizations of peasants, women and indigenous peoples from the South. The number of delegates from the North was fixed in function of how many could be funded to come from the South. This was the only NGO forum held in parallel to a world summit which adopted procedures of this kind to ensure balanced civil society participation. It was the prerogative of the delegates to debate and finalize the Forum's statement, entitled 'Profit for few or food for all?'<sup>13</sup>. The statement built its case 'first and foremost on the basic human Right to Food', an important affirmation in a period in which a rights-based approach was beginning to move on from the political field to tackle the less charted domain of economic and social rights. Civil society's analysis of the causes of hunger highlighted globalisation of the world economy and lack of accountability of multinational corporations

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<sup>12</sup> Established in 1993. See Demarais (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Available at [www.twinside.org.sg/title/pro-cn](http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/pro-cn)

resulting in unemployment and destruction of rural economies. Industrialised agriculture, supported by subsidises and generating dumping practices, was seen to be 'destroying traditional farming, poisoning the planet...and making people dependent on food they are unable to produce'. Structural adjustment and debt repayment imposed by the international community reinforced the tendency of national governments to fashion policies that neglected family farmers and vulnerable people.

The NGO Forum proposed an alternative model based on decentralisation, rather than concentration, of wealth and power. The impact of international agricultural trade on food security was a key concern, following the 1994 establishment of the World Trade Organization. The Forum statement maintained that, far from offering the solution to food insecurity, international agricultural trade constituted a good part of the problem. A new term introduced by Via Campesina, that of 'food sovereignty', made its way into the text of the statement<sup>14</sup>. Not widely understood or used in civil society circles at the time, it was destined to emerge over the following years as the paradigm that civil society opposed to the neo-liberal Washington consensus. The food sovereignty imperative was coupled with the instrument of international law to introduce two of the most innovative proposals put forward by the NGOs. The voluntary Code of Conduct on the Right to Food would call on national governments fulfill their responsibility of implementing policies that ensure access by their citizens to safe, adequate, nutritious food supplies. The Global Sustainable Food Security Convention aimed at building an international framework which would support governments in their efforts to do so. A number of the actions proposed were constituent elements of the alternative platform on which a far broader coalition of civil society organizations and social movements is working a decade later.

A final aspect of the NGO Forum that merits underlining was the careful attention paid to the actors of food security. The report of the forum included a paragraph distinguishing among the roles and responsibilities of different actors: governments, international institutions, private sector and multinational corporations, cooperation and solidarity NGOs. Pride of place went to organizations of peasants, women, indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, herders, consumers, considered to be the 'key actors in any food security strategy' (Italian Committee for the NGO Forum on Food Security 1997:18–19). The Forum process generated heightened attention to the need to go beyond the usual NGO circles and give priority to the involvement of people's organizations and social movements. This commitment tended to remain in the domain of rhetoric, however, for a series of reasons ranging from cultural and methodological to political. It constituted perhaps the most important bone of contention within the NGO world in follow-up to the Forum, even more so than differing views on specific issues, although these too were not lacking. Several years were to go by before the people's organizations themselves gained

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<sup>14</sup> 'Each nation must have the right to food sovereignty to achieve the level of food sufficiency and nutritional quality it considers appropriate without suffering retaliation of any kind'.



sufficient strength to impose their protagonism on a largely ambivalent NGO universe at the time of the civil society Forum for Food Sovereignty of 2002.

### **The World Food Summit: five years later (2002)**

The WFS Plan of Action did not foresee a '+5' event as did other summit processes. But during the first years following the summit it became increasingly clear that progress towards the Summit goal of halving the number of the world's hungry by 2015 was distressingly unsatisfactory. The September 2000 session of the FAO Committee on World Food Security, responsible for monitoring follow-up to the WFS, had before it the first report on implementation of the WFS commitments. The figures showed that 'in the majority of the developing countries, especially in Africa, the food security situation has deteriorated and the number of the undernourished has risen' (FAO 2000:1). The Director-General consequently proposed that the FAO Conference host a high level forum to review progress on the fifth anniversary of the WFS, in November 2001.<sup>15</sup>

On the civil society side, the period since the WFS had seen a radicalization of positions on food and agriculture issues in reaction to trends such as intensified liberalization of agricultural trade attendant on the adoption of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, increasingly aggressive marketing of biotechnology, and continued reluctance of governments to take action on politically charged issues like agrarian reform. At the global level, the first World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre in January 2001 was an affirmation of civil society's felt need and maturity for "an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism." (World Social Forum 2002).

People's organizations related to food and agriculture had made particular progress in strengthening their networks and their lobbying capacity. Via Campesina had continued to build its position as the major international movement seeking to coordinate peasant organizations of small and middle-scale producers, agricultural workers, rural women and indigenous communities from all regions. The visionary and politically adept peasant movement in West Africa had established an autonomous subregional network in June 2000.<sup>16</sup> In 1997, the first ever world-wide federation of fisherfolk was formed, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers, followed in October 2000 by the World Forum of Fisher Peoples. Indigenous peoples'

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<sup>15</sup> The summit was subsequently postponed until June 2002 at the request of the Italian government, headed by Silvio Berlusconi, following the G8 meeting in Genoa marked by the death of a demonstrator and widespread accusations of police brutality.

<sup>16</sup> The Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organisations of West Africa (ROPFA) groups national peasant platforms in 12 West African countries, for a total of some 45 million farmers, and is now reaching out to the other three English-speaking members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

battles, originally situated on human rights territory, were moving slowly to other areas more closely related to food and agriculture, such as genetic resources and access to land<sup>17</sup>. Agricultural workers had their trade unions behind them<sup>18</sup>, although their highly hierarchical organizational mode differed considerably from that of other social movements. Under these circumstances, it was understandable that divergences within the civil society universe had deepened. The people's organization-NGO divide did not by any means coincide with a neat categorization of more and less radical positions. The issue was more one of forms of legitimacy, with people's organizations increasingly contesting the right of NGOs to conduct lobbying 'on behalf of' sectors of the world's population from which they had received no mandate and to which they were in no way accountable. Underlying the legitimacy question, in the best of circumstances, was a contrast in approaches to defining positions and building consensus. People's organizations often invested time and resources in laborious grassroots consultation<sup>19</sup> while NGOs could take a stand at the drop of a telephone conference with the help of in-house or hired expertise.

The first meeting of a civil society planning group for the parallel conference to the World Food Summit: *five years later* took place in March 2000<sup>1</sup>. The participants, some 25 in all, came from organizations representing indigenous peoples, rural women, farmers, development NGOs, and thematic and regional networks. The group proposed to focus civil society attention on a limited number of issues on which they believed governments had to take action if they were serious about ending hunger. These were identified in the following terms in a *Call for Action and Mobilisation at the World Food Summit: five years later* which was widely distributed through civil society networks over the following weeks:

*In 1996 NGOs/CSOs formulated principles and concepts of food security – such as food sovereignty – that are now beginning to be accepted by some official policy makers. Today we want to go one step further and present successful demonstrations and alternative proposals. We have identified five strategic issues on which to focus because we feel they are the keys to attaining world food security:*

- Right to Food – *in relationship to international arrangements (e.g. trade) and domestic social policies.*
- Food Sovereignty – *the right of the people of each country to determine their own food policy.*

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<sup>17</sup> The weakest component of the food and agriculture-related social movements, in addition to indigenous peoples, continued to be the pastoralists.

<sup>18</sup> In particular, on the global scene, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUFA).

<sup>19</sup> Depending on their capacity and the degree of internal democracy.

- Agricultural Production Models – *agro-ecological, organic and other sustainable alternatives to the current industrial model.*
- Access to Resources – *land, forests, water, credit and genetic resources; land reform and security of tenure.*
- Democracy – *International mechanisms should aim to support economic, social and political processes of democratization at the country level. (IPC 2001).*

The civil society strategy involved marrying the NGOs' technical expertise with the decentralized outreach of regional networks and the legitimacy of organizations representing major constituencies of rural producers. The organizations present at the meeting agreed to establish a mechanism that came to be known as the International Civil Society Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), composed of focal points for the regions, for major social constituencies and for key themes. It defined its role as one of mobilization and facilitation, not representation. Over the succeeding months the IPC organized a series of regional consultations which strengthened regional networking and made it possible to contextualize, in very different situations, the strategic issues that had been identified globally. An international consultation of indigenous peoples, judged to be the weakest of the constituencies, brought together participants from 28 countries in all regions to build up a common platform on food security and sovereignty issues. Through these meetings the IPC built strong roots in the regions, with an accent on organisations representing rural producers of various kinds.

The WFS: *fyI* took place from 10 to 13 June 2002. The extent and level of participation was a disappointment for FAO. Most of the rich country leaders were absent, a significant void given the fact that – as the FAO round-up press release reported – ‘OECD countries provide a billion dollars a day in support to their own agriculture sector, six times more than all development assistance’ (FAO 2002). The Declaration adopted on the opening day was an uninspiring reaffirmation of the WFS commitments, with no more teeth in it than the original version. The only new initiative it contained, a product in good part of determined NGO lobbying, was an invitation to FAO to establish ‘an intergovernmental Working Group, with the participation of stakeholders to elaborate a set of voluntary guidelines to support Member States’ efforts to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security’. On the down side, the Declaration plugged the outcome of the WTO Doha Conference, ‘especially the commitments regarding the reform of the international agricultural trading system’, and pledged to help developing countries, ‘particularly their food producers, to make informed choices about and to have access to, the necessary scientific and technical knowledge related to new technologies targeted at poverty and hunger reduction.’ The only mention of food producers in the entire text was thus linked to diffusion of biotechnology!

570 participants were accredited to the plenary sessions of the parallel civil society Forum For Food Sovereignty with the right to participate in the Forum's decision-making processes. They had been selected through the IPC network on the basis of the regional preparation process and respected criteria ensuring balance by regions, type of organisation, and gender. A far larger number of people were accredited to gain access to the building, where they could attend seminars in the afternoon and witness what was happening in the morning plenary sessions through an enormous video screen. The dynamics of the civil society forum were characterized above all by the dominance of people's organizations, particularly the numerous and well-organized delegations of Via Campesina members from Latin America, Asia and Europe. The style of Via Campesina advocacy, as compared with the mode of debate in the 1996 Forum, was overwhelming. Key positions - like those of food sovereignty as the alternative civil society paradigm and 'WTO out of agriculture' as the necessary precondition for finding acceptable solutions to the governance of world trade - were defended uncompromisingly. In plenary sessions the disciplined behaviour of the Via Campesina delegates multiplied their already significant numbers, as they burst into rhythmic chants to underline their points or carried thousands of signed postcards attacking the WTO up to the head table to deliver them to FAO officials. Alongside of the habitual debate, Via Campesina brought the dimension of the 'mistica', moving representations of the social and spiritual dimensions of the struggles in which peasant communities are engaged and of the bonds that link them with nature.

The reactions of other civil society actors to this formidable presence were varied. Via Campesina's positions were supported by a number of NGOs that shared its views, were working closely with peasant movements in Asia and Latin America, and advocated a protagonist role for social organizations in civil society decision-making processes on food and agriculture issues.<sup>20</sup> At the other extreme, Via Campesina's massive entrance onto the scene was contested by those organizations whose hegemony in world forums dealing with food and agriculture was directly threatened by the emergence of this new style of rural social organization. Chief among these was the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), which had claimed for decades to represent the interests of the farmers of the world but had tended to privilege the larger, market-oriented producers, although it was making efforts to reach out to smallholders in the South.<sup>21</sup> The trade unions also, with their highly hierarchical style of representation of workers' interests, found it difficult to countenance the horizontal approach that had characterized the preparation for the forum, in which national trade union members allied with peasant organizations and others to develop positions on a national/regional basis.

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<sup>20</sup> These included, for example, Food First, Pesticides Action Network-Asia and the Pacific, IBON Foundation, and Crocevia.

<sup>21</sup> See Edelman (2003).

In between these two extremes were several categories of organizations. One was the broader world of NGOs. The dynamics which had already operated at the 1996 Forum came to a head in 2002. Many NGOs felt marginalized by the language of a forum which constantly reiterated the hegemonic role of people's organizations, ill at ease with some of the positions adopted by the plenary, and/or repelled by what they felt was an undemocratic piloting of the decision-making process. Within the broad category of NGOs, however, a range of positions could be found, with some organizations adamantly defensive of their traditional roles and others more sensitive to the process of change underway. In any event, the Western-based NGOs which generally tended to dominate global forums were a minority in the Forum for Food Sovereignty, given the quota procedures, and many of the major actors did not bother to come since they were not admitted as plenary delegates with voting rights.

Another category of the marginalized – however inadvertently – were people's organizations other than Via Campesina. Africa at that time was largely absent from the Via Campesina network although dialogue with members of the West African network, ROPPA, had begun several years earlier. The African small farmers organizations, weakly structured and hampered by a language divide, felt unable to defend their specificities and their positions in the debate. The fact that they were investing in an interface with the state-promoted New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative was disapproved by their counterparts in the other regions. NEPAD was denounced in the final Political Statement in the same breath as the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) in contradiction to the position of the people's organizations directly concerned.<sup>22</sup> In their self-evaluation at the end of the forum, the African farmers organizations criticized the advocacy style of Via Campesina for not allowing space for others to represent themselves. Above all, however, they critiqued their own weaknesses and ineptness and took the experience as a stimulus to build the strength of their networks and their lobbying capacity. Representatives of indigenous peoples' organizations were more numerous than in 1996 and they were allocated space to present their distinctive views and life styles in several seminars. Their participation in forum decision making was minimal, however, a reflection of the scarce or poor relations between peasant and indigenous peoples' organizations existing in the real world outside the forum walls. The same could be said for fisherfolks' organizations, while pastoral peoples continued to be practically absent.

Evaluations of the impact of the 2002 Forum on the construction of a strong autonomous civil society movement in defence of food sovereignty clearly vary according to the viewpoint from which they are formulated. A representative of one of the IPC members whose power was threatened by the emerging dynamic stated his view, during a round-up evaluation of the forum held the day after it closed, that 'the meeting results were high-jacked. My organisation's membership cannot relate to the political stances taken. It was more of a

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<sup>22</sup> Who valued NEPAD as a proposal which at least had been born in Africa and who used it as an opportunity to network and to gain official recognition as interlocutors in policy discussions.

political event for social movements than a dialogue and consensus on critical issues.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the forum's president, Sarojeni Regnam, judged that

*Our real success was in mobilising the participation and involvement of the peoples' movements... They shaped and gave direction and clarity to the proceedings. Hunger and malnutrition, struggles and human rights violations were no longer just academic exercises of reeling off of data and statistics, but the reality of the everyday lives of people articulated by the leaders of the peoples' movements living these realities. (IPC 2002b: 9)*

In any event, it would be a mistake to judge the forum in isolation. Seen as a moment in a process, it would probably be difficult to imagine a smoother transition to the emergence of people's organizations and social movements as the main protagonists in crafting the advocacy platform on food and agriculture issues. When the forum closed the IPC was left with the difficult parallel task of managing relations and communication among disparate civil society components of the network, on the one hand, and the interface with intergovernmental institutions, on the other.

The Forum adopted two documents, the Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty, 'Food Sovereignty: A Right for All' and an Action Agenda. The Statement<sup>24</sup> was delivered on 13 June to the plenary of the official Summit. It rejected out of hand the official Declaration of the WFS:fy/ which, in the Forum's view, offered only 'more of the same failed medicine'. In contraposition to the dominant paradigm, the Forum proclaimed the concept of Food Sovereignty, defined in the following terms, as the umbrella under which policies and actions to end hunger should be placed:

*Food Sovereignty is the RIGHT of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies. (IPC 2002a)*

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<sup>23</sup> Personal notes on the meeting.

<sup>24</sup> Available at [www.foodsovereignty.org](http://www.foodsovereignty.org).

A key aspect of this concept was the application of a rights-based approach, implying in particular 'the primacy of people's and community's rights to food and food production over trade concerns'. The Statement came down clearly on the side of removing agriculture from the WTO and promoting the adoption of a Convention on Food Sovereignty which would 'enshrine the principles of Food Sovereignty in international law and institute food sovereignty as the principal policy framework for addressing food and agriculture'. This was a defeat for those CSOs who felt there was scope for reform of the WTO and some of these, including some members of the IPC, concluded regretfully that the Forum process did not offer room for their analyses and strategies.

A novelty of the 2002 Forum as compared with its 1996 predecessor was the adoption of a detailed Action Agenda aimed at translating into practice the principles enunciated in the Statement.<sup>25</sup> The plan incorporated the outcomes of the regional meetings and other proposals that had emerged from the discussions in plenary and the workshops. It was a first effort to move from principles to action although there was insufficient time during the Forum to prepare a coherent strategic document. Nonetheless, the fact that the Forum did adopt a document of this nature undoubtedly conferred a legitimizing mandate on the IPC, called upon to carry it forward.

### **A negotiated FAO-civil society relationship**

The Director-General of FAO was highly impressed with the dynamism of the civil society forum and invited the IPC to meet with him in order to plan for the future. Civil society expectations were high. Assessing the results of interaction with the United Nations at the close of a year which had witnessed the Monterrey Summit on Financing Development, the World Food Summit: *fyI* and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the authoritative ETC Group concluded that 'NGOs and social movements who were embroiled in the summits must end ... the pitiful pageant of pep rallies that have pacified CSOs since 1972 – and develop a tough love strategy for our intergovernmental work' (ETC Group 2003:1). Within the desolate overall panorama, however,

*one area of progress in 2002 (perhaps the only area) was in the changing of the structural relationship between civil society and FAO as a result of the World Food Summit. Along with an extensive list of substantial issues and demands, the NGO/CSO Forum at the Food Summit produced an equally extensive list of technical and institutional proposals intended to strengthen the participation of social movements in intergovernmental*

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<sup>25</sup> The four substantive pillars of the Plan are: a rights-based approach to food security and food sovereignty, local peoples' access to and management of resources; mainstreaming family-based farming and agroecological approaches; and trade and food sovereignty. A fifth section deals with access to international institutions.

*committees and to create new spaces for national organizations and minority groups to interact with the FAO Secretariat and governments. Many of the proposed changes seem incredibly modest. Collectively, however, they amount to a major structural adjustment in the way in which a major UN agency will relate to civil society (ETC Group 2003:4–5).*

The IPC's preparatory effort for the meeting with the Director-General involved an iterative process of communication. It was necessary to clarify aspects of the network's functions on which a common understanding had not been reached during the heated discussions at the forum. Basic principles to be respected in the relationship between civil society and intergovernmental organizations had to be defined. The Action Agenda needed to be transformed into a more strategic and operational proposal. The communications were cumbersome and time-consuming, a practical illustration of the rhythm required for meaningful consultation to take place involving social organizations which, in their turn, have to respect their own internal consultation practices. In the end, the document was finalized and adopted only on the eve of the meeting with the Director-General. Recognizing that direct and systematic involvement with social movements and CSOs was a relatively new departure for FAO, the paper started off by carefully defining what the IPC was and was not.

*The IPC advances principles, themes and values developed during the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty in June, 2002. ...which was based on principles of self-organisation and autonomy of civil society. For these reasons, the IPC is not centralized. Nor does it claim to represent organizations attending NGO/CSO fora. Instead, the IPC acts to enable discussions among NGOs, CSOs and social movements, as well as to facilitate dialogue with FAO. Each NGO/CSO, and all the diverse constituent groups they represent (fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, peasants/smallholder farmers, waged workers, and so on) continues to speak for itself and to manage its own relationship with FAO and its Members. (IPC 2002c:3)*

On its side, in preparing for the meeting FAO took the important decision to adopt the four pillars of the NGO/CSO Forum's Action Plan as the point of departure, and to document how FAO's current and planned activities related to these issues, rather than insisting that the dialogue be based on the official outcome of the WFS and the WFS: *fyl*.

The meeting took place on 1 November 2002. At its close it was agreed to set out the main lines of future relations between FAO and the IPC in a formal Exchange of Letters, which was signed by both parties in early 2003. In this document, FAO acknowledged the principles of civil society autonomy and right



to self-organization – the first time that such a commitment had been registered in writing in a negotiated UN-civil society document - and pledged to take steps to enhance the institutional environment for relations with civil society. On its part, the IPC acknowledged its responsibility to ensure broad outreach to people's organizations and social movements in all regions and facilitate their participation in policy dialogue. The Letter further established a framework for a programme of work in the four IPC priority areas: the right to food, agro-ecological approaches to food production, local access to and control of natural resources, and agricultural trade and food sovereignty. The following section will document how this agreement has been implemented and what impact it has had in both its substantive and institutional dimensions.

### **Impact on development discourse and institutional interaction: opening up political space for social movements**

Since 2003 the IPC has facilitated the participation of over 2000 representatives of small food producers and Indigenous Peoples in FAO's regional conferences, technical committees and global negotiation processes for treaties and conventions. So doing, it has opened FAO up to voices which were previously absent from its policy forums. This has involved not just mobilizing resources for travel, but also diffusing documentation, conducting training on the issues concerned, supporting the formulation of people's movement position papers and, on some occasions, organizing parallel civil society forums. Out of the many issues and events in which the IPC has been involved, three can be selected to illustrate the impact that it has had on development discourse and civil society access to policy space within FAO.<sup>26</sup> The first concerns implementation of the concept of the Right to Food. The official Declaration of the WFS: *fy/* invited FAO to elaborate voluntary guidelines to support member states' efforts to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food. The very inclusion of this provision in the Declaration was, to a good degree, the product of determined civil society lobbying. The civil society stakeholders organised themselves effectively to influence the political process of the intergovernmental working group established within the Committee on World Food Security to formulate the guidelines. FIAN International, a specialized NGO which acted as IPC focal point for the right to food, took the leadership role. Some 40 CSOs were mobilised to attend some or all of the sessions. The CSO participants organised strategy meetings, designated their spokespersons keeping geographic and gender balance in mind, and functioned as an effective lobbying mechanism during and between the sessions. Without any doubt, they were better prepared than many or most of the governments. Point after point, as the negotiations proceeded, they managed to get their views incorporated into the text.

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<sup>26</sup> A fuller account is provided in McKeon (2009).

The final text, adopted by the FAO Conference in 2004, strengthens the legal interpretation of the right to food by extending it beyond simple access to food to include access of individuals and groups to productive resources. It reiterates the obligation of states to respect, protect and fulfil their citizens' right to food. It underlines that governments need to have a national strategy to do so and describes the necessary elements of such a strategy. It sets standards for use of food aid and prohibits use of food as a weapon in conflicts. It addresses governments' responsibilities for the impacts of their policies on other countries. Although the guidelines are voluntary, they provide valuable support to governments that are interested in implementing the right to food and a powerful lobbying instrument for civil society actors in countries where the government is less proactive. Five years later the right to food concept as operationalized in the FAO voluntary guidelines is serving as a Trojan horse in the battle against the neoliberal agenda in the context of the world community's efforts to redesign global governance of food and agriculture.

What were the major success factors in the process of promoting a paradigm shift within FAO around the concept of the right to food? One was related to the subject matter itself. Human rights is classed among the 'soft' issues on which civil society agendas can most easily be advanced, although this case is borderline since the right under negotiation was an economic one. Another factor was the consensus regarding the positive value of human rights discourse within the civil society community. There were no major disagreements on substance and strategy as there have been in the case of other issues like international trade and the WTO. A third was the galvanizing effect of the fact that a specific policy negotiation process was in place. This gave focus to the civil society efforts, directing them towards having an impact on a particular product to be produced within a given time-frame. A fourth 'plus' was the willingness of a serious and well-resourced NGO to take the issue up and provide leadership, since the voluntary guidelines process was at the heart of its 'core business'. The quality of this leadership was a fifth success factor. FIAN performed its focal point task in a democratic and transparent fashion, providing effective coordination without excessive centralisation. Good use was made of internet communications, taking care to post messages not only in English but in Spanish and French as well. A special effort was made to reach out to and involve the IPC regional network and people's organization membership. Meetings during the working group sessions were conducted with respect for the contributions of each member of the group and with a view to teasing out consensus and building team work. A sixth, related factor was the intellectual excellence of the civil society input and the effectiveness of the strategy which the group evolved for identifying key points and using the spaces accorded to CSOs by the intergovernmental working group to get them across. A seventh factor was the good relations and virtuous alliances that developed between the CSOs and the FAO secretariat, the Chair of the intergovernmental working group, and key 'like-minded governments'. This factor facilitated a solution to a problem that persistently dogs civil society lobby efforts, that of resource mobilization. Throughout the guidelines process the civil society

stakeholders were able to count on the necessary resources to bring participants from developing countries and to help cover communication costs.

A second illustration of the impact of the IPC, this time a conflictual one, is provided by the 2003 issue of the FAO flagship publication, the *State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA)*. The thematic focus of this issue was the use of biotechnology in agriculture, strongly opposed by CSOs and social movements. Civil society reaction to the release of the publication on 17 May 2004, which they felt validated the use of biotechnology as a solution to the problem of hunger, was immediate. The IPC network was alerted and action taken to prepare and post an open letter to the Director-General of FAO (IPC 2004). The letter criticised both the process and the content of the 2003 *SOFA*. Regarding process, civil society organisations felt that 'FAO has breached its commitment to consult and maintain an open dialogue with smallholder farmers' organizations and civil society'. In fact, the Exchange of Letters between FAO and the IPC foresaw the establishment of a joint FAO-IPC working group on the impact of biotechnology on agrarian and food production systems. Instead, the content of the *SOFA* issue had been prepared by the FAO secretariat without consultation with civil society although, the open letter maintained, 'there appears to have been extensive discussion with industry'. Regarding the content of the report, the CSOs found that although the document 'struggles to appear neutral, it is highly biased and ignores available evidence of the adverse ecological, economic and health impacts of genetically engineered crops.' By 16 June more than 850 CSOs and 650 individuals had signed the letter, which was delivered by hand to the Deputy Director-General of FAO by the international coordinator of the IPC.

The *SOFA* incident sparked off extremely interesting discussions within FAO. The fact that a prestige publication taking a controversial position on a delicate topic with a preface signed by the Director-General could reach publication without whistles being blown raised issues of process and quality control. The eventuality that corporate interests might weigh on FAO normative activities was preoccupying. The question of whether or not FAO was empowered to have a position on a given issue other than that adopted by its member governments was subject to debate. If it was so empowered, should this position be based on neutral scientific weighing of the facts? Or should FAO itself act as a stakeholder on behalf of the world's hungry as it had opted to do during the negotiations on the application of the right to food?

The Director-General met with a delegation of the IPC on 14 October 2004. He expressed his unhappiness with the process by which the *SOFA* issue had been prepared and reiterated his own view that biotechnology would not solve the problem of hunger. The *SOFA*, he indicated, was to be considered a technical report prepared by an expert committee and not an FAO policy paper. He committed FAO to facilitating the preparation and publication of a civil society report presenting other views on biotechnology. In the end, dedicated support was not made available and without it the IPC was unable to muster a substantive input on the theme. On this occasion as on others, the people's

organizations and the IPC mechanism as a whole proved more effective in mobilizing a far-reaching and credible denunciation than in following through rapidly to document alternative positions. All told, however, the incident constituted a salutary shake-up of the 'neutral scientific-technical' identity often adopted by the secretariats of intergovernmental agencies. Seeking stakeholder contributions has now become a standard procedure in the preparation of *SOFA*. The clash contributed to clarifying the issues involved in cooperation between FAO and civil society although it did not solve them on a corporate basis. They remain to be addressed for a qualitative step to be taken towards the adoption of transparent and reasonably resourced procedures for stakeholder participation throughout the range of FAO's scientific work.<sup>27</sup>

The third illustration we will examine is the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) held in Porto Alegre from 7 to 10 March 2006. This meeting proved to be a particularly significant terrain for experimentation with civil society participation in FAO global policy forums. The issue was a top priority for rural people's organizations and social movements. The IPC was able to use to good advantage the synergies its membership afforded between strong rural people's movements and NGOs with expertise in agrarian reform issues. An alliance was established with the sponsoring Brazilian government, which counted on the IPC to facilitate its communication with radical Brazilian social movements. Relations between the IPC and the FAO secretariat office responsible for the conference were facilitated by the support of the Brazilian government and the institutional basis for cooperation that had been built up since the *WFS:fyI*, in particular the IPC-FAO Exchange of Letters. The head of the secretariat was an experienced, intelligent and diplomatically skilful person who sincerely believed in the added value of civil society input, particularly by rural stakeholders. Finally, the resource problem was addressed by obtaining the assistance of FAO's sister organization, IFAD, which was then well advanced in developing its own innovative interface with rural peoples' organizations, many of which were IPC members.

In the run-up to the conference, the IPC declined an invitation to participate in the official Steering Committee in order to avoid co-optation. It decided instead to organize a parallel autonomous civil society conference which would have meaningful and well-defined opportunities to interact with the official conference.<sup>28</sup> In the end, the IPC obtained for CSOs the right to prepare one of

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<sup>27</sup> UN secretariats often complain if CSOs seek to have their expenses covered when they are provided with an occasion to contribute to the preparation of documents or publications. This objection ignores the resource situation of all but the big, well-heeled NGOs. Providing adequate resources to people's organisations to participate in such exercises can be a win-win proposition which helps the people's organisations to systematise their experience and positions and provides UN institutions with invaluable input to which they would not otherwise have access.

<sup>28</sup> Two other actors did join the Steering Committee – the NGO Action Aid International and the IFAD-based International Land Coalition, a hybrid body which counts the World Bank and FAO among its members along with CSO networks. The IPC let it be known, however, that it would strongly contest the conference if civil society actors other than the people's organizations,

the basic issue papers and several case studies, to name one of the speakers at the inaugural ceremony, and to engage in dialogue on an equal footing with governments in roundtable discussions, with seven civil society representatives pitted against seven ministers or other high government officials in what they dubbed 'gladiator style'. The conclusions of the parallel civil society forum were presented to the conference and included in its report.

The people's organizations and social movements had a meaningful impact on the final statement of the official conference itself, which holds that 'rural development policies, including those on agrarian reforms, should be more focused on the poor and their organizations, socially-driven, participatory, and respectful of gender equality, in the context of economic, social and environmentally sound sustainable development' (FAO 2006a: para. 28). The conference rescued the issue of agrarian reform from the oblivion into which it had fallen in the decades following the 1979 World Conference on Agricultural Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) and linked it to the emerging theme of the right to food. For CSOs the marginalization of World Bank-promoted market-assisted land reform, free trade and export-oriented agriculture as recipes for development was an important political victory.<sup>29</sup> Powerful FAO members, like the United States and the European Union, were less satisfied and have done their best to slow pedal follow-up. But the conference has stimulated a number of Southern governments and intergovernmental organizations to seek FAO's technical assistance in applying the principles enunciated by ICARRD to their particular contexts, with stakeholder participation.<sup>30</sup> In terms of opening up meaningful political space for civil society, the conference set a new standard for FAO, which, however, has not yet been recognized as corporate practice.

### **The Global Food Crisis: a Political Opportunity for Civil Society?**

In late 2007, five and a half years after the WFS:*fyI* and the parallel civil society forum the 'world food crisis' erupted in the media, catching public attention due to the clamorous riots in low-income countries and the fact that even consumers in the industrialized North were feeling the pinch. The social movements and CSOs tracking food and agriculture issues were expecting it. Thanks to a decade of progressively solid networking since the 1996 World Food Summit, they were

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which are the primary direct protagonists of agrarian reform, were allowed to 'represent' civil society in the Steering Committee. Instead, a transparent practice of holding meetings between the FAO secretariat, the IPC and other interested CSOs prior to each meeting of the Steering Committee was established, and the minutes were posted on the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) web site.

<sup>29</sup> On agrarian reform, Via Campesina and ICARRD, see Borras (2008).

<sup>30</sup> The African Union is currently developing continental guiding principles for land reform with technical and financial support from FAO, including for consultation with the African regional farmers' networks.

far better prepared than before to take advantage of what could prove to be an important political opportunity to address both the paradigmatic and the institutional aspects of world food governance. Already at its 2005 annual meeting, in the run-up to the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial, IPC members had taken good note of the renewed centrality of food and agriculture as a world problem area. The UN system – and FAO in particular – appeared indeed to constitute the only alternative to the WTO/Bretton Woods institutions as a multilateral locus for addressing these issues according to a logic in which human rights and equity take precedence over liberalizing markets.

By the time of the IPC's 2007 meeting, the trends that had continued to dominate over the intervening months seemed to corroborate this analysis. Powerful member government which had tended to ignore FAO as an international forum over past years had returned in force to bring their interests to bear on the decision-making processes of the organization. The World Bank was dedicating its 2008 annual report to the theme of agriculture and development for the first time in almost a quarter of a century. The Gates and Rockefeller Foundations had joined hands to form an Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). A Global Donor Platform for Rural Development was reaching out to bring together OECD bilateral aid programmes, the EU and UN family multilateral funders with a vision of 'achieving increased development assistance impact and more effective investment in rural development and agriculture'.<sup>31</sup>

In the IPC's analysis, the strategy of the OECD countries and agrifood corporations for addressing the food crisis was to de-route attention from structural and political issues towards renewed faith in the two planks of the dominant paradigm. The capacity of markets to generate development for all was being refurbished through 'aid for trade' discourse and by promoting bilateral trade agreements as a tool to jump start the stalled WTO Doha round. Technology as a tool to generate food for all was being reinvented through the "new green revolution" with its accent on technology transfer – including a strong push for GMOs – which would reinforce the control of agrifood business over the food chain at all levels. With the crisis of the WTO, the situation had become more acute and the offensive of the pro-liberalization interests more aggressive. If the WTO were to be discredited as a world trade forum, would agricultural trade oversight be brought to FAO? Not if the pro-liberalization forces had a say in the matter. On the contrary, the role they envisaged for FAO was a reduced one, privileging global information analysis and diffusion activities at the expense of presence in the regions and capacity to provide policy advice and technical support for developing country members. The IPC felt this vision was only part of an overall strategy for reform of the UN system which would tend towards reinforcing the power of the central UN secretariat and the New York-based intergovernmental bodies, 'demoting' the autonomous

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<sup>31</sup> [www.donorplatform.org](http://www.donorplatform.org).

technical agencies to the status of technical advisory bodies and further enhancing the role of the 'more effective' Bretton Woods institutions.

In such a context IPC members felt it was even more important than ever to take a systemic approach to strategizing about global food governance. And, more than ever, rural people's organizations and social movements needed the kind of analytic support which the IPC could provide. It was to be expected that space for lobbying within the institutions would be progressively reduced the stronger the conflict became. Hence it was important to achieve an effective balance between mobilizing outside the institutions and maintaining hard-won political space inside. The success of mobilization, clearly, depended not only on numbers but also on capacity to formulate alternatives.

The need for a systemic approach was confirmed on 29 April 2008 when UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that he would lead a task force to address the current global food crisis. Made up of 23 UN specialized agencies, funds and programmes, the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis (HLTF) is coordinated by a small secretariat based in Geneva and Rome. In mid July 2008 the HLTF released a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA), a draft of which had already received the endorsement of the G8 in its 8 July 2008 'Statement on Global Food Security'. The CFA is light on governance discourse. The HLTF is 'not envisaged as a permanent fixture.' It will aim at 'catalyzing and supporting the CFA's overall objective of improving food and nutrition security and resilience in a sustainable way'. To do so, it 'will work at global, regional and country levels to track progress....[and] will address some of the underlying policy issues at the global level (trade, export subsidies and restrictions, biofuels etc.).'

Accountability of this mechanism to governments is close to inexistent. All that is envisaged is 'regular consultation'...through 'high-level briefings with the General Assembly, ECOSOC and UN regional groups, governing bodies and management committees of individual UN system agencies'(UN High Level Task Force 2008).

The OECD countries hit the drawing board as soon as the CFA was released to sketch in the missing pieces. Who should be the members and the 'owners' of the 'Global Partnership for Food Security' that the HLTF was expected to facilitate? How would the essential component of international policy coordination be exercised and what role could be foreseen in this context for the existing Committee on World Food Security housed by the FAO? Who should be responsible for naming and supervising the international group of experts on food security that both the HLTF and the G8 were calling for and, again, what would be the role of FAO in this exercise? And what about the aid component, beyond the emergency assistance channeled through the World Food Programme that was receiving immediate priority? Was it best to favour the World Bank, which had jumped the gun by announcing the creation of a \$ 1.2 billion fast track facility for the food crisis on 29 May? Or was IFAD, the international fund with a special mandate to address rural poverty and rural development, a better bet? There was no doubt that the OECD countries would

have their say in determining the responses to these open questions. How the developing countries most affected by the food crisis were going to get a word in edgeways was less evident.

In framing their own analysis of causes and remedies of the food crisis the people's organisations, social movements and NGOs associated with the IPC were well aware of the fact that the stall in the WTO process had combined with the mediatic food crisis to produce an un hoped-for political opportunity to challenge the dominant neo-liberal paradigm.<sup>32</sup> 'No More "Failures-as-Usual"!' was the title of a civil society statement drafted by IPC members and signed onto by some 900 CSOs in the run-up to the a High Level Conference on World Food Security organized by FAO in June 2008 (IPC 2008). Small farmers organisations trace the roots of the current crisis to three decades of wrong policies.

*For over 30 years policy makers, national governments and international institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization pushed the fundamental restructuring of national economies while chanting the mantra of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. In agriculture this led to dramatic shifts from production for domestic consumption to production for export... Many developing countries that used to be self-sufficient in basic grains are now net importers of food. The restructuring of agriculture also facilitated the corporatisation of agriculture. While peasants and small-scale farmers have been systematically driven from the land in the North and the South, corporations increased their control over the food chain... Agriculture has moved away from its primary function – that of feeding humans. Today, less than half of the world's grains are eaten by humans. Instead, grains are used primarily to feed animals, and more recently they are being converted into agro-fuels to feed cars... Agriculture and food policies are now controlled only by a faceless international market. National policies designed to ensure the viability of small-scale farmers and an adequate supply of culturally appropriate food through support for domestic agriculture have been replaced by the voracious demands of the 'market' (La Via Campesina 2008).*

More than 100 CSOs from 5 continents attended the civil society forum held in parallel to an FAO High Level Conference called in June 2008 to seek solutions to the food crisis. For the first time, environmental NGOs were present in force, thanks to the strong links between the food crisis and environmental issues like climate change and agrofuels. The participants advocated a paradigm shift towards food sovereignty and small scale sustainable food production which,

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<sup>32</sup> Among the many lucid documents on the food crisis emanating from civil society organisations are GRAIN (2008), Guzman (2008), Polaski (2008), Bello (2008).



unlike industrial agriculture, can feed the world while making a positive contribution to 'cooling' the climate. Regarding global governance, civil society called for a fundamental restructuring of the multilateral organisations involved in food and agriculture under the auspices of a UN commission that would reach beyond the 'failed institutions whose negligence and neoliberal policies created the crisis' to include strong representation of 'those we must feed and those who must feed us'.

Over the past year, developing country dissatisfaction with G-8 promoted proposals for the creation of a "Global Partnership for Food Security" in whose crafting they had not been involved has provided impetus for a more transparent and inclusive effort to revisit the global governance of food and agriculture by reforming the FAO-based Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Under the leadership of the current chair of the CFS, the Permanent Representative to FAO of Argentina, and with strong support from Brazil and other governments a "Contact Group" open to representatives of civil society has been established to prepare a proposal for a reformed CFS that will be put to the next session of the Committee in mid October 2009. The IPC is playing a significant role in this process, alongside of major international NGOs like OXFAM and Action Aid which cannot but recognize the legitimacy of the IPC to channel the positions of the people's organizations and social movements that compose it. If the civil society positions, shared by some governments, win out the CFS will become an authoritative intergovernmental policy forum with a vision based on eradication of hunger and universal attainment of the right to food. It will have a recognized function of monitoring the progress of national governments towards this goal and assessing the impact on food security of other intergovernmental institutions. Participation will be opened to civil society with particular attention to organizations representing small food producers and poor urban consumers. A High Level Panel of Experts tasked with providing substantive support to the CFS will include not only academics but also civil society experts feeding in the knowledge-based expertise accumulated by peasant producers, indigenous peoples and CSOs that work with them. Links will be built between the global policy forum and regional and national forums which will be encouraged to adopt an inclusive approach to stakeholder participation in developing and implementing policy frameworks and action plans. The stakes of the negotiation, a synthesis of what social movements and civil society have been advocating since 1996, could hardly be higher.

### **By Way of Conclusion**

What does the experience of civil society engagement with FAO have to teach us about the openings and the obstacles to interface, on both sides of the fence, and about the conditions under which virtuous alliances between social movements and civil society can be built? What characteristics distinguish the IPC from other global advocacy initiatives and what impact have these characteristics had on its effectiveness?

### **The IPC today**

The IPC is an autonomous, self-managed global mechanism grouping some 45 people's movements and NGOs involved with at least 800 organizations throughout the world. Its membership includes constituency focal points (organizations representing small farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists, Indigenous Peoples, agricultural workers); regional focal points (people's movement or NGO networks based in the various regions responsible for diffusion of information and consultation in specific geographic areas); and thematic focal points (NGO networks with particular expertise on priority issues). It is not a centralized structure and does not claim to represent its members. It does not aspire to constitute an all-inclusive civil society interface with FAO and other institutions, but is rather a space for self-selected CSOs which identify with the food sovereignty agenda adopted at the 2002 forum. The IPC serves as a mechanism for information and training on issues regarding food sovereignty. It promotes forums in which people's movements and CSOs involved in food and agriculture issues can debate, articulate their positions and build their relationships at national, regional and global levels. It facilitates dialogue and debate between civil society actors, governments and other stakeholders at all levels.

The IPC does not have a formal statute or legal identity. It has, however, adopted an agreed consultation and decision-making procedure, including an annual meeting. It periodically establishes working groups to collect information and develop positions on specific themes. Such groups currently exist on agrarian reform, agricultural biodiversity/models of production in a context of climate change, artisanal fisheries, food sovereignty in conflict situations, and global governance of food and agriculture. A minimal IPC liaison office based in Rome acts as the international secretariat of the network.

There is no doubt but that FAO has been strongly affected by its interaction with civil society and social movements in the thirteen years since the World Food Summit. Since 1996 practices of civil society participation in FAO's policy formulation and governance have advanced considerably, although they have not been formally institutionalised. Significant civil society successes have been scored in introducing paradigmatic change and formulating mechanisms to apply new concepts, as in the case of the right to food, or rehabilitate existing ones like agrarian reform. Links between national, regional and global policy spaces have been built up by social actors like the West African small farmers' movement promoting family farming (see McKeon et al. 2004; McKeon 2008), South American and Asian artisanal fisherfolk fighting against corporate overexploitation of the seas<sup>33</sup>, and pastoralists defending the animal genetic

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<sup>33</sup> Artisanal small-scale fisheries was introduced as an agenda item on the agenda of the FAO Committee on Fisheries in 2005 and 2007 thanks to civil society lobbying and alliances with the secretariat and 'like-minded governments'. This mounting momentum led to a Global

resources on which their livelihoods depend<sup>34</sup>. The level of debate has deepened on basic questions that have dogged FAO from its foundation: the lack of political will on the part of powerful member governments to address the problems inscribed in the organization's mission and the ambiguity of the technical-political divide that bedevils the secretariat. The very fact that the walls of the organization were shaken from the ground floor up by civil society outrage on an occasion such as that of the release of the allegedly pro-GMO 2003 *State of Food and Agriculture* was, in itself, an important sign of the de-impermeabilisation of FAO. The defensive reaction of some Western governments – traditional proponents of civil society participation in public affairs as a key component of democracy – who now question the priority of FAO's civil society liaison and advocacy work (FAO 2006b:para. 48). could be taken as a disturbing sign of 'backlash'. On the other hand, it could be read as a promising symptom of heightened recognition of the political character of FAO governance, itself a result both of the increased political significance of food and agriculture issues on the world scene and of the greater capacity of civil society actors to question the neoliberal agenda.

The qualitative leap in FAO's engagement with non-state actors can be attributed in no insignificant measure to its entering into negotiation with the autonomous, people's organization-dominated mechanism that emerged from the two summits of 1996 and 2002. Success factors on the civil society side have included the IPC's skill in defending its autonomy and in validating its legitimacy by effectively bringing the voices of Southern peoples' organizations to policy forums to which they had previously had no access. On the FAO side they have included the secretariat's recognition of civil society's autonomy and right to self-organization, willingness to valorize the IPC's efforts to involve organizations of the rural poor in policy dialogue, and engagement to facilitate their access to political space in which to defend their agendas. These success factors, however, have not been institutionalized and the FAO-civil society relation is very much a work in progress, constantly open to questioning by hostile senior secretariat members<sup>35</sup> or member governments. The outcome of the current negotiations regarding the reform of the Committee on World Food Security could have an important effect of institutionalizing much of what has been achieved over the past years.

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Conference on Smallscale Fisheries in October 2008 with the two international federations of artisanal fisherfolk represented in the planning committee. This process has been facilitated by the IPC.

<sup>34</sup> The IPC mobilized resources to bring a delegation of pastoralist representatives from 14 countries to the First International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture organized by FAO in September 2007 and provided them with the support they needed to be able to make their views known.

<sup>35</sup> As has transpired over the past few years.

Assessment of the experience of interface by the IPC itself provides a number of insights.<sup>36</sup> During a self-evaluation exercise conducted in 2005 members judged that the IPC had effectively built links between social movements and FAO and had opened up spaces for people's organisations independently of the big NGOs which tend to dominate the scene. The IPC was judged to have succeeded in maintaining its autonomy and to have contributed to the articulation of food sovereignty as an alternative paradigm to neoliberalism. On the weak side, it lacked effective mechanisms of communication and exchange, the key level of regional work did not receive enough support, dependence on FAO's help to mobilize funds was a problem. A fundamental lesson was that, at the outset, the IPC had underestimated the difficulty of changing FAO and had overestimated its own capacity for action and that of the people's organisations that compose it. The latter, experience had demonstrated, simply did not have time and resources to invest in interface with FAO above and beyond the activities in which they are already engaged following their own agendas and the evolution of the situations in which they are grounded. This had become clear in the incident of the *SOFA* issue on biotechnology. The accent, it was determined, should be shifted more decisively away from FAO's agenda towards the struggles and negotiations in which the social movements themselves are directly engaged. From that starting point the IPC should identify a few political priorities on which to interface with FAO and other institutions, seeking to open spaces and exploit contradictions within the intergovernmental system. If it tried to cover the entire FAO scene, on the contrary, it would inevitably be dispersive and ineffective and would risk co-optation.

The civil society consultation held in parallel to the FAO High Level Conference in June 2008, in the midst of the food crisis, offered an occasion to take the analysis a step further following three years of efforts to apply the insights that had emerged from the earlier self-evaluation. The fact that the IPC functions not as a hierarchical, representative organization but as an autonomous facilitating mechanism was confirmed to be a fundamental success factor. 'Each sector can speak for itself, with no forced consensus as in other UN processes'. At the same time, the IPC is not a neutral space. 'The political statement of food sovereignty is what we have in common. This allows us to develop common strategies while respecting the voice of each component.' Although civil society interaction with FAO predated the creation of the IPC, members judged that the advent of this mechanism has enabled them to move beyond particular technical questions and tackle systemic policy issues.<sup>37</sup> The new global political space it has opened up for people's organizations has proved important for all, but particularly so for weaker movements like indigenous peoples and pastoralists and those who are not part of a bigger family. The global mobilization and advocacy capacity of

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<sup>36</sup> These considerations are based on notes taken during the IPC annual meetings and a collective interview conducted in June 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Limitations in NGO effectiveness in impacting on the United Nations has been attributed in part to the tendency to take sectoral, non-systemic approaches to the United Nations. See Juan Somoza in UNRISD (1997:4).

the IPC is felt to be reflected in the broad diffusion of the sign-on letters it has launched, the recognition it has received from international institutions like FAO, and the success it has obtained on issues like the right to food and agrarian reform. But the greatest strength of the IPC is felt to lie in its capacity to network, synergize and support the separate struggles of its members in the regions and in the manifold policy forums in which they are on the front line of the battle for food sovereignty.

Diversity is a recurring term. In terms of the quality of analysis conducted within the IPC the high points are judged to come from bringing together the different regions and rural producer constituencies. 'Then we get interesting analysis that's not taking place anywhere else'. This diversity has also stimulated virtuous behaviour changes. NGOs have learned to put their expertise at the service of people's organizations. Indigenous peoples have understood the importance of learning from the struggles of other sectors like pastoralists. Strong organizations, like Via Campesina, cite the IPC as a space which has helped it learn to listen.

The weaknesses of the IPC are felt, to some degree, to be the mirror image of its strengths. 'We are a very flat and heterogeneous coalition. Decision-making is difficult. The IPC can't be top-heavy, and a flat coalition needs resources of communication, facilitation, alliance building.' And resource mobilization has not been an area of success. The political opportunity offered by the food crisis and the need to move beyond FAO and take a more systemic view make it urgent to address these organizational issues. 'We can't ask the people's organisations to do more than what they are already doing. We have to avoid creating a "technical corps" that's not controlled by the people's organisations. But we also need to avoid the mistake we are making now of being less effective than we should be'. The very fact that the overall context has become more politically charged is viewed as a result to which the IPC itself has contributed, through its contestation of the dominant neoliberal paradigm. It constitutes a stimulus to strengthen and sharpen the IPC's capacity for action. There are, however, no illusions about the power of opposing interests and the restriction of political space within global institutions that is likely to apply while the battle is on.

Organizationally, the IPC does not fit neatly into the categories described in social movement literature dealing with transnational mobilization. Following the terminology proposed by Tarrow (Tarrow 2005:167), it is not a short-term coalition. But neither is it a federation or an issue-based campaign, although it does contribute to campaigns conducted by its members and by other broader coalitions. Perhaps the description that comes closest to capturing its nature is Marchetti's and Pianta's suggestion that transnational networks 'provide political innovation in terms of conceptualisation, organisational forms, communication, political skills, and concrete projects to the broader archipelago of social movements' (Marchetti and Pianta 2007:3). The major innovation of the IPC as compared with experiences documented in existing literature is its identity as a horizontal mechanism which has made a deliberate and successful

effort to reach out to people's organizations in the South – peasant farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, pastoralists and agricultural workers – and to place them at the centre of reflection and decision making. The IPC is a rare, if not unique, example of an autonomous global civil society advocacy mechanism in which political direction rests with these organizations rather than with the NGOs which, often with the best of intentions, normally dominate decision-making processes in transnational collective action. In this sense, it responds to the concerns about asymmetries and power within networks expressed by Sikkink (in Khagram et al 2002) and illustrates the experimentation with 'novel forms of transnational links involving popular organisations from the south' which, according to Marchetti and Pianta, is attracting interest as awareness of risks of asymmetry increases (Marchetti and Pianta 2007). On the down side, it also confirms the consideration that "efforts to enhance representation and deliberation will slow down networks and make it more difficult for them to respond quickly to global problems and crises" (Khagram et al, 2002:312).

In the world of social movements alternative practices of building horizontal links among local spaces and struggles are relatively well developed, as the regional and world social forums illustrate. Researchers in disciplines ranging from anthropology to geography and ecology have documented and analysed such geographies of resistance.<sup>38</sup> There is also a rich literature on the topic of transnational civil society networks and their vertical interactions with international institutions.<sup>39</sup> The experience of bringing networked local resistance and alternatives to bear decisively on global forums in which 'hard' policies are decided, however, is far from conclusive. As an attentive observer of these dynamics put it several years ago:

*Presently there is a political gap from the local to the global which is only partially being filled in by the stretch from local networks to planetary social movements, international NGOs or global civil society. This is not merely an institutional hiatus but as much a programmatic hiatus and a hiatus of political imagination (Pieterse 2000:199).<sup>40</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Goodman and Watts (1997); Webster and Engberg-Pedersen (2002); Pile and Keith (1997); Gills (2000); Escobar (2001).

<sup>39</sup> In addition to the authors cited above, two particularly stimulating thinkers, coming at the issue of bringing linked local experiences to bear on the global scene from very different perspectives, are Saskia Sassen (2008) with her conceptualization of 'the world's third spaces', and Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (2005) with his theorization of opposition to the re-patterning of the social and natural worlds under globalization, which he terms the 'Empire', by a 'newly emerging peasantry' in Europe characterized in the first instance by its autonomy.

<sup>40</sup> Italics in original.

The itinerary of the IPC is a significant example of work-in-progress to span this hiatus. The fact that the IPC groups major regional and global networks of small-scale rural producers, mandated to speak for a good proportion of the world's poor<sup>41</sup>, gives it a more compelling legitimacy than that of other civil society actors, based rather on the values they defend, the cogency of their arguments, the effectiveness of the services they provide. It also gives it far more political punch in the South, since in many cases these organizations represent the majority of the electorate. This is illustrated by the successful efforts of people's organizations to bring food sovereignty concerns to bear on their governments' policies in countries ranging from Mali and Senegal in West Africa to Bolivia and Venezuela in Latin America and Nepal in Asia. In contrast with Tarrow's reading (2005:159), networking of this nature places strong emphasis on building South-South links among actors who have similar claims and not only reaching upward to international forums. Government accountability at national and regional levels in the South is likely to be a prerequisite to building accountable global governance. If this is the case, the IPC, with its focus on networking the struggles of Southern rural peoples' organizations and social movements and giving them voice in global arenas, is on the front line of the battle.

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<sup>41</sup> ROPPA's 12 national peasant farmer platforms represent some 45 million farmers, the majority of the population of these West African countries.

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### URL for this article

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/mckeon.pdf>

## **Contested urban environments: perspectives on the place and meaning of community action in central Dublin, Ireland**

**Michael Punch**

### **Abstract**

Cities have been substantially and unevenly reshaped through processes of economic restructuring, long cycles of investment/disinvestment across built environments and the neoliberal realignment of urban governance over recent years. Within this often contradictory context, grassroots interventions have taken on new importance and meaning as people seek to influence the future of their localities and their cities. However, it is important to remain critically aware of the challenges and risks for different forms of community action within these changing structural and contextual conditions. This paper draws from a long period of research into and involvement with tenants and community organisations in local authority estates in Dublin. It offers methodological reflections on some varieties of action research. It then explores the evolution of community action in the inner city focused on issues around housing and the urban environment. The paper offers insights to the achievements of and limits to different forms of community action within a changing policy environment in a city undergoing rapid transformation.

*Residents of St Michael's Estate are just getting to grips with the consequences of the announcement on Monday 19th by Dublin City Council that the Public Private Partnership regeneration deal it had with McNamara/Castlethorn Construction to develop St Michael's Estate will not go ahead as planned. Locals are angry and disappointed about this development... as soon as profit margins narrowed PPP collapsed like a deck of cards.*

**St Michael's Estate Regeneration Team, Press Release  
22.5.2009**

*They hope we will go away and stay in our long forgotten ghettos across Dublin City. We will return to our homes not to forget our dreams of a decent place to live but to organise our fight against Dublin City Council*

**St Michael's Estate Regeneration Team, Press Release  
5.6.2009**

At 6.30 pm on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Dublin's City Hall, located at the traffic-choked junction of Dame Street, Parliament Street and Lord Edward Street, became the locus for a grassroots street protest, fuelled by a level of anger and distress unseen since the anti-drugs movements of the mid 1990s. Tenants groups, community organisations and cross-city networks arrived from different points in the south and north inner city, noisily and colourfully drawing attention to the human costs of the latest urban crisis following the collapse of five public-private partnership (PPP) regeneration deals for local authority estates and public lands. One week had passed since Dublin City Council's unexpected announcement that the agreements with McNamara/Castlethorn Construction would no longer proceed in the light of changed economic circumstances. It was a week of unexpected reversals that revealed more clearly the conflicting interests and values of capital, state and community,

For a while, PPP arrangements had become flavour of the month with city and central state officials<sup>1</sup>. Up until the collapse adopted policies meant that all major regeneration projects with costs greater than €20 million *had* to be pursued using PPP agreements. The ability to achieve improved living environments for several working-class communities in the city – who had long suffered from the neglect and rundown of their estates – was thus made dependent on market forces. The turn to the engine of private capital for deliverance was heavily ideological, but also swept along in the blinkered enthusiasm over the Irish property boom of 1996-2007. However, with the sudden crash since 2008, boom has turned to bust and the developer pulled out fast, dramatically illustrating the vulnerabilities and limits to such market-driven approaches to social regeneration.

The protest was important for another reason. It was a collective outpouring of anger at recent injustices and demands for a better future – for the right to the city<sup>2</sup>, to live and to flourish and just to *be* in this place – behind which lay long years of struggles, achievements and losses. Accordingly, the protest and everything that led up to it is a story that deserves careful listening. It says something about the dreams and despairs of local communities, the skills available to and the strategies pursued by different forms of urban social movement and community development initiative, the machinations of public policy at central and local level, global neoliberal ideologies trickling down through Irish political economy, and cycles of investment and disinvestment in the city. There was a further significance to these events with regard to the nature of community mobilisation in the city: this signalled a back-to-the-

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<sup>1</sup> The Public Private Partnership model was extensively used by the Irish state in infrastructural projects such as roads, schools and housing. In the case of housing regeneration, deals were struck between Dublin City Council and private developers to develop predominantly private housing schemes on public lands that previously contained only social housing and open space. The deal meant zero public investment. The cost to the private partner of building some social units and community facilities was offset by the gift of the rest of the site for commercial exploitation.

<sup>2</sup> A phrase coined by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre.

streets turn in strategic action after several years of engagement with participatory and partnership structures.

This paper draws from a long period of research into and involvement with tenants and community organisations in local authority estates in Dublin. It offers methodological reflections on some varieties of action research. It then explores the evolution of community action in the inner city focused on issues around housing and the urban environment. The aim of this work is to develop some strategic insights on the achievements of and limits to different forms of community action within a changing policy environment in a city undergoing rapid transformation.

### **Approaching the space of community action in the city**

Urban social movements have at various times received considerable attention in social and political analyses of the city. Perhaps the best known recent body of work began with Manuel Castells' turn from an earlier structural Marxist account (Castells, 1977) to a research project that gave a more central explanatory role to a diverse and chaotic pattern of social movements focused on environmental, cultural and political demands in the city (Castells, 1983). These battles for the right to the city and the production of urban meaning were important forces in shaping historical patterns of urban change, alongside top-down processes driven by the state and capital, which tended to receive more attention in much critical social theory.

Subsequent research in this vein has explored how global restructuring and community politics are interlinked in order better to understand the historical and socio-spatial dimensions of urban transformation (Smith and Tardanico, 1987). This suggests a research agenda that explores the linkages between such issues as everyday life in the household or community, social networks, work-based and community-based political action, global capital flows and the organisation and control of production and trade. In a similar vein, Fisher and Kling (1993) assembled a diverse set of studies of community mobilisation in the context of globalised and neoliberalised urban systems. In an examination of grassroots responses to global pressures in U.S. cities, Fainstein (1987) highlighted the local implications of integration into a world economy. In the face of the twin threats of economic restructuring and spatial reorganisation in cities (including pressures linked to fierce competition for previously devalued land in the urban core), community activists have mobilised around public-service provision, community gain agreements from urban regeneration, and community-based local economic initiatives.

A frequent theme running through this work relates to grassroots opposition to urban renewal. In Castells' (1983) work, for example, a case study in San Francisco explored how minority neighbourhoods managed to survive under urban-renewal pressures. Renewal schemes were proposed first in the 1950s under the aegis of a pro-growth coalition in the city government "as an adequate instrument to provide a favourable setting for the new service economy, to

renovate blighted areas, to displace the poor and minorities, to improve the urban environment, to keep middle class residents, and to reduce the flight of high income taxpayers to the suburbs" (Castells, 1983: 102). This programme led to mobilisation on a large scale between 1967 and 1973 in the Mission Coalition Organization (MCO), which involved up to 12,000 people (out of a total population of 50,000) and 100 grassroots committees at its peak. The MCO was a citizen participation project, which aimed to represent residents' interests in the Federal urban programmes and, potentially, build into a multi-issue, multi-ethnic community alliance representative of the entire neighbourhood. The organisation was set up essentially along "Alinsky" lines, recalling the Back-of-the-Yards Council built upon 1930s labour militancy in Chicago. This emphasised two principles, the importance of the neighbourhood scale as a social base for political action and participatory democracy (Marston and Towers, 1993).<sup>3</sup>

The MCO exhibited complex articulations between community organisations and public programmes of social reform, neighbourhood self-reliance and local politics. Its operators (community leaders, local priests, etc.), adversaries and place in the urban social structure were reflected in a focus on class issues (poverty), race issues (minority culture, discrimination, etc.) and city issues (quality of life in the neighbourhood affected by service provision and economic value). The organisation had a number of positive effects, most notably in successfully protecting the neighbourhood from extinction in the face of renewal, improving the environmental quality of the public spaces, and winning some public funding for local community services. However, the MCO's effectiveness was limited by internal divisions over the main priority for action (neighbourhood, class or minority issues) and the "absorption of most of the leadership into the management of the programmes<sup>4</sup> and the subsequent infighting within the community over the control of public resources" (Castells, 1983, 137).

A number of researchers have focused on this complex question of incorporation – the tendency for the state or other powerful institutions to absorb and co-opt bottom-up movements within the complex machinations of policy-making and funding mechanisms. In many international cases, the state has cultivated direct linkages with local activists in the process achieving some control over potentially disruptive or dissenting organisations. A broad trend towards partnership between public and third sectors has to varying degrees reconstrued community and voluntary action as social policy delivery vehicles (Kramer, 1981; Acheson and Williamson, 1995).

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<sup>3</sup> See Alinsky (1945) for a description of the theory and action employed by this local organisation; see also Jacobs (1961) for comment on the success of the Alinsky praxis in opposing destructive urban redevelopment plans; Miller (1981) provides a description of the intentions and actions of community organisations that continued in this tradition in the post-war era.

<sup>4</sup> Federally funded social programmes

In a wide-ranging review of grassroots organisation in U.S cities, Mollenkopf (1983) also highlighted some common limitations, particularly the fact that the inherently local nature of such movements has prevented them from addressing the structural sources of conflict over urban development or from achieving a national political presence. Furthermore, a general reliance on State grants raises the danger of manipulation from above rather than accountability from below. One important consideration at this point is Fitzgerald's (1991) distinction between community-defined organisations, where the interests remain purely local and competition between places is promoted, and community-based organisations, which emerge and evolve in a particular locale but contribute to the advancement of broader social demands and goals.

Arising from difficulties of this kind, the critical importance of transcending localism and overcoming geographically fragmented activism has been discussed as the problem of "militant particularism" (Williams, 1989). The challenges of "properly bringing together" localised interest groups to advance the general interest and common good is fraught with difficulties, but experience has shown it is a challenge that must be met:

*... it was hard bitter learning: that you would lose or only partly win particular struggles unless you could generalize and broaden them, and change their underlying conditions (1989: 249)*

There is then a considerable international literature on grassroots mobilisation in urban settings, particularly where the basis or impetus relates to the lived experience of inequality or exclusion. The work demonstrates the mutual interconnections between general processes of change and local experiences and responses, and it variously explores the dynamic engagement between consciousness and action, theory and practice. This international research offers some guidance for the work on Dublin. It provides insights into the complex links between urban contradictions and struggles and the interplay between capital, the state and the grassroots at the level of the city. The cumulative international evidence provides some critical insights as to the place and meaning of grassroots organisation in the urban third sector, highlighting some important achievements and limits, notably with regard to localism, particularism and incorporation.

However, interest in this field has waned somewhat since the 1990s, as more recent commentary on social movements in the literature has tended to emphasise issues-based international movements, such as those focused on global justice, environmentalism and feminism (Castells, 1997), rather than on spatially defined urban movements. This is indeed important – we need careful critical analyses of the actually existing processes of neoliberal globalisation, including an understanding of the interests behind this project, its variable and uneven effects and the open possibilities for resistance and alternative futures.

Nevertheless, alongside this useful focus on such international movements, we would do well to remember that history shows any strategy or system of domination can also be resisted and rejected locally at neighbourhood level,



either partly or entirely (this may become an even more important fact now in the face of the latest global crisis which is undermining people and places in many areas of everyday life). In recognition of this political fact, Douglass and Friedmann (1998) attempt to “put the local back in” to the conversation. They turn our attention back to local narratives constructed around regions, cities and neighbourhoods. These are not closed off from global economic processes – the global and the local interpenetrate in a fluid and complex manner – but they are the sites for effective engagement in civic action. Collective actors (civil society) awaken to the conditions of their lives locally – of their labour and consumption – and mobilise to struggle for the right to a voice, the right to live differently and the right to human flourishing. In a slightly earlier formulation, Castells (1983, 70) would have agreed:

*...the emphasis upon the social and cultural determination of space must be combined with the recognition of the fundamental role played by territoriality in the configuration of social processes...Only in the secrecy of their homes, in the complicity of neighbourhoods, in the communication of taverns, in the joy of street gatherings may [people] find values, ideas, projects and, finally, demands that do not conform to the dominant social interests.*

## Notes on method

While many will agree readily enough with the importance of such local experiences and spatially defined grassroots praxis, we are faced with considerable methodological challenges relating to what precisely we are searching for and how best to carry out the research in a way that can contribute knowledge that is strategically useful to those directly affected by urban problems and inequalities. It is important in other words continuously to seek a research praxis that can offer insights to what does or does not work that can be made available to those directly affected by and/or active in confronting any issue of injustice or inequality in the city, whether the source of the conflicts and tensions are linked to global processes, state power or more locally defined structures and practices. This is an inescapable task of general importance: any research programme needs to include some serious reflection on its relationship to the wider world. It has been commonly accepted in every field of scientific endeavour (whether social, physical or natural) that the act of analysing data changes it. We are inescapably part of the universe we observe. If that is true for physics – from quantum to cosmological levels – it is even more obviously true for social research – there is no neutral ground, no wholly objective, other-worldly view. What matters is how we try to manage the effects and direct the potential use value of the research.

This paper argues for (and tries to make some small contribution to) an engaged research praxis that takes seriously the significance of grassroots movements. The point is that people’s collective readings of and responses to what is happening to their lived city is a significant and meaningful historical fact. This

is an important methodological as well as political principle. Organic understandings and interventions reveal much about the real social relationships – sometimes painful and conflictual, sometimes joyful and cohesive – and the values and intentions that characterise the contours of lived experience in any urban place. Thus we might invoke a simple but essential geographic and anthropological principle at the outset: place and instance, experience and practice, matter (Lee, 2002); the varied patterns of local knowledges and actions are important (Geertz, 1993).

At the same time, it is important not to adopt a naive localism or an unwarranted faith in the power of locally situated collective mobilisation. Such an unsophisticated populism would lose sight of the real limits and conditions within which any movement for change is socially constructed. This is why we need to enter into a continuing process of research, critical reflection and dialogue.

In this spirit, the discussion here explores some recent trends in organisation and action emerging from working class communities in contested inner-city spaces in Dublin since the 1970s, culminating in the May 2008 protests. The discussion is informed by a long programme of academic research and local engagement carried out from 1997 to the present. This work has included periodic involvement in various community organisations and networks as well as formal research. Some of these methods and experiences are worthy of brief reflection since it may be useful to highlight some of the strengths and challenges that can be encountered in trying to carry out engaged research aimed at generating practical knowledge or locally informed insights.

This work has included the production of a local development plan in consultation with the Ringsend Action Project (Punch, 2000), arguing for the resourcing of a diverse network of local economic initiatives in the context of deindustrialisation and docklands regeneration. Advisory support was provided for a research project of the South West Inner City Network exploring the local implications of a neoliberal urban-renewal strategy (Punch et al., 2007). Other work involved sitting on an independent voluntary consultancy forum along with residents and activists from Fatima Mansions (FAST: Fatima Advisory Strategic Team) from January to April 2004 during a period of intense negotiations over PPP regeneration plans. A similar piece of work involved a programme of consultancy and observational research with local activists attempting to negotiate the PPP consultation process in O'Devaney Gardens in the north-west inner city.

In this latter example, the first action taken involved “sitting in” as independent observers on early meetings (in April 2004) between tenants and the local authority. The local representatives succeeded in slowing down the process, which had all the appearances of being railroaded through initially. The next stage of work involved meeting each Monday night with local activists who had been appointed to represent the community in the negotiations to discuss the previous week's meeting and prepare for the coming one. Up until the end of Summer 2004, this was simply voluntary consultation work therefore. At that

point, a small research grant was secured from the Combat Poverty Agency<sup>5</sup>. This grant supported a more formal, long-term research programme agreed with the local activists, which would involve a researcher sitting in on all of the PPP negotiations as an independent observer with a view to producing a report on the process and the costs and benefits to the community involved.

This process continued between September and December 2004, involving the negotiation of a Community Charter, which was to input local needs and voices to the PPP plan. These meetings involved six tenants' representatives, two from the local Community Development Project, three Dublin City Council officials and their private consultants on PPPs (a property firm called Urban Capital). The process was facilitated by Community Technical Aid (CTA), an independent community development organisation.

A draft report offering an analysis of the consultation process emphasised the important power differentials in the process and raised a number of serious concerns, including the timing of participation (too late in the process), the inadequacy of resources and supports for capacity building locally, the limited spectrum of input to key parts of the planning process, a lack of transparency and the need for effective consultation structures and decision-making powers at local level. The work was presented and debated at (often lively, sometimes fractious) public meetings facilitated by the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies in Trinity College Dublin. The account of these problems was welcomed by many locally, and experiences reported on were recognisable to activists engaged in other local areas. At the same time, the arguments also engendered resistance and opposition from the state partners both publicly and behind the scenes. Ultimately, the whole experience was frustrating as it proved difficult to circulate or disseminate the findings more widely as the report was never published by the commissioning agency. The approach adopted did show the usefulness of providing support and advice when invited to do so by local people engaged in struggles over complex planning issues, and for a time the observational work helped to support people in a practical way if only by placing some level of onus on the state partners in the negotiations to deal fairly and openly on the grounds that "you are being watched". It also revealed the pitfalls of such an active approach given the complex micro-politics of local action and the pressures and limits linked to funding structures. There can be a real tension arising from the need to maintain the integrity of independent research findings where such findings generate politically charged critiques.

A second major form of action-oriented academic work has involved participation in the steering group of Tenants First<sup>6</sup>, a cross-city network of

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<sup>5</sup> This was state funding for research in the voluntary sector and it was sourced in partnership with a national housing advisory charity, which in contractual terms commissioned and therefore 'owned' the research. This situation was not ideal, as subsequent experiences proved, but it was the most immediate way to secure some financial support

<sup>6</sup> The steering group is made up of activists and tenants from local authority estates across the city. My involvement has been as a co-opted research and policy advisor to this grouping.

local authority tenants and anti-poverty groups from its inception in November 2003 to the present (ongoing). Again, there are two sides to this. It involves providing input on planning and housing policy issues raised at grassroots level (the network's agenda is shaped by regular public meetings with tenants and activists from communities across the city). This agenda called for research support to produce a guide for tenants faced with PPP regeneration plans (*The Real Guide to Regeneration*). The work was based on the experience of the communities first subjected to this regeneration process. The *Real Guide* was subsequently "workshopped" with local tenants, community workers and activists through a series of community-based public meetings, and it has been made use of (as local people see fit) in major regeneration programmes such as that in Dolphins Barn, a large flats complex in the south-west inner city. We have also produced a policy document setting out an alternative vision for housing (*Housing for Need Not Greed*)<sup>7</sup>, which amounts essentially to a defense of social housing (investment in provision and maintenance in order to move towards social housing becoming a vibrant sector of choice). A campaign to push forward this agenda is currently being devised. This latter work has been challenging in that it took literally years to iron out a platform that all members – coming from a diversity of local situations and political perspectives – could commit to comfortably and whole-heartedly.

The care taken to produce this work with diverse local input was worthwhile in that there is a real sense of ownership of the final products across all who have engaged with them, and it is thus politically more powerful. At the same time, problems and crises were mounting in housing and regeneration through all this period, so you have to live with the frustration of not being able to move forward as quickly as might be possible with an external (but top-down) piece of work. The effectiveness and usefulness of this approach remains to be seen, and it will depend on our ability to construct an effective campaign and a broader alliance to progress the arguments and recommendations coming from the research. This campaign work is ongoing at the present time. Finally it is worth also noting that Tenants First has been actively (and visibly) engaged in the various street-level protests over the past year or so.

As well as insights from active involvement of this kind, the paper also draws from a more formal and standard research programme, involving a series of 45 interviews carried out with activists from grassroots organisations across the inner city (see Punch 2002, 2005 for a report on findings relating to the social economy and the drugs crisis). The aim of this work was to record a social history of bottom-up movements in the city informed by the experiences and perspectives of local activists and to situate such experiences analytically within the broader political economy of urban change.

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<sup>7</sup> A related piece of work has also been carried out at national level for the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice (2009). While this is different methodologically, as it was developed in consultation with a nationally based voluntary agency, it is also now feeding into the emerging campaign work, while some of this research was also drawn on in the Tenants First document.

From the perspective of the researcher (and the research institution), a number of methodological principles provide the case for adopting these kinds of approaches (despite the risks and frustrations that can be encountered). Firstly, there is a case for a programme of research with social relevance informed by the real concerns and struggles of everyday life in the city. A university has a responsibility to its host city and those who live there, and in trying to serve and contribute to the city it finds itself in, any such research institution can make a difference and benefit from the unexpected patterns of learning discovered in the process (Linnane, 2006)<sup>8</sup>. Secondly, it is hoped that this approach can enhance understanding about how people make sense of their received situation and attempt to alter the trajectory of change to one that is more human and respectful of local needs, values and meanings. Such local action is significant given the immense barriers and costs involved; that people *still* get involved despite such difficulties signals something important about the social realities of the city. And finally, in reaching this local level of understanding we can perhaps say something more certain about social order, historical change and collective consciousness in general (Geertz, 1993).

### **A note on definitions**

Consideration of specific local cases, such as Dublin's inner city, can bring some useful experiential depth to the conversation, but we need first to clarify some terms before looking at the evidence. Notwithstanding the theoretical-methodological importance of local experiences and social practices, there remains considerable definitional confusion. A large area of such experience and practice is often termed "third sector", "third space" or "third system" (being outside of and alternative to the institutions and practices of state and capital). However, this "third space" remains a loose definitional category, spanning a range of voluntary associations and networks outside of the state and private sectors, including everything from independent and anarchic grassroots social movements to bottom-up community action and developmental initiatives to formalised international NGOs and charitable organisations. It encompasses civil society in its broadest sense – essentially, citizens being actively engaged in processes of societal development and change through involvement in churches, cultural associations, sports clubs, independent media, concerned citizens groups, social networks, etc. (Flyvbjerg, 1998). There is obviously a chaotic diversity across this inchoate grouping in terms of intentions, philosophies, praxis, institutional forms and relationships

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<sup>8</sup> I address this point about the university and the city *to* the academy in part as a protest given that this is precisely what is *not* happening or is being more and more marginalised in the top-down demand for research that can gain access to the top-rated, least-read academic journals and that can attract funding from outside institutions that bring their own interests and agendas. This is one important dynamic of the power structures of universities and an important aspect of the problem of power and the production of knowledge more generally. Within such a framework, any kind of engaged work has to become essentially a matter of voluntary commitment alongside the academic work valorised and rewarded by the institutions.

with (and attitudes towards) the dominant institutions of state and market. The enormous variation is clearer still when one considers this sphere of social action can denote everything from conservative residents' associations opposing the siting of a homeless facility to radical social movements seeking to build alternative ways of living or to challenge and change the existing dominant culture. For clarity and simplicity and in the interests of narrative coherence, the focus here is narrowed considerably to the emergence of new forms of spatially defined grassroots organisation and action in inner-city urban neighbourhoods.

### **Inner city organisation in Dublin: housing and the urban environment**

In general, the most striking elements of community-voluntary organisation in Dublin were primarily top-down in nature up until the late 1960s, consisting mainly of action inspired by charitable or philanthropic impulses. The impacts and role of the Dublin Artisans Dwellings Association and housing initiatives such as the Iveagh Trust, for example, are well documented (Aalen, 1992). Many social and economic services were delivered by religious organisations acting from scriptural values (notably Matthew 25), including local parishes and national organisations such as St. Vincent de Paul. Traditionally, this work followed a caring model, constructing crucial support systems and services for the poor, but structural challenges to the nature and persistence of poverty and inequality in the urban system were less frequently present (though under the influence of liberation theology in the 1970s, many such organisations began to take on more explicit and radical social-justice orientations). This tradition of charitable action with a service orientation flourished in the context of a relatively weak welfare state and the presence of considerable economic inequality and social disadvantage, starkly evident in the poor and overcrowded living quarters in the working-class locales that made up much of the historic built environment of the city.

### **New directions**

From the 1970s onwards, a number of important historical shifts occurred, producing far-reaching changes in the qualitative nature of the third space in the city. In particular, the early 1970s saw a different mode of local organisation and action starting to spring up at grassroots level, a turning encouraged by a confluence of forces. These included the collapse of the older industries, top-down redevelopment and housing plans and social problems linked to inequality (Inner City Organisations Network, 1998). Such organisation was also provoked by a planning culture perceived to be unsympathetic to local needs and values:

*(In the 1970s) a number of tenant groups had evolved around the city...and some of them took the form of community organisations,*

*community development associations...And there was a sense of people being completely alienated from the state and completely alienated from planning and the development that was going on in their areas (interview, community activist).*

These emergent tendencies marked an historical shift in community-voluntary work in Dublin. It began to move from being a space for predominantly top-down activity informed by a charitable ethos to one containing a busy microworld of bottom-up community organisation responding to local needs and conflicts and in many cases informed by more radical intents such as empowerment and equality agendas. The concerns of these movements have been diverse, including local economic development, community culture and heritage, the anti-drugs movement and housing and urban environmental struggles. Grassroots organisation around this latter core theme is examined in the rest of this paper to provide a focused consideration of some key issues facing local activists.

### **Housing and the urban crisis**

The major initial impetus for grassroots organisation was the urban crisis. In particular, the housing question re-emerged as a serious social issue from the late 1960s onwards, as a result of overcrowding, insufficient supply, poor living conditions, inadequate maintenance and aging stock in the inner city. This reached crisis point in the 1970s, as the first manifestations of an essentially anti-city planning process (Mumford, 1961) included the detenanting of flat complexes around the city centre and rehousing on the periphery and road-widening schemes (creating urban blight and dereliction). Housing action committees were set up to campaign on housing problems around the city, notably the Dublin Housing Action Committee. There was a simultaneous emergence of tenants' organisations, including the creation of a national coalition, the National Association of Tenants Organisations (NATO). Much of the action at this time involved street-based resistance and oppositional stances towards top-down processes of urban change.

One important early example was "the state's decision to remove 700 families out of the centre of the city" (Summerhill, Sean McDermott Street, Gardiner Street). It was clear to activists that the intention "was to create space for offices, car-parks etc." (Rafferty, 1990; 223-4). The most immediate local effect of such paternalistic anti-city policies was the disruption of inner-city communities and, by implication, their complex informal networks of support. This experience produced varying levels of critical awareness regarding the operation of capital and, usually more clearly, the local state in the production of urban space. The contradictions of strategies that hastened urban decline were keenly felt:

*...around the 1970s, there was a lot of speculators would have moved in and seen this was prime land and they had great visions for it. But in the meantime all the flat complexes in around Sheriff Street and around the inner city, the likes of Seán MacDermott Street, Corporation Street and*

*Foley Street were being allowed to run down...The plan that the Corporation had for them then was to shift these people, the community, out of the area. Put them out in the suburbs where there was no infrastructure in place (interview, community activist).*

The decentralisation strategy was often implemented in the face of vigorous local opposition. A number of campaigns against the detenanting of the inner city (Summerhill, Seán McDermott Street, Sheriff Street, etc.) sprang up during the 1970s and 1980s: "...there was a coming together of the people to resist this, and that brought about the birth of different organisations, tenant organisations...which stood up and stood their ground" (interview, community activist). Experiences of the street actions raised critical questions about urban inequalities: "I remember members of this project blocking the road and blocking Summerhill and they were imprisoned for stuff like that. So taking action led to another series of issues like equality in your area - if this road had been going through another area, how would residents feel about that?" (interview, community activist). However, faced with an often intransigent local authority, such urban struggles often met with failure:

*My own mother was shifted around to Foley Street [in 1972]. But she swore she would never move again for the Corporation [local authority]. But the time came - the Corporation came in then and they decided they were going to knock Foley Street down then - this was the eighties. So my mother said she wasn't going to move, and she stuck to her guns. So what took place then was they rehoused every tenant out of Foley Street but she wouldn't go - there was an awful lot of houses on Foley Street. So anyway, at the end of the day she was the last there, and they were demolishing the place around her, and they cut off electricity, they cut off water, they created leaks in the roof and the whole lot...at the end, she had to give in - her health just got the better of her (interview, community activist).*

At a more abstract level, the experience in fighting the various spatial issues generated for some activists a more critical understanding of the motives and the power relations behind urban change:

*"There was a whole series of protests, and then a gang of us got arrested...but the battle was for space...the southside was over-developed and the planning objective was to shift the centre of gravity more northside. But the northside was predominantly a class which in their eyes had no contribution to make to the commercial fabric of the city and therefore logically they should be moved out" (interview, community activist).*

The urban focus continued in later years, reinforced in particular by pressures related to property-based urban renewal. Contradictions between planners' and developers' visions for the city and local needs and values fed into the emergent patterns of organisation and action. The International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) was a textbook case, one that illuminated the dislocation between the new functions apportioned to the inner city in the global space of capital and the



economic deprivation that was rife in neighbouring working-class locales like Sheriff Street (north docklands). The IFSC was constructed at the Customs House Dock site, supported by a generous range of tax incentives (set up under urban renewal legislation in 1986) offered to the private consortium that invested in the development. This contested site in the north docklands proximate to some of the poorest communities in the country (hit badly by the deindustrialisation and job loss of the 1970s and 1980s) now became a central component of government strategies to connect the city and nation into the global networks and flows of finance capital. A flagship project, it adopted many of the defining features of Thatcherite regeneration programmes such as the London Docklands. It followed the broadly neoliberal policies of low corporate taxation, fiscal incentives for capital and deregulation, in the process defining regeneration solely in terms of economic growth concerns.

This regeneration vision was at best irrelevant to local communities, at worst actually destructive. This became urgent in the case of Sheriff Street, a mid-rise flats complex adjacent to the renewal area. The government decided to sell the site for private development and demolish the flats, in effect displacing the existing community. Community bulletins circulated to build consciousness capture the mood locally in the face of these urban pressures and an uncommunicative renewal authority. The renewal plans were "in effect a death sentence on the Sheriff Street community", which would lead to "the demolition and scattering of the people... There is now little doubt that this was the real objective, the people and the community were seen as expendable – as surplus to requirements" (North Wall Community Association, 1990).

The plans prompted spirited opposition, including intense community mobilisation, mass public meetings and street-level campaigns: "...the locals held a three-month protest, a sit-in, to prevent that happening because they were being put out... that caused huge tension because they actually sat down in the streets, held things up for three months" (interview, community activist). The fight against displacement was based on asserting a simple conviction over and against the logic of renewal: "the rights of a Community should never be regarded as subordinate to those of commercial interest. A proper housing policy is central to the success of Inner City renewal and regeneration" (North Wall Community Association, 1993). The campaign was successful in ensuring people were rehoused locally in a local authority development north of the old site. However, the private redevelopment was exclusive and heavily segregated (walls, gates, moats) – a built expression of wider social inequalities and power relations in the city. And for some, the loss of the older built environment also generated mixed emotions: "a lot of the community got rehoused from the flats... and some have missed that... they miss the whole social interaction of living in the flats. There's no balcony... some people feel more isolated in the houses" (interview, community activist).

## **New urban pressures, new grassroots strategies**

Where the early grassroots activism from the 1970s to the Sheriff Street battle tended to be independent and of an oppositional and mostly defensive nature, more recent periods saw important shifts in praxis and in the wider context. A raft of EU and state funding has been made available for local development, supporting the construction of a complex network of funded projects (youth, drug treatment, social economy, family resource centres, etc.). The state has also shifted its strategic approach to planning and renewal, creating a diversity of consultation structures, which have in various ways brought some activists and tenants “inside the boardroom” within structures such as the Community Liaison Committee in the Docklands, the Monitoring Committee in the Liberties-Coombe (south-west inner city) area regeneration and in various forms of Regeneration Boards for the more recent PPP efforts.

This is part of a broader shift in governance in Ireland whereby a “social partnership” model has become a standard mechanism for developing policies from national to local level on everything from national wage agreements to the management of local community development projects. The structures generally have representatives from all key stakeholders – government, business, trade unions and the community-voluntary sector. This cultural shift has precipitated a profound change in grassroots praxis as activists move from learning the language and strategies of street protest to those of participation and negotiation, while also becoming more involved in managing funded development projects. This poses an open question about the future of community action. The dilemma is whether it belongs within such social partnership processes – arguably part of the architecture of neoliberal governance – or in an alternative space of citizen participation, where the goal “is to ‘democratize democracy’ in a genuinely inclusive form” (Powell and Geoghegan, 2005: 140). A strong case can be made that community organisations need to look beyond such state-led consultation structures in order to challenge neoliberal orthodoxy and further the interests of oppressed groups (Meade, 2005).

A further set of challenges arrived with the economic boom (c. 1995-2007), which engendered intense urban development pressures (commercial and residential) across the city. The city's economy became increasingly dominated by a number of key sectors, notably financial services, real estate, and personal services (retail and tourism). Private capital flooded back into new build and redevelopment projects until the relatively sudden bust in 2008. This was also a period of further experimentation in urban planning, with Dublin City Council taking a highly entrepreneurial turn in its policies, introducing considerable flexibility and experimentation in approaches to the regulation and regeneration of the city (McGuirk, 1994; McGuirk and MacLaran, 2001). Over this period, relationships between capital, state and the grassroots have evolved through moments of, variously, engagement and retreat, collaboration and conflict. The state placed considerable emphasis on encouraging investment in high-grade property development for commercial and residential purposes, and at the same time a plentiful supply of financing was ensured by low interest rates and the eagerness of the lending institutions to advance loans - sometimes of

spectacular sums. This also resulted in occasional urban struggles, as rapid development often posed a threat to the survival of indigeneous communities, local culture and the integrity of the urban fabric and the locale.

In particular, the increasingly neoliberal bent of urban governance gradually provoked a level of disquiet as a range of schemes were cooked up to market and remake whole city quarters, enticing in large-scale investors and reimagining the city as an attractive (and lucrative) site for European-style urban lifestyles and commercial, retail and cultural activities. This included the creation of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority in 1997 and the Urban Renewal Act of 1998, which created five new integrated area plans (IAPs) across the inner city (outside of docklands) designed to encourage property development but also wider outcomes in terms of cultural activity, image enhancement and community gain. These schemes involved various degrees of community engagement, as local activists were invited to sit on monitoring committees or otherwise make observations and recommendations on policy. Research into one of these, the Liberties-Coombe IAP (Kelly and MacLaran, 2004), revealed the predominant effect to be the "incentivisation of gentrification", while community gain was minimal. The frustrations led to the resignation in protest of activists from the Monitoring Committee. The story took a further twist with the state's engagement with urban regeneration via public private partnerships (PPPs), the most overt expression to date of the infection of urban policies by neoliberal ideologies.

### **Public private partnerships and local action**

The first public notice of the strategic turn to regenerating inner-city local authority estates via public-private partnership models came with a 2001 circular emanating from central government (Department of Environment and Local Government, HS 13/01), which required that local authorities consider the extent to which additional housing supply can be achieved using PPPs. In 2003, a further directive required that regeneration projects costing over €20 million would *have* to be considered for PPP. Dublin City Council took up the baton energetically, earmarking numerous flats complexes for demolition and redevelopment.

The situation was of course complicated because these were in the main living, historic social areas of the city: localities like Fatima Mansions, St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens, Dominick Street, Dolphins Barn, Croke Villas and others. These were urban places with strong identities and felt attachments, wherein people had struggled and survived for generations against the hardships of exploitative working conditions and low pay, mass redundancies and unemployment, poverty and degraded living conditions, and the myriad social problems that go along with these conditions of inequality and injustice, including the drugs crisis. These communities had mobilised over many years and organised dense and complex grassroots networks and infrastructures to fight for local interests, achieve creative patterns of local development and

publish community plans for people-centred, social regeneration (Fatima Groups United, 2000; St. Michael's Estate Regeneration Team, 2002). And now, after decades of decay and neglect, private capital and the state were focusing attention on these publicly owned sites with ambitious plans for clean-sweep redevelopment to produce much denser residential complexes dominated by private housing on the remains of what once were entirely social-housing estates.

This was neoliberal planning writ large, entrepreneurial governance taken to its limits. On the surface, it made perfect economic sense. It seemed to offer a means to reconstruct rundown estates at zero public cost. The private sector partner would redevelop the whole site, providing an agreed number of social housing units and amenities in return for the development rights on the rest of the site. In fact only Fatima Mansions, the earliest PPP set in train, was actually constructed by this method. In this case, resourceful local action and the ability of activists to set up effective consultation structures and to keep ahead of the game succeeded in winning a high quality development of social housing for local residents and significant input in community facilities and services. The private housing that makes up the majority of the redevelopment is nearing completion and its long-term future remains to be seen, though in the short term a substantial section will be used by the local Institute of Technology for student accommodation. Elsewhere, people learned the hard way – through years of arduous and ultimately dispiriting negotiations – the limits to market-driven models of regeneration. The example of St. Michael's Estate illustrates the process and the lessons (Bissett, 2009).

The estate is less than two miles south-west of the city center just outside the historic Liberties area and adjacent to a recently completed Luas (tram) station. Constructed between 1969 and 1970, the original estate consisted of 346 flats in a series of mid-rise blocks isolated from one another by mostly functionless open space. It suffered the hardships of job loss and unemployment consequent to the deindustrialisation of the area in the 1970s and the recession of the 1980s. Largely neglected by policymakers, it became "ghettoised", one of the "scary" spaces of the city, abandoned to its internal problems by the state. It had the heart torn out of it by the drugs crisis, being used as a site for selling and using and afforded little police protection, and many tenants moved out, leaving boarded-up units and an air of dereliction. The local authority did not maintain the estate, and its physical deterioration added to the sense of local crisis over many years.

People duly got organised and mobilised for change, setting up a family centre (1985) and a representative Blocks Committee (1986) and taking part in a joint Task Force (1998) with city council representatives. This established that the people favoured demolition as a radical solution – the hoped-for new start – to the conditions of daily life. In 2001, a community regeneration team think-tank was established, which published *Past, Present, Future: A Community Vision for the Regeneration of St. Michael's Estate*. There followed a long process of negotiation and resistance, progress and setbacks, beginning with a 2001 plan

for demolition and redevelopment, which was rejected by the Department of the Environment in 2003, demanding in its place a PPP regeneration. A 2004 plan produced unilaterally by the City Council would have resulted in demolition and replacement by 550 private units, 80 social units and 220 affordable units. This was resisted fiercely through a (mainly) street-level protest campaign focused on delivering the original agreed plan. This succeeded insofar as the council's own plan was voted down by councillors, and the long process of PPP negotiation commenced in 2005, involving local representatives at the table. An agreement was reached involving McNamara-Castlethorn Consortium in January 2008 in a development to be financed by the sale of 480 private apartments plus some commercial facilities. This was followed by yet another twist on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2008 when Dublin City Council announced the collapse of several PPP schemes, all involving McNamara-Castlethorn.<sup>9</sup> And so began the latest series of street protests outside City Hall involving all the affected communities and supportive groups and networks.

The whole PPP strategy contained inherent weaknesses related to its reliance on market forces for completion. Indeed, the decisive criteria for development were not the public good or social regeneration but exchange values and economic viability (that is, profitability). Thus, the contradictory values of capital, state and community became the central point of tension and conflict through all of the negotiations. The seminal account of the *realpolitik* of regeneration by John Bissett, a community worker and one of the two local representatives on the Assessment Panel, reveals much of the central tension and conflict around values:

*Looking back over the negotiations, it is clear that there was more than one 'regeneration' going on. There were two diametrically opposed views as to the best way forward...Such differences manifested themselves most lucidly around the provision and status of social housing. Within the negotiations social housing became something of a marginalised category. From a community perspective the necessity of providing social housing was defended fiercely. Against this, Dublin City Council built all of its negotiation strategies and tactics around privatising the Estate using the logic of 'the market' (Bissett, 2008: 79).*

What this meant in practice was that the delivery of social housing depended on the sale of private apartments. You thus had the odd situation whereby the City Council was driving and attempting constantly to legitimise this process of commercial exploitation. These inherent contradictions and tensions led ultimately to the unravelling of the entire exercise, leaving the plans dead in the water and the dreams of a new start in a good living environment crushed. Devastated and angry, residents and activists set in motion a back-to-the-streets protest movement, arguing for an alternative to neoliberalism:

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<sup>9</sup> St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens, Dominick Street, Infirmary Road, Séan MacDermott Street.

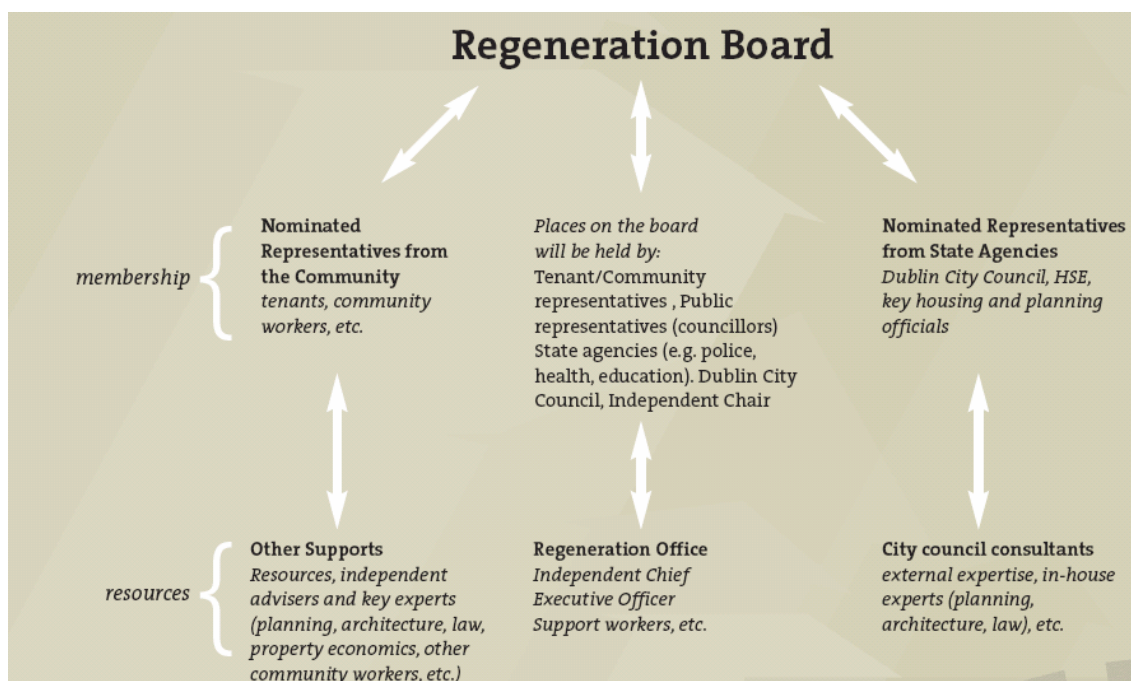
*There are no safeguards built into the PPP model to protect the interests of the city council and residents against market change. It is a boom or bust strategy...We are talking about people's homes and families here. PPP is not a suitable process for developing social housing on public lands. It's a long drawn out costly process, with too much emphasis on how much money can be made from public land for the council and the developer*

(St Michael's Estate Regeneration Team, Press Release 22.5.2009)

### **Achievements and limits: strategic considerations**

It is clear that all of this grassroots work has made valuable and lasting contributions to the life of the city and its patterns of change, but also that there are real and significant limitations. There have been quantifiable gains in tapping into available funding streams (EU and state). Some of the engagement with consultation structures secured real gains such as in Fatima Mansions (social housing redevelopment and social regeneration investment). Much has been acquired (sometimes painfully) in applied learning and knowledge from engagement with economic and cultural development activities and engaging in negotiations around complex planning and regeneration processes. The production of knowledge independently through action creates a base of understanding that is owned by the community rather than created externally and (even with the best of intentions) "parachuted in" or made partially available in the shape of publications, workshops or other such resources designed and created by a top-down research institution. All of this has meant that communities have managed to build considerable capacity locally, and that is a real gain.

There have also been more ineffable yet essential gains through self-organisation – the creation of complex networks of local groups with their own modes of decision-making, collaboration and action. Progress has been made in collaboration through independent networks such as Tenants First, which has had some innovative success on two fronts. As a forum bringing together local activists for almost six years now it has provided an independent grassroots space for sharing knowledge and information and offering mutual support and encouragement. Thus the knowledge produced locally (for example regarding technical or strategic issues involved in the PPP negotiations) can help to empower other communities at early stages of negotiation over regeneration. This organisation has also produced publications (and offered related workshops locally) based on research and analysis into regeneration and broader housing policy issues, and these have been informed by needs and experiences on the ground locally. And within this work, a key area of knowledge relates to the experiences with building local organisations and structures that can more effectively engage with complex top-down planning processes particularly under PPP regeneration (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1** Possible structure for a Regeneration Board

**Source:** Tenants First (2006)

These are all real gains offering positive lessons for any grassroots movements emerging from and operating within working-class communities and dealing with the everyday oppressions of top-down neoliberal agendas (like PPP regeneration) in the city.

There are some evident concerns, however, and these also provide important lessons for consideration. One essential concern is the risk of incorporation. Available state funding for community development has meant that activists have also by default become increasingly engaged as project managers, and energies are increasingly absorbed in endless rounds of meetings, form-filling exercises and the day-to-day demands of running the various schemes. Local development policies have also engendered varying degrees of dependency on what are ultimately vulnerable and short-term sources of income. This process of incorporation is a central problem in the political economy of community action. Where alternative or oppositional movements or cultures emerge in any society, the dominant (hegemonic) forces will usually tend either to marginalise, suppress or co-opt such activity. There is wide recognition locally of this problem. The challenge for activists is finding organisational structures that can facilitate a balance between the value of maintaining autonomy and a critical distance and the need to access resources in order to support and diversify activity and achieve their goals. As an unfunded voluntary network, Tenants First has attempted to explore one model of doing so, by providing an

independent space within which people can collaborate to seek common ground, develop understanding and analyses and campaign for alternative policies.

There are also complex problems in engaging with consultation structures set up to implement urban regeneration plans. Activists and community workers involved in independent organisations became to varying degrees increasingly embroiled at negotiating tables in boardrooms, learning fast a different language and culture of business, property investment, planning and city marketing. However, such engagement also carries inherent dangers of incorporation. It makes the maintenance of independence and a critical distance more difficult, as participants come under subtle or (sometimes) direct pressure not to comment or speak outside the boardroom, but rather to keep all such comment within formal negotiations. At the end of the day, any final agreed plans are in part the property of all of those who participated, and it is difficult then to resist or propose alternatives to any policies, regardless of how uneasy or conflicted some activists might feel about the implications of these. Worse, if things go wrong, those involved in the negotiations can become the “flak-catchers” for local anger and disillusionment.

Finally, we might consider the role of action research in this and its own possibilities and limits. The key challenge here is to ensure that it is owned by the relevant community, something that is not at all straightforward. There are complex power issues in the production of knowledge within university and other research institutions, and in ways this is becoming even more problematic with increasing pressures to attract funding and publish in a narrow range of outlets (international journals that rank highly according to their academic impact). There is a broad moral case that at least some research activity *should* be action-oriented and to some extent “owned” by and useful to those actually experiencing the issues under consideration, and this is something quite different to the pressure and targets at work within the universities. How is this to be achieved?

The key challenge is ensuring that engagement from the bottom-up is carried out in a way that gives ownership of the research to those who are directly affected by the issues under study. This is true for all stages – identifying the research questions, designing the method, entering into critical reflection, making recommendations and disseminating the findings. At the same time, it is important also to maintain the integrity of the research, and that might include arriving at findings that are uncomfortable for some participants or that may lead to some tension or conflict. The hope is that such difficulties can be managed in most cases if the whole project is authentically rooted in the locale and owned by the community. Realistically, however, such conflicts can sometimes prove unmanageable and it may be impossible to progress the project in such situations.

In the case of the research and publications produced by Tenants First, the work carried out was informed by the questions and needs identified through local public meetings, while the analysis was constantly rewritten and reshaped



through the work of a smaller sub-group consisting of activists plus one or two researchers. Recommendations were then debated and agreed among the wider steering group of Tenants First itself (also made up of activists with some input from researchers). This latter process literally took years, but it did produce work that was in a meaningful sense owned by the organisation. The aim of such an approach is to support the emergence of a kind of "counter expertise" from below as against the "officially sanctioned knowledge" of the city coming from above (Nilsen and Cox, 2005). For example, this approach could counter the official narrative that the local authority estates were decayed spaces of little value for which PPP regeneration offered the best medicine. It proposed an alternative – the possibility of imagining alternatives to demolition and regeneration based on recognising the value of what exists and improving on it (the flats complex as home and a space of working class traditions of community solidarity) (Tenants First, 2006). Interestingly, the University does not in practice acknowledge the existence of such work, which in any event has a collective authorship<sup>10</sup>.

Overall, the social-movement repertoire (Tilly, 2004) will benefit from a diversity of inside and outside strategies – street-level protest when that is most appropriate, engagement in negotiations and boards at other times, funded developmental work, unfunded independent networks, etc. – and informed recognition of the different gains and limits of each of these different modes of praxis. Research can help with this latter aim and in identifying and articulating demands for policy and other changes in the external environment, but it will be most effective if all stages of the research process are "locally owned", something that takes time (even years) and a level of voluntary commitment (at least as long as universities and research institutions remain unsupportive of such fluid and uncertain approaches that are unlikely to win major grants). All of these approaches – inside, outside, research – bring their own considerable challenges, but each is relevant to the bottom-up struggle for a living city for all people. The stakes could not be higher.

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<sup>10</sup> Typically, "research active" is defined in terms of numbers of academic articles in refereed international journals, academic books and chapters in academic books.

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## **"Lo sai che non si esce vivi dagli anni ottanta?" Esperienze attiviste tra movimento e associazionismo di base nell'Italia post-77**

**Beppe De Sario**

*La transizione tra gli anni settanta e ottanta ha rappresentato un passaggio critico, e per certi versi drammatico, nella storia dei movimenti sociali italiani. La radicalizzazione dello scontro con gli apparati di stato si è affiancata, tuttavia, alla diffusione delle culture di movimento – specie del femminismo e delle culture giovanili – lungo il decennio successivo. Tale diffusione – o meglio, traduzione culturale – si è realizzata in forme e luoghi specifici: dalle controculture politicizzate – particolarmente il punk – alle esperienze associative del femminismo lesbico e del movimento omosessuale, fino agli incontri tra culture dell'attivismo emergenti e residuali all'interno dei nuovi movimenti ambientalisti e pacifisti.*

*L'articolo affronta, attraverso l'uso di fonti orali e documenti politici e professionali, l'esperienza di piccolo gruppo condotta da giovani attivisti e attiviste – cresciute nel movimento del '77, nella città di Torino – nel passaggio dalla militanza politica a forme di politicizzazione dell'associazionismo di base, specie nel campo dei servizi alla persona.*

### **Abstract**

*The transition between the 1970s and the 1980s represented a crucial transition, as well as a dramatic one in some ways, in the story of social movements in Italy. Alongside a radicalised confrontation with the state apparatus stood the diffusion of movement cultures – particularly those of feminism and youth culture – through the succeeding decade. This diffusion – or rather this cultural translation – was realised in specific forms and places: from politicised subcultures (punk in particular) to the group experiences of lesbian feminism and the gay movement to the encounter between emergent and residual activist cultures within the new environmental and peace movements.*

*The article uses interview material as well as political and professional documents to explore the small group experiences of young activists in Turin, come of age in the movement of 1977, in their transition from political militancy to the politicisation of grassroots voluntary groups, particularly in the field of local and community needs.*

Il concetto di società civile ha genealogie e tradizioni ricche e profonde, sia nelle società europee e nord-americane sia nel resto del mondo. Tale nozione

politologica ha una sua storia recente che data dal secondo dopoguerra, quando i processi combinati di Bretton Woods, la diffusione di pratiche e retoriche dei diritti umani e la crisi degli stati nazionali – quantomeno in alcune dimensioni della sovranità e della rappresentanza politica – hanno avviato un processo che è tuttora in atto (Appadurai 1996).

Tale nozione ha avuto un importante ruolo emancipatorio nello sviluppo dell'attivismo comunitario e nei processi di globalizzazione dei movimenti, specie nel corso degli ultimi vent'anni, e in particolare nella costruzione di un lessico e un repertorio di azione comune tra soggetti e organizzazioni del nord e del sud del mondo (Center for the Study of Global Governance 2001). Tale concetto, senz'altro segnato sul piano culturale e relazionale da un'impronta occidentalista, ha tuttavia avuto il merito di accompagnarsi all'emergere dell'attivismo non occidentale, consentendo il riconoscimento di inedite pratiche ispirate a un'altra modernità politica rispetto a quella occidentale (Chatterjee 2004, Chakrabarty 2000) mettendo così a frutto nel campo dei conflitti globali quelle "differenze storiche" altrimenti relegate nell'ativismo o conquistate a movimenti non democratici.

Parlando di società civile, in Europa e in particolare in quella mediterranea, non si può prescindere dalla politicizzazione novecentesca e da forti movimenti sociali a base ideologica, innestati sulle tradizioni popolari socialiste e comuniste. Nell'Italia repubblicana la penetrazione di questi movimenti ha a lungo suggerito una coincidenza dell'attivismo civico con il movimento operaio e con i partiti della sinistra, da una parte, o con il movimento e il partito cattolico, dall'altra (Forgacs e Gundle 2007), mettendo così da parte le primigenie ispirazioni autogestionarie e autonomiste del mutualismo operaio tardo ottocentesco (Revelli 1996).

Vi è stato a lungo, pertanto, un accordo stretto tra partiti e società civile organizzata nell'Italia repubblicana. E da quando, invece, si può datare un progressivo allentamento di questo legame, e un maggiore coinvolgimento dei movimenti sociali? Queste domande rimarranno sullo sfondo di questo contributo che, nello specifico, intende interrogarsi sul passaggio della politica dei movimenti sociali, nel corso degli anni settanta, verso altre forme dell'attivismo sociale sviluppate a partire dal decennio successivo. Le domande di partenza, che interrogano alcuni protagonisti di esperienze particolari di attivismo, a cavallo – anche per autodefinizione dei soggetti – tra movimento e società civile, sono pertanto: in che modo il mutamento di pratiche e di lessico politici ha consentito di traghettare l'attivismo radicale da un decennio al successivo? Su quali risorse di soggettività, pratiche e di cultura politica ha potuto contare tale transizione – o meglio, *traduzione culturale*<sup>1</sup> –?

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<sup>1</sup> Ritengo che l'espressione transizione abbia una connotazione storicista, in quanto lega le premesse dell'innovazione alle radici e/o alle tradizioni di riferimento in termini che possono risultare meccanicisti. Questo rischio risulta particolarmente evidente nel caso di movimenti sociali oramai "endemic" (Melucci 1996) che devono confrontarsi di continuo sia con le tradizioni da cui provengono sia con contesti contemporanei. Le culture dell'attivismo sociale e associativo degli anni ottanta, nella mia ipotesi, non sono stati semplici trascinalenti, o

In una parte di letteratura sociologica sui movimenti degli anni ottanta (Diani 1988, Della Porta e Diani 1997, Melucci 1982, 1984) si pone fortemente l'enfasi sulla rottura introdotta da tali movimenti rispetto a quelli precedenti, maggiormente centrati su un orizzonte organico della proposta politica, su una retorica di classe – o prevalentemente tale – e su una sostanziale coincidenza della dimensione del politico con quella presidiata dai poteri costituiti, per quanto aderendo e sviluppando forme di politicizzazione assai originali. Tale originalità, specie in campo storiografico, è stata considerata spesso solo nell'alveo di movimenti più ampi e complessivi, rigettando l'etichetta "borghese" di società civile e adottando, per un altro verso, quella onnicomprensiva e onniesplicativa di "movimento". Ad esempio, il forte attivismo diffuso e territoriale degli anni settanta, legato ai bisogni sociali di base come la casa e la salute delle donne e dei bambini, o le lotte sociali nei servizi pubblici come scuola, cultura, sanità sono stati spesso appiattiti sulle esperienze dei movimenti sociali – o che si autorappresentavano come tali – (Tornesello 2006).

D'altronde, l'analisi sociologica dei nuovi movimenti degli ottanta è stata a lungo dicotomica, con una ricerca delle forme innovative e una dimenticanza di quelle considerate superate; ciononostante, negli stessi conflitti del periodo e specie a livello locale – come nelle campagne antinucleari e in quelle ambientaliste – vennero coinvolti soggetti anche assai diversi: da gruppi di volontariato ai partiti di sinistra, dai gruppi radicali dell'Autonomia Operaia (Montagna 2010) ad associazioni femministe e gruppi contro-culturali (Philopat 1997). Questa coincidenza temporale può provocare un difetto di sguardo, magari interpretandola come pura e semplice presenza simultanea di elementi residuali ed emergenti, solo questi ultimi – specie nel campo ambientalista e antinucleare – degni di rappresentare l'emergenza di nuove pratiche politiche, nascenti fuori dal sistema politico tradizionale. Tale opposizione tra società civile e movimenti, in Italia, ha un evidente periodo di incubazione proprio nel decennio ottanta, nel quale le stesse organizzazioni dell'estrema sinistra hanno manifestato e coltivato una certa alterità rispetto ad altri soggetti, ritenuti troppo rispettabili o integrati. Le letture scientifiche del tempo e l'autorappresentazione di alcune aree di attivismo radicale risultano pertanto complementari, occultando, tuttavia, un ben più complesso processo di scambio di esperienze, traduzione culturale e sperimentazione politica avvenuto nel passaggio tra anni settanta e ottanta (De Sario 2009).

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traslitterazioni dell'attivismo politico precedente; né si propongono come un fenomeno totalmente nuovo ed estraneo alle tradizioni italiane della politica indipendente. A partire da questo approccio, la traduzione culturale è il processo di incorporazione delle innovazioni culturali – esterne ed eterogenee – in esperienze precedenti, e anche il nuovo dispositivo che determina il rapporto tra culture dell'attivismo specifiche e la tradizione di riferimento – o presunta tale. Tale processo di conflitto e passaggio di elementi culturali tra un elemento e l'altro richiama – per analogia – la traduzione per come è stata concettualizzata nei *translation studies*, e qui adattato a quanto avviene nella relazione tra una forma di attivismo e un'altra. In termini maggiormente teorici, si tratta di un processo di "articolazione" nel senso elaborato da Stuart Hall ed Ernesto Laclau (Hall 1996, Laclau 1990).

L'uso tattico dell'affiliazione associativa da parte dei movimenti radicali, la "mascherata"<sup>2</sup> e l'autodifesa, un diverso rapporto con i soggetti sociali e con i cittadini, l'invenzione di nuove pratiche e identità politiche devono molto, invece, alle sperimentazioni di base avvenute tra la fine degli anni settanta e i primi anni ottanta, quantomeno in alcuni campi dell'attivismo di base. Si tratta delle esperienze di associazionismo e di volontariato<sup>3</sup>, della nascente cooperazione sociale<sup>4</sup> nei servizi alla persona, dell'attivismo culturale in un ampio e irregolare arco di esperienze che sono andate dall'Arci<sup>5</sup> all'associazionismo gay e lesbico (Cavarocchi 2010), fino alle "autoproduzioni" musicali nate nell'ambito delle controculture politicizzate – esperienze che avrebbero condotto allo stile e all'innovazione attivista dei "centri sociali occupati e autogestiti". Dal punto di vista delle culture politiche, e ancor più nei discorsi e nelle estetiche, tali esperienze originarie devono molto a diverse tradizioni di movimento: dal femminismo radicale, specie nelle sue evoluzioni nel nuovo decennio (Calabrò e Grasso 1984) al movimento del '77 (Grispigni 1997) e all'attitudine a un'azione in piccoli gruppi e a una risposta diretta ai bisogni emergenti, in rottura con la *governance* garantita da partiti e sindacati.

Questa premessa è anche un indirizzo programmatico nello studio della formazione e dell'apprendimento di attivisti e attiviste – spesso giovanissimi/e – che condussero tali esperimenti tra movimento e società civile. L'uso di questa espressione e in particolare della preposizione *tra* non vogliono essere elusivi del problema posto da un rapporto complesso. Al contrario, mi concentrerò sull'intreccio di movimento e società civile proprio attraverso la rappresentazione di alcuni percorsi specifici e di particolari traiettorie personali, sviluppate tra la fine degli anni settanta e la metà degli anni ottanta nella città di Torino<sup>6</sup>. Concentrarsi su esperienze di formazione e apprendimento all'attivismo sociale, con protagonisti giovani e giovanissimi dei primi anni

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<sup>2</sup> La mascherata è qui associata alla pratica performativa dell'identità giovanile, mutuando il concetto da Butler (1990).

<sup>3</sup> Associazionismo e volontariato, nel corso dell'articolo, saranno utilizzati analogamente a termini inglesi come *voluntary association*, *volunteerism*, *volunteering*, e simili.

<sup>4</sup> Con l'espressione cooperazione sociale qui si intende lo sviluppo delle imprese sociali e lavoratori specializzati – ma non dipendenti di enti pubblici – nel campo dei servizi alla persona. Le cooperative sociali, sebbene regolate in maniera assai specifica dalla legge 281/1991 del Parlamento italiano, possono per analogia avvicinarsi a diverse forme di impresa sociale, espresse nel campo anglosassone dai termini *community enterprises*, *social firms*, *mutual organisations*, *co-operatives*.

<sup>5</sup> È la più grande federazione italiana di circoli culturali e ricreativi; fondata alla fine degli anni cinquanta, vicina al Partito comunista italiano. Specialmente nelle sue articolazioni locali – i circoli – ha attraversato diverse stagioni della storia dei movimenti a partire dagli anni settanta, fino al movimento alterglobalista.

<sup>6</sup> All'epoca Torino contava circa un milione e duecentomila abitanti, nella sua fase di massima espansione urbana e produttiva (oggi è intorno ai novecentomila abitanti). Torino e il suo hinterland hanno rappresentato a lungo il cuore dell'industrialismo italiano (solamente l'industria automobilistica Fiat occupava, alla metà degli anni settanta, circa centoventimila operai e impiegati) nonché dei movimenti del '68 studentesco e del '69 operaio.



ottanta, non è solamente un modo per dar voce a storie inedite di un passaggio evolutivo dell'attivismo – peraltro poco o schematicamente rappresentato, specie negli studi storici. Vi è anche, infatti, l'intenzione di sottolineare come attraverso il racconto di sé che emerge nelle fonti orali, l'autorappresentazione degli attivisti di quel periodo abbia fatto invece ricorso, più o meno consapevolmente ma sempre creativamente, a un vasto repertorio di esperienze dirette, tradizioni militanti e politiche, risorse intellettuali e finanche prodotti delle culture popolari contemporanee.

### **Senza padri né maestri**

La Torino della fine degli anni settanta è stata spesso rappresentata come cupa, livida, progressivamente privata delle spinte utopiche che ne avevano contraddistinto il '68 studentesco e il '69 operaio. Vi è un'abissale distanza tra le memorie di entusiasmo e confusione creativa presenti in alcuni racconti sul '68 universitario (Passerini 1988, Revelli 1991) e il cinico disinteresse con cui la radicalizzazione di fine decennio avrebbe inciso sulle reazioni operaie al rapimento del presidente della Democrazia cristiana Aldo Moro, da parte delle Brigate rosse (Mantelli e Revelli 1979). Eppure altre esperienze ne complicano le periodizzazioni. Per esempio quella dell'onda lunga femminista, che dopo la stagione dei collettivi si sarebbe riversata nell'Intercategoriale Donne dell'Flm (Federazione lavoratori metalmeccanici) e nei primi consultori autogestiti. Nel complesso, tuttavia, la sfera pubblica consolidava i pregiudizi più duri e inattaccabili. La narrativa emergente a quel tempo è quella che racconta la città con toni apocalittici, il cui soggetto – passivo e sempre più silente – sono di frequente i giovani. I ragazzi combattenti dell'organizzazione armata Prima Linea, il dramma dei giovani disoccupati, la rabbia dei sottoproletari e della bande di quartiere, la tragedia della generazione consegnata alla droga sono tutte rappresentazioni assai diffuse nella pubblicistica e nel senso comune.

Anche le contemporanee politiche delle amministrazioni pubbliche hanno riflesso fortemente questo clima di passaggio. Già a partire dal '77 la giunta comunale guidata dal sindaco comunista Diego Novelli aveva promosso un approccio innovativo alle politiche giovanili: vi si progettava la progressiva estensione della rete dei Centri di incontro (una sorta di centri sociali comunali); l'istituzione di Settembre musica e altre iniziative di promozione culturale di qualità; la diffusione dei Punti verdi, ovvero di luoghi di aggregazione aperti durante l'estate, situati specialmente nei parchi cittadini. Queste iniziative si collocavano anche sull'onda lunga della partecipazione popolare alla riforma amministrativa che alla metà degli anni settanta aveva creato i quartieri e i loro consigli rappresentativi, nonché in corrispondenza dello sviluppo di un forte attivismo territoriale legato ai bisogni popolari, che concentrò le energie delle organizzazioni della sinistra extraparlamentare – a Torino, in particolare, Lotta Continua e Avanguardia Operaia. Accanto a ciò vennero promosse politiche di promozione dell'associazionismo di base, che in città avrebbe espresso la fase aurorale dell'odierno terzo settore.

Tuttavia, lo scontro politico e militare tra fazioni dei movimenti sociali e apparati di stato ha limitato le potenzialità di tali politiche e spesso le ha costrette a risposte obbligate, dall'una e dall'altra parte. Ne è un esempio lampante uno degli incontri avvenuti, proprio nell'autunno del 1977, tra il sindaco Novelli, accompagnato dall'assessore alla cultura Fiorenzo Alfieri per negoziare la legalizzazione dell'occupazione, e gli occupanti del circolo giovanile Barabba, dove intanto stava maturando l'organizzazione e la militarizzazione della componente torinese di Prima Linea (Novelli e Tranfaglia 1988, Segio 2006). Intorno ai nuclei più attivi della militanza giovanile, che si era diffusa dall'università verso i quartieri periferici – e ritorno – si stava tuttavia affermando una nuova cultura emergente, specie tra i giovanissimi delle scuole superiori. Da una parte l'esperienza vissuta nei licei e nelle scuole tecniche e professionali era stata dirompente e rappresentava – in un contesto di matura scolarizzazione di massa e altrettanto diffusa disoccupazione giovanile – l'ambiente principale della radicalizzazione dei giovani. Dall'altra si andavano aprendo percorsi tangenziali rispetto all'attivismo, che potevano prendere corpo in un'adesione multiassociativa dei giovani. Questo fenomeno, in contraddizione con le apparenti tendenze al cosiddetto riflusso<sup>7</sup>, stava investendo la partecipazione ad associazioni sportive, culturali, di animazione, fondate su un principio promozionale e di base, e su un'attitudine all'"autonomia diffusa" che andava perdendo i riferimenti movimentistici e avrebbe trovato canali di evoluzione assai fecondi. Accanto a questo, alcuni ricercatori (Ricolfi e Sciolla 1980) individuavano allora una montante cultura del disimpegno, della disillusione e della rabbia, parallela e convivente con quella dell'impegno sociale di base. Vi emerge una Torino giovanile che il titolo della ricerca di Ricolfi e Sciolla riassume in un'espressione assai eloquente: *senza padri né maestri*. Questa espressione tuttavia non va intesa come una semplice cesura radicale, o mancanza di relazioni e radici con il passato recente dei movimenti. Essa riassume assai efficacemente l'attitudine, l'esperienza e in sostanza il duro faccia a faccia dei giovanissimi di fine settanta con i propri referenti adulti, con le istituzioni e anche con gli ambienti dell'attivismo radicale. Questo contesto, composto di politiche pubbliche locali, esperienze militanti in crisi, nuove pratiche giovanili, trasformazioni socio-economiche che forzavano e incrinavano il ventre profondo della città cuore della classe operaia, avrebbe prodotto esiti contraddittori: da una parte le già citate iniziative di inclusione dei giovani, per quanto era in potere delle amministrazioni locali, dall'altra la dipendenza di tali politiche da un quadro discorsivo che, spesso al di là dei progetti e dei promotori specifici, le forzava verso la normalizzazione, la criminalizzazione e la repressione dei comportamenti giovanili.

Ne è un esempio il Partito comunista: soggetto "progressivo" nel suo ruolo amministrativo, aperto alla promozione di politiche innovative di inclusione, ma

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<sup>7</sup> Tra 1977 e 1979, sui mezzi di comunicazione di massa e negli stessi ambienti militanti si produsse un dibattito sul "riflusso" dei movimenti dopo la lunga "onda" che li aveva caratterizzati nel corso di quello che è stato chiamato, anche nella riflessione storiografica italiana, il "lungo '68".

anche – specialmente nel ruolo istituzionale di partito – organo repressivo con il sostegno dato alle strategie di fermezza nei confronti del radicalismo politico, estese in quegli anni anche ai comportamenti giovanili considerati devianti. Assai significativo è il ricco dibattito ospitato dalla rivista settimanale del Pci torinese, “Nuova Società”<sup>8</sup>, che in particolare tra ‘80 e ‘82 è stato ampiamente rivolto alla critica, e spesso anche alla dura sanzione morale, degli atteggiamenti dei giovani e dell’attivismo giovanile nei confronti delle droghe, di qualsiasi genere.

Di questo passaggio della storia della città l’esperienza giovanile è stato un catalizzatore potentissimo. Le immagini incalzano e si sovrappongono: la mancanza di parole esprime lo sgomento che il dibattito del movimento segna dopo la tragica morte del giovane Roberto Crescenzo, nell’attacco del corteo antifascista del 1 ottobre 1977 contro il bar Angelo Azzurro<sup>9</sup>; le memorie ancora oggi considerano quella morte uno spartiacque, in una direzione o nell’altra, verso la radicalizzazione, il disimpegno o altre forme di partecipazione sociale. La droga invade precipitosamente la vita dei giovani (Panebarco 2004) e questa esperienza segna con maggior forza e drammaticità, rispetto ad altre scene urbane, i racconti e le memorie dei protagonisti dell’attivismo sociale di base. La stessa socialità sottoproletaria delle periferie si raccoglie intorno a bande più o meno caratterizzate culturalmente, che mantengono un forte idioma locale – quello dei “truzzi”, dei “tamarri” – ben distinto e assai più diffuso rispetto all’adesione alle cosiddette “bande spettacolari” di punk, skinhead, dark e così via. I riferimenti discorsivi a questo immaginario sono molteplici, anche nel documentarismo sociale e nella narrativa: per esempio la militanza di stadio mostrata nel video *Ragazzi di Stadio* (Segre 1980), o ancora oggi, come in *Piove all’insù*, romanzo dedicato a quella complessa transizione politica, esistenziale e generazionale (Rastello 2006). Non casualmente il primo concerto punk totalmente autogestito a Torino, nel Centro d’incontro del quartiere Vanchiglia (primavera del 1982) sarebbe stato intitolato “Contro la disperazione urbana”.

## Quartiere Vanchiglia, Torino

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<sup>8</sup> Tra i titoli più eloquenti del periodo 1980-1982: *La morfina contro la legge*, 165, 23 febbraio 1980; *Droga non scaccia droga*, 169, 26 aprile 1980; *Quando l’oppio entra nella cultura*, 188, 28 febbraio 1981; *Il PCI e lo spinello*, 189, 14 marzo 1981; *Come uscire dal tunnel della droga?*, 191, 11 aprile 1981; *Da sinistra contro lo sballo*, 197, 11 luglio 1981; *Droga: cosa non si è fatto, cosa si può fare*, 199-200, 12 settembre 1981; *Cosa fare contro la droga*, 201, 26 settembre 1981; (*precisazione del Gruppo Abele*), 206, 12 dicembre 1981 [nel quale il Gruppo Abele denunciava campagne calunniose nei propri confronti, ispirate ad un rigido proibizionismo]; *Un fiume di droga: chi lo ferma?*, 219, 10 luglio 1982 [vi è una critica esplicita dell’“aggregazionismo” che conduce direttamente alla devianza e alla droga, e si istituisce una linea che va dai circoli del proletariato giovanile fino ai soggetti di base non istituzionali; si sollecitano peraltro grandi campagne pubbliche, evocando il parallelo della mobilitazione contro il terrorismo di sinistra]; *La Fgci ci ripensa*, 227, 11 dicembre 1982 [la Fgci era la Federazione giovanile comunista italiana, l’organizzazione giovanile del Partito comunista].

<sup>9</sup> In occasione delle proteste per l’uccisione del militante di sinistra Walter Rossi, avvenuta il giorno precedente a Roma.

La vicenda affrontata in queste pagine coinvolge alcune decine di giovani, diciottenni i più grandi e adolescenti i più giovani, a partire dal 1977. La scena si svolge nella città di Torino, in particolare nel quartiere Vanchiglia, l'antico Borgh d'I Fum (borgo del fumo) così chiamato perché lungo le sponde del fiume Dora Riparia si erano insediati i primi opifici torinesi, già a partire dalla seconda metà del XIX secolo. Quindi un quartiere operaio nel secondo dopoguerra, ma anche ricco di presenze artigiane, di parrocchie socialmente attive sul territorio e sedi politiche, a partire dai grandi partiti di massa (Pci, Dc, Psi) per arrivare alle organizzazioni extraparlamentari, comitati di quartiere e partiti della nuova sinistra (Democrazia proletaria). Le esperienze organizzate a cui diedero vita questi giovani erano collettivi di base, impegnati nell'attivismo di quartiere a cavallo tra il lavoro sociale e il volontariato, in una sorta di attivismo diffuso che era sorto capillarmente grazie all'attitudine all'autonomia maturata nel movimento '77.

Tutto questo venne sperimentato in gruppi di base autogestiti (Gab – Gruppo attività di base, Gts – Gruppo terziario sociale) e poi nel corso del tempo si professionalizzò attraverso l'adesione a una delle cooperative sociali emergenti dell'area torinese, la cooperativa Animazione Valdocco, nata da una componente dell'oratorio salesiano Valdocco a cui si unirono giovani provenienti da più spiccate esperienze politiche di movimento. Il gruppo di Vanchiglia avrebbe fatto parte di questa seconda componente, promuovendo i servizi di animazione che erano sorti nel quartiere, in particolare nella gestione del Centro di incontro di Lungo Dora Colletta, una sorta di centro sociale comunale – ma piuttosto aperto alle istanze dell'autogestione giovanile – simile a molti altri nati per iniziativa del comune di Torino a partire dal 1977 come risposta al "disagio giovanile". Gli spazi comunali per l'aggregazione erano diventati punti di incontro per molti militanti ed ex militanti, in cui maturarono esperienze di animazione con adolescenti di strada, azioni di contrasto dell'eroina, attività culturali e musicali di base. In alcuni quartieri di periferia, ad esempio Vallette-Lucento (Bianco 1992-1993), i Centri di incontro furono anticipati, a volte negli stessi spazi, dai cosiddetti circoli del proletariato giovanile, mentre altrove agli stessi circoli seguirono esperienze associative specie nel campo culturale, teatrale e musicale (Aa.Vv. 1997).

### **La spinta all'attivismo tra scuole ed esperienze associative**

Negli ultimi anni settanta, all'interno di un contesto cittadino in cui i movimenti avevano intrapreso un'uscita precipitosa dallo spazio pubblico del conflitto – specie rivolgendosi alla militanza armata o a forme diverse di impegno sociale e associativo – i percorsi di formazione all'attivismo sociale si erano fatti maggiormente diversificati, ancor prima della nascita di un campo associativo strutturato e visibile. Questa diversificazione si può intravedere già nella varietà degli itinerari individuali, a partire dall'esperienza scolastica nelle scuole superiori del tempo.

Fino al volgere del decennio l'incontro con la scuola superiore aveva rappresentato un'esperienza centrale nella formazione dei giovani, creando in loro aspettative di socializzazione tra pari e veicolando stili e pratiche alternative, la cui forza risulta in qualche misura disallineata rispetto ai cicli della protesta politica. Nonostante l'interruzione di canali e contatti tra mondi politici differenti – lungo i quali militanti di varia estrazione avevano partecipato a comitati di quartiere, circoli giovanili, collettivi universitari o femministi, occupazioni di case – nella memoria dei più, la scuola è ricordata come un'esperienza "sconvolgente" fino ai tardi anni settanta. Vi erano compresi lo shock di eventi come le occupazioni che ancora dilagarono nel '78 e nel '79, ma soprattutto l'offerta di stili di vita, abbigliamento e gusti culturali alternativi che iniziavano ad ampliarsi e muovere dalla tonalità freak e movimentista a quella punk e new wave emergente. Anche laddove le scuole frequentate non davano più molto spazio al movimento, le reti orizzontali costituite dai collettivi scolastici o associazioni di base avevano aiutato a muoversi nella *città delle scuole*, ed erano stati fonte di incontri e stimoli per nuove attività.

In questa prospettiva, diventano più comprensibili alcune scelte che paiono deviare i percorsi formativi degli intervistati fuori dell'alveo che la scuola superiore aveva tracciato. Certo non è possibile generalizzare, ma entro il cerchio delle persone protagoniste dei progetti sociali nel quartiere Vanchiglia si innescò un circolo virtuoso tra la scuola superiore e la formazione successiva che non aveva nulla a che vedere con i *curricula* disciplinari. Molti – e in particolare molte attiviste – si iscrissero alla scuola per educatori professionali, al corso universitario di pedagogia o alla scuola per infermieri, pur provenendo dalle scuole più diverse: liceo classico o scientifico, magistrali o scuole tecniche d'altro genere. In qualche misura, un contesto scolastico ancora molto vivace fu l'antidoto – assunto da una specifica generazione di giovani – contro il cosiddetto "riflusso" dell'attività politica.

*Invece questo concetto del riflusso l'avevo rimosso, e già allora mi faceva veramente schifo, non mi piaceva minimamente, mi sembrava una trovata giornalistica per sottolineare il lato buio ombroso ambivalente equivoco di tutto quello che poi fu negli anni settanta, che andò nella lotta armata, in tutto questo percorso autodistruttivo a cui io poi non ho partecipato... il modo di far politica che mi era più adatto era proprio questo, al servizio della gente, era nel quotidiano, una pratica del quotidiano. (intervista a P. R.)*

Ciò che mi preme osservare è che l'ambiente scolastico è unanimemente ricordato come *stimolante, ricco, scioccante*: un fattore di rottura nella costruzione dell'identità. Il passaggio per le scuole di quegli anni è stato l'elemento che avrebbe indirizzato maggiormente i contatti possibili con il mondo associativo e dei gruppi di base. Terminata la militanza rimasero le

relazioni, e queste furono la ricca eredità degli anni successivi: non come nuovo segmento di un movimento strettamente politico, ma come un'esperienza culturale e generazionale.

## **II "riflusso" dei movimenti e i suoi antidoti**

*Nel mio caso è andata così... quella che era una storia mia personale precedente a quella professionale è stata una storia di militanza, sia politica che nel campo dell'associazionismo, per quello che lo può essere negli anni settanta... a Torino andando alle superiori e muovendomi nell'area di Dp [Democrazia proletaria, partito politico della nuova sinistra], parallelamente a questo c'è stato un mio interesse nel mondo dell'associazionismo [...] dopo di che abbastanza per casualità, ammesso che il caso esista, ho deciso, su stimolo di tutta una serie di persone che facevano parte del Csi [Centro sportivo italiano, corrispettivo cattolico dell'Arci-Uisp], ed alcuni di questi operatori si sono staccati ed hanno cominciato a lavorare per la cooperativa della Svolta, che era quella che ha avuto i primi animatori a Torino, quando non c'erano ancora animatori dipendenti pubblici... e su stimolo di alcuni di loro, dicevano ma perché non fai la scuola per educatori? io all'epoca ero iscritta a filosofia, facevo tutt'altro [interruzione] ho tentato questa cosa e mi hanno presa, nel giro di pochissimo tempo ho iniziato a lavorare alla Valdocco. (intervista a P. R.)*

Le scuole, la cultura giovanile e i suoi luoghi di socialità sono stati gli ingredienti principali del sentimento comune che fece intravedere ad alcuni giovanissimi cresciuti nel movimento la possibilità dell'impegno nel sociale. In questo senso la parola "casuale" si connota di altri significati: si avvicina più al senso del *dato scontato*, e lascia intravedere piuttosto la forza di un *umore generazionale diffuso*. Questo, nonostante che gli sbocchi professionali e le inclinazioni al lavoro sociale non si dimostrarono generalizzati nei giovani dei tardi anni settanta. Tuttavia, innegabilmente, si era intanto diffusa un'attitudine di massa alle tante e molteplici attività a esso collegate, o che ne rappresentavano una premessa o una palestra: ad esempio l'animazione di strada, quella sportiva, l'impegno nei collettivi femministi, scolastici o legati ai consultori.

*Andando a ritroso, nel '77 il mio impegno era sbilanciato in un campo che sicuramente era il campo politico, nel senso che da parte mia vi fu una scelta di praticare determinati metodi di antagonismo sociale, di antagonismo politico più che sociale, tra i quali vi era anche la lotta armata, per cui da parte mia volle anche dire andare a finire negli ingranaggi della giustizia, eccetera... per cui avere una serie di ritorni soggettivi che hanno visto anche un periodo di carcerazione. (intervista a C. F.)*

Alcune cooperative sociali dell'area torinese ospitano, o hanno avuto tra i propri soci fondatori, ex militanti di organizzazioni armate<sup>10</sup>. A Torino il reinserimento lavorativo nel campo della cooperazione sociale fu stimolato dalle stesse istituzioni locali, specie incoraggiando i percorsi di revisione personale e politica condotti da molti militanti di Prima Linea nel corso della cosiddetta "dissociazione". Oltre a consentire nuovi stimoli progettuali e chance per attività "non-istituzionali", il settore sociale fornì uno spazio nel quale far decantare le identità più radicali – senza riportarle all'ordine, necessariamente. Per un altro verso, vi era già stata contiguità di stili di vita e impegni sociali tra giovani attivisti e quelli entrati nelle formazioni armate dopo il 1978. Nella biografie raccolte in altre ricerche, colpisce la ricca vita pubblica e sociale dei giovani armati, e la loro vicinanza al complesso di esperienze generazionali vissute dai coetanei: alcuni volontari in Friuli dopo il terremoto del '76, altri impegnati come animatori in gruppi scout, nel Laboratorio Teatro Settimo ai suoi esordi o come educatori di strada negli oratori del quartiere Vanchiglia (Novelli e Tranfaglia 1988), niente a che vedere con gli itinerari dei militanti di stampo brigatista, molti dei quali appartenenti alla generazione precedente nata nei primi anni cinquanta.

*Per cui dopo di che, una volta terminata quella fase, che fu una fase anche di ripensamento soggettivo, proprio sulla lotta armata come strumento di lotta politica se vogliamo, dicevo passato questo periodo vi fu da parte mia un cadere nell'anonimato politico... se vogliamo, il mio incontro con l'intervento sociale fu un incontro abbastanza casuale, devo dire.*  
(intervista a C. F.)

La fine di ciò che è stato segnalato da un narratore come "anonimato politico" va osservato anche in altri termini: come una *riemersione all'azione di politica*, ora associata al nuovo attivismo sociale di base, in spazi pubblici di nuova concezione. Questi dati, a mio avviso, sono un elemento che conferma quanto l'attitudine a "rifluire nel privato" sia stata più legata all'età anagrafica e ai caratteri della generazione politica che non alla pura e semplice militanza nei movimenti radicali. Non a caso, il dibattito sul cosiddetto riflusso vide la convergenza di soggetti di vario genere, a esclusione di quelli che si affacciavano in quel momento all'attivismo: da una parte coinvolse le organizzazioni della sinistra extraparlamentare provenienti dal '68, al tempo dell'esaurimento del

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<sup>10</sup> Da una parte, vi è stata l'opera di accoglienza e di offerta di riabilitazione realizzata dall'associazione cattolica Gruppo Abele (i casi più emblematici sono stati quelli degli ex di Prima Linea e Brigate rosse Sergio Segio e Susanna Ronconi). D'altra parte, vi è stato un movimento più silenzioso e sotterraneo, per mezzo del quale diversi militanti armati della fine degli anni settanta divennero soci o fondarono associazioni e cooperative sociali d'area torinese: tra quelle di cui sono a conoscenza, la cooperativa Valdocco, La Testarda, Senza Frontiere, Eta Beta.

ciclo conflittuale degli anni settanta; dall'altra vide i mass media e alcuni intellettuali celebrare il "ritorno al privato" come una reazione al decennio di estrema politicizzazione che stava terminando (Galli della Loggia 1980, Morando 2009). Di ben altro genere, a mio avviso, è invece il racconto di sé che forniscono i giovani attivisti sociali dei primi anni ottanta. Il riflusso fu un dato *culturale* e *generazionale*, e attraverso tale differenza dell'esperienza soggettiva si può intravedere una diversa periodizzazione storica dell'attivismo sociale e giovanile.

### **Animazione e lavoro di strada**

Nel percorso associativo di quartiere maturò anche la formazione al lavoro dei singoli attivisti, anch'essa sottoposta alle sollecitazioni delle culture di movimento e quindi indirizzata alla ricerca di un lavoro "diverso". Dalle interviste, dai progetti e documenti redatti dal piccolo e vario campo associativo di Vanchiglia è emerso uno spaccato delle nuove forme di azione e di soggettività, successive a quelle di movimento.

*Siccome ci trovavamo con la comunità di base, frequentavamo il Comitato di Quartiere e Dp, ci spostammo un po' di zona, ci chiamavamo Gruppo attività di base, il Gab, ci prendevano anche in giro perché eravamo solo tre o quattro, poi avevo coinvolto anche dei miei compagni, non c'era ancora R., siamo andati avanti come Gab fino al '79-ottanta, l'anno in cui abbiamo conosciuto R., ce lo fece conoscere A. che aveva già fatto l'obiettore [di coscienza] al Centro di incontro, e loro hanno fatto il laboratorio di serigrafia, non c'era ancora il Centro di incontro di Lungo Dora Colletta. (intervista a P. G.)*

I punti cardine del discorso sono assai vari e mostrano nella sua complessità l'indipendenza della giovane generazione, che attraverso le risorse culturali e le esperienze maturate tra pari ha condotto a precise scelte di vita. La pratica scelta per intervenire sui bisogni è stata "l'animazione di territorio". Questa era frutto, assai locale, del ricco dibattito politico<sup>11</sup> sorto intorno alla metà degli anni settanta sugli interventi dei gruppi di base nei quartieri, impegnati in progetti assai vari e portati avanti con strumenti altrettanto eterogenei. Vi era una tradizione teatrale/creativa dell'animazione (Casaroli e Marinari 1992), centrata sul repertorio delle culture popolari e proletarie, nonché sulla proposta di narrazioni e giochi politici, teatro di strada e attività d'arte applicate agli scarti urbani e ai materiali poveri. Tutto ciò avveniva non tanto per irreggimentare o educare i "giovani proletari", bensì per consentire spazi di espressione e dare fiducia – si potrebbe dire, "restituire soggettività"<sup>12</sup> per mezzo dell'espressività –

<sup>11</sup> Un luogo centrale, a questo proposito, fu la rivista "Ombre Rosse", specie tra '77 e '79.

<sup>12</sup> Mutuo la definizione da Luisa Passerini, sebbene ella l'avesse utilizzata limitatamente al "restituire soggettività sul piano dell'interpretazione" (Passerini 1991, 8), quindi all'interno della



attraverso la drammatizzazione, le pratiche manuali, il gioco e la musica. Da questo approccio all'animazione di territorio prenderanno avvio i progetti del Gts di Vanchiglia indirizzati ai temi della lotta alla tossicodipendenza e del disagio giovanile.

Una sistemazione teorica e metodologica del cosiddetto "lavoro di strada", condivisa tra varie esperienze professionali italiane, fu frutto quasi esclusivo delle pratiche e dell'autoriflessività assai elevata sviluppata nel settore sociale; tuttavia, questa fu un'elaborazione decisamente più tarda<sup>13</sup>. Le matrici culturali e politiche di tali esperienze, almeno nelle loro prime formulazioni scritte, sono state interne alle scene di movimento italiane – in particolare la lotta all'eroina sperimentata nei circoli del proletariato giovanile (Anonimi 1977) – con alcune suggestioni provenienti dal nord-Europa e dagli USA.

*La struttura deve diventare punto di riferimento dove trovare precise cose e persone "dalla propria parte". Il modello cui storicamente fare riferimento [per la costruzione di un "Centro d'accoglienza" nel quartiere Vanchiglia, mai realizzato] è quello degli sleep-in autogestiti dei Provos olandesi, dei progetti quali Release e il Blenheim, delle free-clinics americane, dei self-help di Harlem delle Black Panthers. (Gruppo Terziario Sociale – Vanchiglia 1984)*

La ricerca di soddisfazione dei bisogni sociali era saldamente ancorata a una "ideologia" anti-istituzionale. Questa verrà ribadita trasversalmente sia nell'animazione culturale sia negli interventi di sostegno a tossicodipendenti sviluppati negli anni successivi da alcuni operatori originari del progetto Vankiglia<sup>14</sup> in altri comuni dell'area torinese.

*Non abbiamo bisogno di nuove istituzioni. Nello sviluppo storico materiale della risposta al bisogno, la creazione di istituzioni ha rappresentato un momento importante di crescita culturale e politica la cui spinta propulsiva, come altre, è oggi esaurita [...] Occorre avere molto chiaro che ciò che è possibile fare oggi per dare risposte al malessere giovanile è solo e unicamente senza e contro le istituzioni, intese come il pensare e l'agire istituzionale. (Gruppo Terziario Sociale – Vanchiglia 1984)*

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pratica di ricerca; ciononostante, se si intende la pratica educativa e l'animazione anche come un'operazione di conoscenza, può risultare utile la sfumatura ora introdotta: *restituire soggettività per mezzo dell'espressività e delle relazioni*.

<sup>13</sup> Faccio riferimento alla "Carta di Certaldo" sul lavoro di strada, sottoscritta da circa venti associazioni, cooperative, équipes di educatori pubblici il 15 gennaio 1994.

<sup>14</sup> La denominazione del gruppo di attivisti di base mutò nel giro di pochi anni, introducendo la deformazione del nome del quartiere: da Vanchiglia al più giovanile e allusivo Vankiglia S/balla.

Questo spirito, confortato da riferimenti politici e analisi teoriche frutto delle fonti più disparate, si rifletterà in moltissimi documenti e progetti elaborati dal gruppo di Vanchiglia; in questi scritti si sosteneva, inoltre, di voler agire secondo strategie la cui anti-istituzionalità si sarebbe innestata, in senso lato, sulla tradizione terapeutica e politica già applicata nell'antipsichiatria.

*L'impostazione di un tipo di lavoro come questo è necessariamente un'impostazione anti-istituzionale, quella stessa cioè che, come riferimento culturale, ha prodotto le teorizzazioni e le prassi di ogni intervento sociale scientificamente impostato (v., il campo della psichiatria). (Gruppo Terziario Sociale – Vanchiglia 1983)*

## **Animazione e creatività**

Questa tradizione dell'animazione si è incontrata e scambiata esperienza lungo un'altra linea, un itinerario che tra gli anni settanta e gli ottanta coniugò la traccia artistica e sperimentale dell'animazione con l'attività sociale. Nel corso dei lunghi anni settanta era avvenuta una progressiva diffusione di tecniche e approcci elaborati un decennio prima dal teatro d'avanguardia, anch'esso avviato a una precipitosa politicizzazione. Il teatro politico – prima "teatro delle cantine" e poi delle strade e delle grandi manifestazioni giovanili – si collocava allo sbocco di un processo cominciato da diversi anni, nei pieni '60, grazie alla speranza di una "rivoluzione culturale" allora fortemente sostenuta dalle ideologie della sinistra rivoluzionaria. La linea in questione veniva dal recupero del "popolare", tematica mai del tutto ripulita dalle ambiguità che la parola porta con sé (Lumley 1998, cap VI, Ginzburg 1980).

La scena di cui mi occupo non fu mai mossa da spiccate ambizioni artistiche. L'animazione e il teatro di strada, in Vanchiglia, erano invece destinati al gioco e allo stimolo della creatività dei più piccoli e degli adolescenti. Queste attività erano spesso inserite in feste di quartiere, e pertanto ne derivava un deciso carattere comunitario.

Questo vasto patrimonio di esperienze d'arte e sperimentali si avviava, alla fine dei settanta e nei primi ottanta, nella direzione della *popolarizzazione*, verso la trasmissione del sapere creativo a una nuova generazione di animatori ed educatori indirizzati al lavoro sociale. Dopo essere state strumenti dell'"avanguardia di massa" (Calvesi 1978), queste attitudini entrarono in alcuni ambiti professionali come bagaglio formativo e strumenti di lavoro. In Vanchiglia ne sono esempi il teatro di burattini, il teatro di strada e i mascheramenti carnevaleschi, i laboratori di serigrafia, le sale prove musicali. Per altri versi questa tradizione attecchì nell'ambiente cooperativo anche in servizi maggiormente specializzati, soprattutto quelli psichiatrici: erano frequenti in quegli anni i laboratori di "arte-terapia" che miravano a "de-

istituzionalizzare" coloro che erano stati di recente liberati dai manicomi grazie alla legge 180 del 1978<sup>15</sup>.

Il rapporto di cui si è detto risale alle esperienze pionieristiche di fuoriuscita dall'istituzione psichiatrica; difatti, già nell'ospedale triestino in cui operò Franco Basaglia avvennero le prime messe in scena di "teatro-terapia", di animazione teatrale con bambini e con i pazienti, per opera di Giuliano Scabia, già firmatario nel 1966 insieme a molti altri attori e registi di un manifesto per il rinnovamento del teatro, affinché vi si realizzasse un più stretto rapporto tra attore e spettatore e tra gesto e parola. Anche a Torino vi fu la realizzazione di progetti particolarmente innovativi nel campo dell'arte-terapia, alcuni condotti da Piero Gilardi e da altri artisti vicini alla pratica dell'arte povera. Più diffusamente furono coinvolti attori, animatori e artisti sul duplice fronte della militanza e del lavoro sociale: allora impegnati tra il "Collettivo Animazione" di Democrazia proletaria e i laboratori pionieristici per pazienti psichiatrici o adolescenti, realizzati in convenzione con la cooperativa Valdocco nel Quartiere 7 (Gilardi 1983).

### **Cultura dei "bisogni" e formazione al lavoro sociale**

Il criterio fondamentale in base al quale il gruppo di Vanchiglia ha valutato le priorità dell'intervento è stato l'adesione ai "bisogni del quartiere". Era un tema – ed una formula – direttamente mutuata dai movimenti degli anni settanta (Heller 1974). Tale riferimento teorico e politico, naturalmente, doveva poi articolarsi con il territorio stesso, con le sue coordinate sociali e culturali.

*Eravamo assolutamente autonomi, eravamo molto fai-da-te, legati al nostro territorio, ai bisogni del nostro territorio, alle nostre risorse... cioè molto rigidamente seguivamo questa consegna di investire gli spazi a cui riusciamo ad arrivare con le forze che avevamo [...] noi proponevamo cose sui bisogni, non ipotesi politiche [...] la nostra ipotesi era legata ai bisogni del quartiere [...] collaborando con altri gruppi su cose specifiche, su quel bisogno lì in quel momento lì. (intervista a R. R.)*

"Bisogno", in questo caso, ebbe ben poco di ideologico e cioè di irriducibile; e non fu mai nella pratica professionale degli operatori del Centro d'incontro una definizione data per acquisita una volta per tutte. Nel corso degli anni il "bisogno" fu declinato nelle diverse età dei ragazzi che frequentavano il centro, nelle culture giovanili emergenti – in particolare il punk – nel genere e

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<sup>15</sup> La Legge 180 del 13 maggio 1978 (Accertamenti e trattamenti sanitari volontari e obbligatori) è la norma che portò alla chiusura dei manicomi e regolamentò il trattamento sanitario obbligatorio. È anche nota come "legge Basaglia", in riferimento a Franco Basaglia, psichiatra italiano e direttore del manicomio di Trieste nel corso degli anni settanta, nonché esponente dell'antipsichiatria che si era diffusa sull'onda delle teorie di Ronald Laing e David Cooper.

nell'appartenenza di classe. Le attività andarono dai giochi di strada con i più piccoli, alle sale prove, ai corsi e agli stage creativi, alla stampa serigrafica e alla break-dance. Tali attività arrivarono a comprendere concerti di portata cittadina, letteralmente usati come leva culturale in un contesto ancora riluttante a prendere atto dell'irrompere del punk, della new wave, del rock di base e delle aspirazioni che queste tendenze portavano tra i giovani. Nel tempo, la parola "bisogno" si arricchì di nuove sfumature e anche di ambivalenze: da una parte la ricerca di condizioni essenziali per la vita del singolo – come l'occupazione, l'istruzione, la salute – dall'altra la conquista di dimensioni estetiche e strumentali per l'esperienza giovanile. Nei documenti prevalgono, significativamente, la critica del consumismo e dei "falsi bisogni" accanto al rifiuto di condannare la ricerca di soddisfazioni qui ed ora da parte dei giovani sottoproletari degli ottanta.

*Il GTS nasce da quelle forze che, a partire dal 1977, si sono mosse in questo quartiere su obiettivi sociali e culturali per un intervento corretto sull'emarginazione giovanile: il Coordinamento dei Gruppi di Base, i GAB con le loro esperienze di animazione nelle zone sottoproletarie del Quartiere, la Consulta Giovanile del Q.8, il Comitato Interassociativo che riuniva varie forze sull'ARCI-UISP agli SCOUT, in collegamento ideale con l'esperienza del circolo del proletariato giovanile "Rainbow" che è storicamente la prima aggregazione giovanile spontanea su questi temi. A partire dal 1980, ci siamo messi a ragionare sulla possibilità di creare posti di lavoro sui temi che ci interessavano. Nasceva l'ipotesi del Terziario Sociale. (Gruppo Terziario Sociale – Vankiglia S/balla 1984)*

Non tutti i futuri operatori sociali meditarono una scelta professionale partendo dalla propria esperienza associativa; ad alcuni difatti fu fatta una vera e propria offerta di lavoro dai propri compagni. E chi la fece loro, cosa cercava in questi coetanei, quali attitudini? Mentre coloro che la accolsero, cosa cominciarono a immaginare di quell'attività, e come appresero a immaginare se stessi in quel lavoro di nuovo tipo? All'inizio le risposte furono accompagnate dall'incertezza, e spesso dall'ignoranza circa i contenuti del lavoro sociale, allora ai suoi esordi. Diversi ragazzi di allora, ex militanti del movimento o di formazioni organizzate, erano semplicemente alla ricerca di un impiego; alcune occasioni di lavoro erano state escluse a monte, altre furono utilizzate come ripiego temporaneo, cosicché l'impegno nel settore sociale comportò una lenta e complessa identificazione.

Diversi giovani in tutta Italia seguirono questa via. A partire dal '76-'77, vi furono ripetuti interventi del governo nazionale e degli enti locali a sostegno dell'occupazione, tra cui quello del 1976 sulla parità uomo-donna sui luoghi di lavoro e la legge sul collocamento obbligatorio<sup>16</sup>. Vi furono provvedimenti

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<sup>16</sup> Legge 285/1977.

legislativi a favore della costituzione di imprese cooperative, anche se nel testo di legge erano immaginate soprattutto nel campo produttivo, agricolo in particolare (Comune di Torino 1978, 51). Anche questa è un'immagine assai forte: il ceto politico nazionale e locale intendeva accompagnare la giovane generazione, esclusa dal lavoro fordista e formatasi al conflitto sociale radicale, a un impiego sano e concreto, occupandola nell'artigianato, nel settore florivivaistico, nell'orticoltura e nella confezione di oggetti d'artigianato artistico. In sostanza – paradossalmente – si adottava ormai fuori tempo un cliché cresciuto negli stessi ambienti di movimento: l'inclinazione dei giovani alla marginalità economica e produttiva.

Diversamente da ciò, la promozione del lavoro sociale prese più propriamente la forma del mutuo-aiuto tra giovani, che ebbe peraltro come conseguenza di mantenere in vita e sviluppare la temperie culturale esplosa nelle aree di movimento. Non che vi fosse stata una strategia per privilegiare i propri coetanei, rafforzando la propria generazione nel momento di una difficile uscita dagli anni settanta. A mio avviso, tuttavia, è indubbio che nello sviluppo di questo campo professionale agì un riflesso culturale, sia nella scelta dei candidati al lavoro sia nella proposta dei progetti e dei destinatari. Anche il "prodotto" realizzato in queste esperienze si prestava assai bene a tal fine: si trattava delle relazioni sociali e della cultura popolare in genere, la quale però si avvicinava sempre più all'accezione anglo-sassone di popular culture che non all'oggetto "cultura popolare", evocato in molteplici progetti militanti e artistici degli anni settanta. Per esempio, tra gli obiettivi del ciclo di concerti musicali intitolati "1984. Fuga da Vankiglia", organizzati presso il Centro d'incontro, vi era esplicitamente l'intenzione di "lavorare con le bande giovanili" – ovviamente non nell'accezione data dai media di massa a quel tempo – e di contrastare il "monopolio" della cultura esercitato dai privati e dall'Archi<sup>17</sup>. Quest'ultimo slogan echeggiava – o era ripreso da – un analogo messaggio dei punk torinesi più politicizzati che frequentavano il Centro d'incontro, tra l'altro già utilizzato durante concerti e manifestazioni autogestite<sup>18</sup>.

## **L'attivismo e il lavoro sociale tra ragazzi e ragazze**

Cosa rappresentò il lavoro sociale per le donne? Il passaggio storico che osservo, nel suo complesso, ha ospitato un cambiamento delle occupazioni femminili e un transito cospicuo delle donne dagli impieghi industriali – emblematico il caso delle cassaintegrate e licenziate FIAT dell'80 – ai nuovi servizi alla persona

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<sup>17</sup> Erano i tempi dell'Archi Kids, in prima fila nell'organizzazione di concerti, occasioni di socialità ed offerte commerciali per i giovani; nella denominazione emergeva l'ammiccamento alle cosiddette subculture "spettacolari": "Kids", difatti, era il termine generico che stava a indicare l'insieme degli appartenenti a un gruppo culturale giovanile, in area anglo-sassone.

<sup>18</sup> Alcuni titoli di serate e concerti punk, nel periodo tra 1982 e 1984 presso il Centro d'incontro di Vankiglia: "concerto punk per l'autogestione" (29/1/1983), "contro il monopolio delle case discografiche – concerto punk" (23/4/1983), "...un...CENTRO'... Autogestito a Torino" (28/1/1984), "per l'apertura di spazi autogestiti" (17/12/1984).

(Movimento delle donne Torino 1984). Nel caso specifico delle donne intervistate non si è dato questo passaggio, considerata la giovane età e la condizione di studentessa nella quale si trovavano molte di loro negli anni settanta. Tuttavia ciò non ha impedito che nuove opportunità per le donne adulte implicassero l'aprirsi di altri orizzonti di possibilità per le giovani donne che si affacciavano solo allora all'attività professionale. Dopo la crisi economica a cavallo degli anni settanta e ottanta si aprirono per le donne spazi nel mercato del lavoro. Si affermò un dibattito che a Torino in particolare si arricchì dei contributi dei vari femminismi cittadini, in alcuni loro settori assai attenti al mondo del lavoro. Così prese piede il dibattito sulla funzione del part-time – emancipatore, o indirettamente garante del lavoro domestico delle donne? (Barbagli e Saraceno 1997) – mentre al livello della pubblicistica si profilava nuova attenzione alla femminilizzazione di alcune professioni di servizio e, di riflesso, alla professionalizzazione di alcune mansioni femminili “di cura”, prima segnate dalla gratuità (Aa.Vv. 1984, Fanelli e Ronci 1985).

*Mentre per le studentesse le reti di solidarietà e le strutture organizzative costruite in questi anni – a partire dai collettivi femministi, che sono tuttora assai diffusi nelle scuole – costituiscono in qualche modo un antidoto alla crisi delle forme di partecipazione, e un terreno prezioso di confronto e di aggregazione, si può pensare che per i maschi la crisi degli strumenti tradizionali del fare politica tenda a tradursi, in molti casi, in crisi della politica tout court: significativamente la forma più sviluppata di associazionismo femminile è il collettivo, la forma più sviluppata di associazionismo maschile è il gruppo sportivo. (Ricolfi e Sciolla 1980, 201-202)*

Abbiamo osservato come a partire dalle scelte formative successive alla scuola secondaria, le strade degli attivisti e delle attiviste di Vanchiglia abbiano seguito differenti strategie e inclinazioni soggettive, di cui quella femminile e femminista è stato un elemento centrale. Nel “lavoro sociale” è apparso fin dal termine degli anni settanta un orientamento a percorsi scolastici e formativi *femminilizzati* – tendenza che è rimasta significativa almeno fino alla metà del decennio seguente. Fatta eccezione per i primi anni di vita della scuola educatori di Torino – dal '68 alla metà dei settanta – almeno fino ai pieni ottanta la quasi totalità delle diplomate fu composta da ragazze. Soltanto a partire dal nuovo decennio le presenze maschili cominciarono a crescere. Dagli anni ottanta, difatti, agli uomini venne progressivamente precluso il canale informale di accesso al lavoro sociale rappresentato dall'obiezione di coscienza e dai nuovi spazi sociali e culturali come i Centri d'incontro. I ragazzi, prevalentemente, erano entrati nell'ambiente cooperativo e associativo dapprima come attivisti politici, utenti, obiettori di coscienza o animatori occasionali; solo con la generazione successiva cominciarono a costituire una quota importante degli iscritti alla SFES – intanto diventata SFEP (Scuola di Formazione per Educatori Professionali).

Per tornare ai termini usati all'inizio dell'articolo, l'elemento casuale che ha portato alcuni ragazzi e ragazze verso l'attività sociale è stato segnato dalla cultura giovanile e di genere; ma dal lato maschile ciò fu mosso in prevalenza dalla condizione studentesca, dalle frequentazioni di movimento, oppure venne orientato dal rifiuto del lavoro – maturato in piccole officine o botteghe, ormai sgradite e squalificate agli occhi dei coetanei, o dal fugace transito per la grande fabbrica fordista all'epoca dell'estrema radicalità e della successiva crisi produttiva della Fiat, a partire dal 1980.

Nella sfera d'esperienza femminile l'avvicinamento avvenne invece attraverso il legame con altre donne, e in molti casi operò nei luoghi di incontro del femminismo cittadino: nei consultori, nelle case delle madri degli adolescenti con i quali si faceva animazione di strada, nei collettivi di donne, studentesse, impiegate e operaie. Così non sorprende l'entusiasmo femminile per le scelte di allora, lo slancio comune a molte verso l'autonomia dalla famiglia, l'accento posto su un lavoro precocemente scelto e fatto proprio. Il tema dell'autonomia ha pervaso fortemente i dialoghi che ho svolto con le attiviste di Vanchiglia; il lavoro sociale è stato per esse un'occasione di *emancipazione*, intesa come partecipazione a progetti professionali carichi di investimento soggettivo. Emancipazione è un termine complesso, a suo tempo collocato nel dibattito tra l'anima istituzionale e quella radicale del femminismo italiano; qui va inteso nel senso di chance di autonomia, in primo luogo economica, ma anche come momento di autoriflessività e invenzione di sé – del proprio lavoro e dell'identità sul lavoro. Questo processo di identificazione avvenne in équipe/collettivi nei quali la presenza femminile fu a lungo maggioritaria, e nei quali i linguaggi femminili dell'espressività e della relazione furono largamente egemoni. Si delineò in tal senso un'*egemonia discorsiva* che si legge nelle pratiche e nella scrittura dei progetti educativi, nonché nelle dichiarazioni di alcuni ex militanti intervistati, nel piacere e nel benessere provato per la nuova inaspettata occasione di crescita e affermazione di sé offerta dal lavoro sociale. Secondo la mia interpretazione, anche l'attività politica è uscita rivisitata da questi itinerari, non cancellata e nemmeno mantenuta in vita artificialmente: è sostanzialmente la "politica come pratica quotidiana", secondo le parole già citate di una testimone.

Se per i ragazzi il lavoro sociale rappresentò una risposta alla chiusura di altri spazi pubblici di parola e azione, per le ragazze questa cesura non si è manifestata. Gli uomini, pur nella differenza delle storie personali, hanno vissuto la nuova fase con entusiasmo e incertezza per il cambiamento personale, ma anche con la convinzione di poter rinnovare le espressioni della politica radicale. Altrettanto diffusa era l'opinione che solo negli spazi dell'attivismo sociale sarebbe stata praticabile una forma di impegno, almeno per quegli anni profondamente segnati dalle code del terrorismo e dalla repressione delle realtà radicali. Questo approdo – e le ansie e i tormenti che portò con sé – fu vissuto dai soli ragazzi.

Non sorprende pertanto che, comune a tutti i percorsi femminili, a quelli originari di Vanchiglia come a quelli delle ragazze che si avvicineranno al Centro

d'incontro e alla cooperativa Valdocco negli anni ottanta, vi sia stato un forte investimento personale nei confronti del lavoro sociale. A spingere le ragazze fu una cultura elaborata orizzontalmente, fuori dalle tradizioni verticali della famiglia o della fabbrica – nella quale peraltro le donne erano meno presenti. Esse non avevano una cultura del lavoro che spettasse loro in eredità – se non quella del lavoro domestico – e questo svantaggio venne rivoltato in un vuoto creativo, aperto alle sperimentazioni. Ancor più significativo: il lavoro sociale si è posto in completa rottura, da un punto di vista soggettivo, con le capacità e le attitudini che le ragazze erano state chiamate ad apprendere in famiglia; esso fu invece parte di un complesso mondo di vita che ebbe vette di elaborazione teorica nel movimento femminista, ma atteneva anche a un modo di scambiare e mettere in comune l'esperienza di vita emerso diffusamente nella propria generazione.

*Però in contemporanea mi sono trovata a partecipare a una iniziativa cittadina [...] nel senso che quegli anni erano gli anni in cui avvenivano le occupazioni a Torino del Sant'Anna [ospedale ostetrico ginecologico Sant'Anna] c'era un grosso dibattito sulla legge sull'aborto e così via, e io come studente media giovane ho partecipato all'occupazione del Sant'Anna che ebbe proprio una risonanza cittadina, e non solo, si muoveva su un filo che teneva coinvolte molte città d'Italia... e a seguito di questa occupazione, che era un'occupazione simbolica, no? che vedeva insieme sia gli operatori dell'ospedale sia le donne i cittadini le persone che potevano diventare utenti di quel servizio, è anche nata un'iniziativa che muove peraltro i suoi primi passi con l'intercategoriale donne Cgil Cisl Uil, che ha visto... erano gli anni che è uscito Noi e il nostro corpo, questi libri che erano la bibbia...*

*e c'era questa intercategoriale donne del sindacato che ha fatto partire, non so se collocato nel '76 '77 o '78, ma comunque in quel periodo lì, questo corso di 150 ore, quindi rivolto alle persone che lavoravano, un corso di 150 ore<sup>19</sup> sulla salute della donna, ed è stata un'iniziativa nata a seguito dell'occupazione del Sant'Anna alla quale io ho partecipato come studentessa; quindi ci si trovava per un lungo periodo nella sede dell'Flm che allora era in via Porpora così come in alcuni locali del Giovanni Bosco... e io ho partecipato ad esempio a quel collettivo, che era un collettivo di donne, a tutti gli effetti, che aveva intenzione di lavorare sul concetto di salute della donna e dove si portavano le esperienze anche personali, ed è stata un'esperienza per me, un'esperienza bella, perché non era così antagonista, cioè non era così... era un'esperienza di femminismo ma non vissuta nei termini in cui invece mi sembrava venisse proposta a scuola [...] in questa esperienza di respiro cittadino io mi ci trovavo, e quella è stata una cosa interessante che poi vabbé mi ha permesso di*

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<sup>19</sup> Le cosiddette 150 ore sono un diritto all'istruzione scolastica di base, conquistato dagli operai metalmeccanici nel corso del conflitto per il rinnovo del contratto nazionale di lavoro del 1969.



*entrare in relazione con quella che era allora la Casa della Donna, anche se poi comunque le generazioni che partecipavano a questo erano generazioni leggermente più grandi di me, gente che era di dodici anche quindici anni più grande, quindi oggi lo scarto è vissuto in maniera relativa, allora era sicuramente più pesante...*

*però io la ricordo come un'esperienza bellissima, cioè far parte di questo collettivo, trovarsi due o tre ore la settimana... mi ricordo, giovedì pomeriggio... appunto con queste donne che erano operaie della Facis, della Ceat [fabbriche del quartiere Barriera di Milano, nella periferia nord di Torino] dell'ospedale e altri studenti, e io ero studentessa su questo tema, salute della donna, che poi aveva un raggio d'azione veramente ampio che partiva anche dal mettersi in gioco in rapporto alla narrazione dei propri rapporti di coppia rapporti personali e così via... quella è stata la mia esperienza iniziale. (intervista a P. R.)*

## Conclusioni

Il problema della transizione – ovvero della traduzione e mediazione – delle culture di movimento da un decennio all'altro è un tema ancora piuttosto trascurato dalla ricerca storica. Oltre che di grande importanza per stabilire continuità e rotture nella storia dei movimenti sociali, un'auspicabile proliferazione di studi empirici e riflessioni teoriche sul mutamento dell'attivismo e della politicizzazione radicale consentirebbe di osservare le dimensioni concrete di quello scambio cognitivo, culturale e pratico che i movimenti stessi avevano sollecitato negli anni settanta e che è stato spesso risolto – o liquidato – nell'espressione "mutamento dei costumi". Secondo questa espressione, dopo la stagione dei movimenti sarebbe sorta una società più secolarizzata, individualista, fondata sull'autonomia e meno autoritaria di quella che l'aveva preceduta (Crainz 2003, Ginsborg 1998). Viene citata la stagione dei diritti civili – il divorzio e l'aborto – spesso suggerendo, tuttavia, come tale mutamento sia stato pagato con una depoliticizzazione generale della società, ovvero esso sia cresciuto a margine del sistema politico e dei dispositivi di potere sociale.

Se si può concordare sul fatto di una certa marginalità, o lateralità, delle forme di politicizzazione radicale degli anni ottanta, va anche sottolineata la carente concettualizzazione di ciò che può essere considerato, nel nuovo decennio, il "politico". Le traduzioni delle culture radicali, in primo luogo il femminismo, nei lavori di servizio alla persona e lo sviluppo di una scena mai così diffusa di produzione culturale indipendente vanno invece in questa direzione: quella della politicizzazione di nuovi campi dell'esperienza e della pratica sociale, tra quelli che le trasformazioni del capitalismo andavano modificando e informando di sé, ovvero la socialità, la cura, la comunicazione e la cultura (Castells 2002). La marginalità di tali esperienze rispetto al sistema politico – che muoveva verso altre direzioni, nell'approssimarsi del passaggio del 1989 – non sminuisce l'emergere di "aree di movimento" (Melucci 1984) che sono

diventate endemiche e hanno agito sempre più in una prospettiva controegemonica piuttosto che di diretto confronto antagonista nei confronti del potere sociale e politico.

L'esperienza torinese, riportata in queste pagine, mette in rilievo l'importanza delle culture di movimento – giovanile e femminista – non solo nella resistenza al cambiamento della società in una direzione neoliberista, ma anche il tentativo di politicizzare nuovi campi della produzione e della vita sociale. Le culture di movimento e l'esperienza vissuta dalla giovane generazione di fine anni settanta sono le risorse messe in gioco in questo processo, il quale consente di osservare altre periodizzazioni dei movimenti – almeno dal punto di vista delle loro proliferazioni, aldilà dei cicli della protesta politica in senso stretto – e concentrarsi sui nodi chiave della relazione intergenerazionale e della traduzione culturale quali momenti di resistenza. L'esperienza nelle tumultuose scuole di fine anni settanta, l'eredità di alcune teorie – e vulgate – come quelle del rifiuto del lavoro e della teoria dei bisogni, l'esperienza di liberazione assai concreta delle giovani donne di allora, il contatto con le culture giovanili e il loro repertorio semiotico adatto a sorprendenti manipolazioni, sono solo alcuni dei terreni sui quali si è sviluppata questa traduzione delle vecchie esperienze radicali di attivismo in nuove sperimentazioni.

Il rapporto tra movimenti e società civile, pertanto, è stato di volta in volta adattato, mediato, specificato in base a singolari esperienze di gruppo, repertori linguistici e politici, e si è insediato in contesti urbani assai diversi nei quali la lunga durata della differenza storica ha avuto un ruolo centrale nel definire le direzioni di questi mutamenti. In altre città, difatti, il campo della cooperazione e dell'attivismo sociale e associativo ha avuto un peso minore nell'influencare – e catalizzare – i percorsi degli ex militanti dei tardi anni settanta. A Milano, l'attivismo giovanile è stato più che altrove attratto da una città in grande trasformazione, che muoveva passi veloci verso l'economia dei servizi – moda, comunicazione, informatica, arte e creatività – sollecitando i giovani stessi a un rapporto antagonista e allo stesso tempo competitivo con tali sviluppi (Martin e Moroni 2007). La tradizione torinese, come abbiamo visto, fu più maggiormente articolata alle culture sociali della città, alle sue eredità operaie e solidaristiche.

A Roma, invece, una più lunga permanenza dell'area dell'Autonomia Operaia ha definito un campo attivista più rigido nell'aprirsi alle sperimentazioni e alla contaminazione della società civile emergente, sia per diffidenze ideologiche sia per una scia più lunga di repressione politica che ha dettato a lungo l'agenda dei movimenti radicali romani. Non a caso, l'esperienza di costituire associazioni a partire da collettivi ed esperienze di movimento fu più tarda e problematica che altrove, e in alcuni casi fu spesso dettata – nella memoria dei protagonisti – da un uso tattico della forma associativa per svolgere lecitamente attività di base nei quartieri e tra i giovani (De Sario 2009).

Se mutando le domande di ricerca e i concetti con i quali chiamare l'attivismo e le forme di politicizzazione si possono osservare dimensioni nuove del radicalismo sociale e politico, non scompaiono certo cesure e momenti di rottura. Questi, probabilmente, vanno collocati più in là rispetto alle

ricostruzioni che privilegiano il piano politico, e devono essere centrati su altre contraddizioni ed impasse. Se la sfida – fallimentare – nei confronti dei poteri costituiti, puntando al contropotere o alla lotta armata, aveva segnato la sconfitta del radicalismo degli anni settanta, nel corso del decennio successivo furono la sfida con il mercato culturale, l'insufficiente sviluppo di una economia autogestionaria, l'apertura alle nuove soggettività sociali e l'istituzionalizzazione del mercato sociale – il terzo settore – a segnare nuove cesure e ad aprire l'attivismo radicale agli anni novanta. Si è trattato di tentativi, come altri, per coniugare a livello di base le esperienze di movimento con quelle dell'associazionismo emergente, l'integrità della propria storia personale e politica con le evoluzioni a cui il nuovo decennio aveva costretto gli attivisti e le attiviste. Nonché, in qualche modo, per tentare di *uscire vivi dagli anni ottanta*.

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## **A luta pela formalização e tradução da igualdade nas fronteiras indefinidas do estado contemporâneo: radicalização e / ou neutralização do conflito democrático?**

**Marco Aurélio Maximo Prado, Frederico Viana Machado,  
Andréa Moreira Carmona**

### **Summary**

This article situates the criticism of that manicheist mode of thinking in the framework of the intrinsic complexities in the relationship between organized civil society and the state in the Brazilian lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) movement. The authors give a substantial contribution to theory by showing how the emergence of a new social movement can result from criticism made by one previously existing movement to another.

It points out that the emergence of the LGTBQ movement in Brazil owes a lot to critiques of traditional left-wing activism made by the feminist movement during the Brazilian democratic transition of the late 1970's and early 1980's. As McRae (1990) noticed in their counterparts in the North, they promoted values that until then were seen as non-significant by Marxist-Leninist groups, which focused exclusively on class struggle and regarded any other motivation for collective action as "bourgeois".

This article also shows how the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the consequent identification of homosexuals and bisexuals as "risk groups" led to a transition in the LGTBQ movement from being an oppositional, protest-based movement to one that is more institutionally complex and bureaucratized in the form of a web of NGOs, as a result of the need for closer ties with the state, so as to provide better preventive and healing healthcare for the LGBTQ community. Such institutionalization on the basis of public health concerns gave the movement an increased visibility that allowed it to further develop its identity-based, advocacy and performative aspects.

However, it also led to factionism within the movement and personalization of each faction around the agendas of, on one hand, protest leaders, and on the other hand activists who became managers of public policies aimed at further social inclusion. The authors argue that, despite the positive synergies, in terms of increased social legitimacy and access of disadvantage groups to public goods, brought by the collaboration between social movements and the state in participatory institutional arrangements, there is a risk that the blurring of boundaries between these spheres and lead to fragmentation within the movements, as well as the cooptation of some of the factions by clientelist or assimilationsit ties to the state. Therefore, as the boundaries between the state, social movements and non-governmental organizations are blurring, there is a need for a reconceptualization that goes beyond these categories, this time

based more on the strategies and alliances that actors use to position themselves in political processes than on their legal personality.

## Resumo

O presente texto apresenta algumas reflexões sobre a relação entre diferentes atores políticos no cenário da política brasileira, tomando a experiência da cidade de Belo Horizonte e do movimento de lésbicas, gays, bissexuais, transexuais, travestis e transgêneros (LGBT) como foco de análise. O texto analisa as fronteiras de interrelação dos diferentes atores sociais, buscando refletir sobre a relação contemporânea entre sociedade civil, Estado e movimentos sociais.

## 1) Introdução

O presente artigo tem como objetivo discutir as formas recentes de relação estabelecidas entre a sociedade civil organizada e o Estado contemporâneo a partir da experiência da militância LGBT (Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, transexuais, travestis e Transgêneros) no Brasil, tomando a cidade de Belo Horizonte, em Minas Gerais, como a principal referência. O texto parte da vivência de pesquisa e ativismo desenvolvida nos últimos anos pelo Núcleo de Psicologia Política (NPP) da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) e pelo Núcleo de Pesquisa em Cidadania e Direitos Humanos LGBT (NUH) da mesma universidade, com vistas a compreender algumas implicações políticas e cidadãs que estão sendo desenvolvidas no âmbito da relação entre universidade, movimentos sociais e Estado.

A discussão será localizada a partir do conhecido dilema sobre a tensão/parceria que se estabelece entre movimentos sociais/sociedade civil organizada e Estado, tendo em vista o fenômeno da *onguização*<sup>1</sup>, intensificado no Brasil a partir da década de 1990, e a capilaridade do Estado brasileiro que se desenvolveu paralelamente ao processo de democratização inaugurado com a abertura política após o fim do regime totalitário. Essa realidade contribuiu para a construção de espaços mistos de interpenetração das políticas públicas e dos movimentos sociais, conduzindo ao mesmo tempo à interação e à sobreposição de papéis entre agentes públicos e militantes.

O conceito de sociedade civil, embora amplamente utilizado e de reconhecida utilidade teórica, comporta problemas que colocam em questão os limites de sua definição. Se em um regime totalitário, onde todos os âmbitos da vida privada se tornam regulados pelo Estado, a noção de sociedade civil desaparece, nos regimes democráticos contemporâneos a diversificação das experiências

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<sup>1</sup> Chamamos de *onguização* a contínua transformação de movimentos sociais em ONGs, que se fortaleceu sob o âmbito dos governos neoliberais e em muito foi influenciado pelas agências de fomento que demandaram a institucionalização dos movimentos sociais como uma forma de fiscalização e controle.



coletivas e sociais denota a árdua tarefa de agruparmos fenômenos díspares sob uma mesma definição teórica. Acompanhando a crescente complexidade do sistema social, diversos autores vêm recusando o dualismo Estado/Sociedade Civil, buscando diferenciações que nos ajudam a compreender as formas de organização social e suas relações com o poder.

A complexidade das ações coletivas na sociedade contemporânea tem emergido como reivindicações pela equivalência de direitos que possam contribuir para a ruptura de códigos e símbolos culturais hegemônicos. Isto se apresenta nos conflitos, antagonismos, tensões, diálogos e negociações construídas na relação entre os diferentes atores sociais, tal como identificamos na relação dos movimentos sociais com o Estado. Se, por um lado, os movimentos sociais demonstram especificidades e diferenças que podem conduzir à afirmação e/ou fragmentação de suas lutas, por outro lado, nas políticas públicas, há um referencial de universalização e igualdade dos direitos humanos que podem conduzir à homogeneização.

Para contextualizarmos nossos argumentos, é importante ressaltarmos que o surgimento do Estado moderno está relacionado com a emergência e consolidação da modernidade no plano global das políticas internacionais, o que nos leva a afirmar que compreender a dinâmica política desenvolvida entre sociedade civil e Estado deve levar em conta as especificidades históricas e estruturais de cada sociedade, sem perder de vista as implicações que a formação e a manutenção de cada Estado exerceu na constituição e regulação dos demais. Neste sentido, consideramos impossível compreender as relações políticas ativas junto ao Estado brasileiro, sem analisarmos as forças políticas que são causa e sintoma das formas de colonialidade e subdesenvolvimento.

Desde sua incorporação ao império português, o Brasil sempre se viu às voltas com relações de subordinação política aos países Europeus, num primeiro momento e, especificamente, aos Estados Unidos, principalmente após a Segunda Grande Guerra. Durante a guerra fria, a influência norte-americana, legitimada pelas teorias da modernização, estimulou e financiou a emergência de governos totalitários em toda a América Latina, o que contribuiu para uma desarticulação da sociedade civil brasileira (Feres Júnior. 2005). Durante a ditadura militar, quaisquer atividades políticas críticas ao regime foram severamente punidas, através de prisões, torturas e cerceamentos da liberdade de expressão. Os militantes políticos eram qualificados como bandidos subversivos e seus movimentos contra-hegemônicos classificados como terrorismo. Esse contexto limitou radicalmente o potencial transformador da participação política popular.

Importante reconhecermos que, durante a ditadura militar, muitos grupos lutaram pela redemocratização do país. Neste período identificam-se desde grupos clandestinos radicais de orientação marxista de estratégias diversas, até movimentos pela redemocratização que buscavam legitimidade pública. Entretanto, é somente após a abertura política que ocorre um ressurgimento – ou fundação – da sociedade civil brasileira, que assumiu um caráter fortemente anti- autoritário, com ênfase na liberdade individual e associando a

transformação da realidade social à transformação individual (Scherer-Warren, 1993).

A intensificação da vida urbana brasileira e o período de abertura foram acompanhados pelo surgimento dos movimentos sociais urbanos que trouxeram para a cena política brasileira, novas formas e potencialidades de transformação social, caracterizadas pela independência com relação aos grupos políticos institucionalizados e elites políticas em geral (Cardoso, 1999). A possibilidade real de mudança social, pela via de transformações gradativas no cotidiano, produziu formas associativas que buscavam a conscientização política e ações políticas questionadoras e conflitivas para com o Estado. Gohn (1994) reconhece que os movimentos sociais desempenharam um papel fundamental no processo de redemocratização no Brasil. Após a Constituição Federal de 1988 ter explicitado, principalmente no seu artigo 5º, a proteção dos direitos de minorias sociais, estabelecendo a mútua responsabilidade entre cidadão e Estado na efetivação das políticas públicas, notou-se que a tônica da relação entre esses atores sociais se alterou bastante. Paralelamente percebe-se o crescimento do fenômeno das Organizações Não-Governamentais. A revitalização da sociedade civil e a democratização do Estado brasileiro, que ocorrem simultaneamente, produzem cenários compostos por instâncias e atores extremamente heterogêneos e interdependentes.

Doimo (1995) utiliza os termos "redes de movimentos", "campos ético-políticos" e "conexões ativas" para dizer da possibilidade dessa interação entre indivíduos e organizações formar redes fluidas que ultrapassem reivindicações pontuais para campos mais amplos da convivência política, sem perder a ambigüidade que é algo constitutivo das ações coletivas.

O vigor com que o neoliberalismo assolou as práticas políticas brasileiras, ao mesmo tempo em que estreitou a proximidade entre as instituições governamentais e grupos organizados da sociedade civil, muitas vezes culminando em uma relação de parceria entre Estado e Movimentos Sociais, provocou uma série de dificuldades para a mobilização destes atores sociais, fortalecendo o formato de ONG (Organizações Não-Governamentais) como alternativa política mais viável de mobilização e ativismo social. As ONG's se multiplicaram e se diversificaram com mais velocidade a partir da década de 1990 no Brasil, fenômeno marcado pela fundação da ABONG (Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não-Governamentais) em 1991 (Teixeira, 2002).

Com a intensificação da democracia abrem-se espaços de interlocução entre a sociedade civil e o Estado e, conseqüentemente, ambos precisaram passar por reformulações. A sociedade civil se vê compelida a buscar qualificação técnica e cognitiva para existir enquanto ator político. A figura do voluntário cede espaço para novas categorias de profissionais "socialmente engajados". O cotidiano de muitos movimentos sociais passa então a oscilar entre papéis técnico-profissionais e de mobilização social. Muitos militantes passam a compor quadros técnicos e políticos das instituições governamentais ao mesmo tempo em que o financiamento do chamado terceiro setor passa a ser efetuado por editais e orçamentos estatais e não estatais, resultando em relações que muitas

vezes são apontadas como cooptação dos movimentos sociais pelo Estado. O Estado, por sua vez, ao mesmo tempo em que tem que repensar seus arranjos democráticos para viabilizar e visibilizar o diálogo público, transfere responsabilidades para a sociedade civil em consonância com o descaso neoliberal para com os direitos sociais<sup>2</sup>.

## **2) Movimentos LGBT e sua aproximação com o Estado brasileiro**

Ao final da década de 1970 e início de 1980 é significativo o fortalecimento de diversos movimentos organizados de minorias sociais, tais como o Movimento Feminista e o Movimento Negro (Rodrigues, 2006). As feministas, que em muito influenciaram os movimentos homossexuais daquele período, foram as principais responsáveis por críticas contundentes à militância dos movimentos de esquerda, defendendo a importância de valores que até então eram desprezados pelos grupos de inspiração marxista-leninista que privilegiavam exclusivamente a luta de classes e tomavam como "burguesas" quaisquer outras formas de reivindicações (MacRae, 1990).

Neste período, as estratégias militantes destes grupos se inseriam numa agenda de transformações sociais mais amplas, sendo que muitas feministas mantiveram uma orientação marxista. Entretanto, aos poucos estes grupos foram buscando cada vez mais especificidade em suas lutas como forma de fortalecer suas ações. O movimento negro é um excelente exemplo, na medida em que efetuou grande esforço para tensionar os fundamentos das hierarquizações por classe e raça como forma de tornar visível o racismo velado da sociedade brasileira.

Neste contexto, incluindo-se as consequências da epidemia do HIV/AIDS, o movimento LGBT atravessa os anos de 1980 passando de um movimento contestatório para um movimento complexo e burocratizado, seguindo em algum nível uma tendência internacional (Bernstein, 1997; Engel, 2001). Um bom exemplo deste percurso histórico pode ser identificado na pesquisa de Anjos (2002), sobre o grupo Nuances de Porto Alegre/RS, na qual se descreve um contínuo entre atender e representar no cotidiano do grupo, que leva a uma oscilação entre a atuação política e o benevolato junto à comunidade LGBT. Este contínuo pode ser confirmado em diversos grupos LGBT, como indicam nossas pesquisas (Machado & Prado, 2005; Machado, 2007). Nota-se que nesse cenário, muitas vezes, ocorre uma sobreposição de lugares, onde encontramos, por exemplo, em determinados momentos da gestão municipal de Belo Horizonte, o movimento social ocupando a função de atendimento aos casos de violações de direitos e o Estado realizando mobilizações sociais e atos públicos.

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<sup>2</sup> Para uma discussão sobre a relação entre Estado e Sociedade Civil na implementação dos Centros de Referência LGBT, no âmbito do Programa Brasil Sem Homofobia, ver Machado, Fonseca & Nascimento (2007).

Distante do movimento identitário fundado na década de 1970 com o grupo Somos e o Jornal Lâmpião da Esquina, Ramos (2005) aponta que na segunda metade dos anos 1990, presenciamos mudanças importantes nas discussões sobre homossexualidade em quatro esferas distintas: 1) Legislativo; 2) Mercado e novos espaços de sociabilidade; 3) Surgimento de novas entidades de defesa, e finalmente, 4) As Paradas do Orgulho LGBT. Atualmente, autores como Carrara (2008)<sup>3</sup> e Prado, Arruda e Tolentino (2009) indicam a emergência dos grupos universitários pela defesa da diversidade sexual como um importante ator que se firma a partir dos embates institucionais sobre o preconceito às homossexualidades e transexualidades no interior das instituições acadêmicas e que já apontam extrapolar estas fronteiras com articulações nacionais com outros movimentos sociais.

Gradativamente, na primeira metade de 1990, há um reflorescimento do movimento homossexual brasileiro fortalecido por diferentes atores sociais locais, nacionais e internacionais, vinculados a universidades, políticas públicas, partidos políticos, associações científicas ou profissionais. Incluímos, entre outras iniciativas, multiplicação de ações no legislativo, judiciário e executivo; o crescimento do número de bares, boates, revistas, livrarias, editoras, festivais de cinema e grifes associados às homossexualidades; a criação de sites na internet, de entidades de defesa de homossexuais e a convivência de estilos heterogêneos de associação e a incorporação dos temas relacionados à homossexualidade e ao homoerotismo nas pautas de pesquisa universitárias sociais e humanas (Facchini, 2005; Ramos, 2005).

Facchini (2005) demonstra que, ao longo da década de 1990, houve um crescimento considerável no número de grupos militantes. Embora a autora não aceite que na década de 1980 tenha ocorrido simplesmente um declínio do movimento homossexual, concorda que quantitativamente esse declínio foi efetivo, ao passo que na década de 1990, (...) *não somente aumentou o número de grupos/organizações do movimento, como houve uma diversificação de formatos institucionais e propostas de atuação. Por outro lado, notam-se também uma ampliação da rede de relações sociais do movimento e a presença de novos atores* (Facchini, 2005:149).

Neste contexto, surge em janeiro de 1995 a ABGLT – Associação Brasileira de Gays, Lésbicas, Bissexuais e Transgêneros, que desempenha um papel fundamental para a militância LGBT, congregando entidades de todo o Brasil, promovendo ações e redes de intercâmbio. A ABGLT foi criada por 31 grupos fundadores, em Curitiba, tendo comparecido 120 participantes (Silva, 2006). A ABGLT conta hoje com mais de 220 organizações filiadas, em sua maioria ONG's, formando a maior rede LGBT da América Latina.

Como podemos ler em seu site<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup> Ver entrevista em  
<http://www.clam.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?inford=4274&sid=43>

<sup>4</sup> [www.abglt.org.br](http://www.abglt.org.br), acessado em junho de 2009.

*A missão da ABGLT é promover a cidadania e defender os direitos de gays, lésbicas, bissexuais, travestis e transexuais, contribuindo para a construção de uma democracia sem quaisquer formas de discriminação, afirmando a livre orientação sexual e identidades de gênero.*

Esta organização tem feito a ponte entre a diversidade dos grupos espalhados por todo o Brasil e as políticas sociais mais amplas, promovendo intercâmbio entre os diversos grupos, entre os grupos e militantes brasileiros com experiências organizativas de outros países e entre os grupos e as políticas públicas governamentais para o segmento LGBT. Além disto, a ABGLT tem sido responsável por abrir discussões sobre direitos LGBT em âmbito nacional, influenciando na adoção de políticas públicas e fazendo pressão junto a representantes dos poderes legislativo, executivo e judiciário. O projeto Aliadas – Compromisso com o respeito e a igualdade – é uma iniciativa da ABGLT que tem como objetivo fazer pressão junto aos parlamentares para aprovação de leis que favoreçam a cidadania LGBT, através, sobretudo, da conhecida prática do "advocacy". Em 2007 formou-se a Frente Parlamentar pela Cidadania LGBT, composta por mais de 200 parlamentares, com a qual a ABGLT negocia diretamente.

Atualmente a ABGLT tem sido um dos principais atores de articulação e monitoração do Programa Brasil Sem Homofobia, que é um programa da Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República, e que surge como uma carta de intenções que vêm gradativamente se consolidando como política pública através do financiamento de Centros de Referência e Combate a Homofobia e financiamentos de ações educativas e pesquisas e que, apesar de suas insuficiências, tem alcançado importante impacto no país. O projeto SOMOS, também de âmbito nacional, tem sido executado localmente pelos associados da ABGLT, que por sua vez, centraliza e coordena os resultados nacionais deste projeto, que pretende realizar a capacitação de grupos LGBT nas áreas de prevenção e assistência em HIV/AIDS e a defesa e promoção dos direitos humanos.

Importante ressaltarmos que este campo de politização, que emerge da sociedade civil organizada, tem revelado a crescente heterogeneidade de atores e posicionamentos, muitas vezes materializados em divergências e ambigüidades. Um exemplo de âmbito nacional se encontra no surgimento da Liga Brasileira de Lésbicas, que foi formada em oposição ao grupo que constitui a ABGLT, por acreditar que esta instituição ainda reproduz as hierarquias patriarcais da sociedade e, dentro dela, as mulheres estariam condicionadas a lugares de subordinação. A formação de grupos de oposição sinaliza para a complexidade que estas temáticas assumem até mesmo no interior das instituições de defesa dos direitos LGBT, indicando a heterogeneidade deste campo.

Outro exemplo no âmbito local são as tensões vividas nas divergências das ações políticas mais específicas (demandas por redistribuição socioeconômica - geração de emprego e renda para travestis, demandas por reconhecimento sócio-cultural - ações afirmativas para Gays, entre outras). Um discurso acrí-

pretensamente defendendo uma igualdade frente a essa diversidade, anula as especificidades de cada grupo social produzindo homogeneização. Se, por um lado é um desafio pensar em uma política pública de identidade LGBT diante da pluralidade das lutas sociais desse próprio movimento; por outro lado, a disputa que por vezes acontece dentro dos próprios movimentos sociais LGBT, sobre qual segmento é o mais violado nos seus direitos, pode levar alguns grupos a acionar estratégias de defesa e ataque distantes das mesas de negociação já estabelecidas e na contramão de valores já pactuados na esfera pública. Tais antagonismos apontam o dilema de como efetivar políticas públicas de enfrentamento às várias injustiças socioeconômicas e culturais sem ignorar as especificidades de cada grupo social e nem fragmentar as lutas (Fraser, 1997).

Se os grupos que se formaram pela organização da sociedade civil apresentam profundas heterogeneidades, é importante mapearmos um pouco da heterogeneidade que se forma entre os agentes que interpelam e são interpelados pelas discussões sobre a sexualidade, em espaços mais formalizados de atuação. Para ilustrarmos esta heterogeneidade, nos deteremos em alguns exemplos que identificamos em nossas pesquisas na cidade de Belo Horizonte no Estado de Minas Gerais (Machado, 2007).

A lógica do Governo Federal de inclusão da política LGBT no âmbito da política nacional de direitos humanos, tem sido reproduzida em alguns Estados, como é o caso de Minas Gerais. Entretanto, questionamos até que ponto essa estratégia política representaria o reconhecimento dos direitos LGBT como direitos humanos ou apontaria mais uma vez para uma lógica de inclusão perversa - ou exclusão - de um grupo ainda bastante invisibilizado entre os órgãos públicos de maior legitimidade política e conseqüente prioridade orçamentária. Essa lógica permite uma análise crítica da atual relação entre Estado e movimento social LGBT, como possivelmente representando muito mais cooptação do que abrindo possibilidades de diálogo sob novas pressões sociais e políticas.

Neste campo de disputas, fica claro que a luta pelos direitos humanos está relacionada à desigual distribuição do poder pelas classes dominantes de cada época. À medida que uma classe social reivindica um determinado direito, por meio de disputas políticas que supostamente poderiam romper com hierarquias, outros valores vão sendo agregados aos hegemônicos. Entretanto, permanecem muitas desigualdades, diferenças e jogos de poder entre a reivindicação e a conquista de mudanças que limitam as possibilidades de manifestar posicionamentos políticos e demandas.

Neste sentido, as pressões sociais vindas de diferentes segmentos sociais conseguiram uma construção irregular, em termos de conquistas: ora um grupo alcançando direitos ou privilégios, ora outro, e, assim, são elaboradas as normas da conduta humana. Contudo, são regras relativamente compartilhadas, no sentido de que dificilmente as negociações são inteiramente acatadas e, como conseqüência, alguns grupos têm menos recursos nessa "mesa de negociações", de forma que as elites tendem a receber mais benefícios.

Tal discussão contribui para reflexão de pelo menos dois grandes dilemas: 1º) A tensão entre direitos humanos (valores, culturas e lutas) <sup>5</sup> e direitos de cidadania (garantidos nas leis, institucionalizados), desconhecendo as suas diferenças e reduzindo o campo de reivindicações, tem desmobilizado as ações coletivas e desresponsabilizado o Estado da garantia e expansão de novos direitos. 2º) A hierarquia presente na institucionalização dos direitos humanos voltados para cada grupo social, estabelecendo uma hierarquização de prioridades e legitimidades de alguns direitos em relação a outros e influenciando na gestão orçamentária e administrativa das políticas públicas.

Tais tensionamentos apontam relações estreitas com a lógica da administração pública de Belo Horizonte e a política municipal de direitos humanos, que se materializa, por um lado, numa tentativa de gestão local baseada na transversalidade com as demais políticas e, por outro lado, revela limites políticos e institucionais nessa perspectiva de atuação. Por exemplo, a Coordenadoria Municipal de Direitos Humanos-CMDH, no período de 1993 a 2000, por estar vinculada diretamente à Secretaria de Governo, possuía legitimidade política e estrutura administrativa para as ações intersetoriais embasadas na universalidade dos direitos humanos. Atualmente, vinculada à Secretaria Municipal Adjunta de Direitos da Cidadania-SMADC, que possui frágil posição estrutural e institucionalização fragmentada do conjunto de suas políticas, há maior resistência e falta de compreensão do caráter transversal dessa política. Frente a esse contexto cabem reflexões sobre: quais seriam as reais possibilidades dos direitos humanos servirem de instrumento para dialogar com as diferenças? E, ainda, de como propiciar uma política de direitos humanos que seja interlocutora dos direitos LGBT, trabalhados pelas demais políticas e pelos diferentes grupos LGBT, que abarque a complexidade humana?

Da forma que têm sido institucionalizados os discursos e práticas numa concepção universal dos direitos humanos, é possível constatar que essa universalidade se encontra muito menos nas agendas políticas, do que como um horizonte a ser percorrido, uma utopia ativa por uma sociedade pluralista. Já que por esse viés, compreendemos os direitos humanos como um campo de disputas políticas, onde o que é possível de ser universalizado são as particularidades. Por isso, talvez o caminho deveria ser inverso: de que maneira as direitos LGBT e sexuais podem contribuir para a garantia dos direitos humanos.

Ao modo como interpretamos o desenvolvimento do movimento LGBT no Brasil, a ABGLT representa um momento privilegiado na aproximação da sociedade civil com o Estado nas discussões sobre sexualidade. Embora esta aproximação ainda não tenha conseguido garantir a efetividade das transformações necessárias aos princípios mínimos da cidadania LGBT no Brasil, importantes conquistas merecem destaque. O impacto político da

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<sup>5</sup> Direitos humanos como construções sociais e históricas. Um processo marcado pela correlação de forças frente aos direitos já garantidos nas leis e as novas demandas/direitos que possam surgir para a garantia da dignidade humana nos novos contextos.

influência da sociedade civil nestas discussões se revela no fato de que, atualmente, membros da ABGLT participam de vários grupos de trabalho, criados em diferentes ministérios do Governo Federal com o intuito de articular e comprometer as ações do Estado com a comunidade LGBT.

Em Belo Horizonte, atualmente a ABGLT tem como grupos associados a ALEM (Associação Lésbica de Minas), o grupo CELLOS (Centro de Luta pela Livre Orientação Sexual), a ASSTRAV (Associação dos Travestis, Transexuais e Transgêneros de Minas Gerais) e Libertos Comunicação<sup>6</sup>.

### **3) A Heterogeneidade dos Atores em busca de Articulação: o caso de Belo Horizonte**

Para os propósitos deste artigo, é importante circunscrevermos, além dos movimentos sociais organizados, que já discutimos em publicações anteriores (Machado, 2007; Machado & Prado, 2005; Machado, Nascimento & Fonseca, 2007), outros atores que têm se mostrado relevantes para as transformações sociais em prol da livre orientação sexual e da cidadania de LGBT, com o objetivo de mapearmos a heterogeneidade deste campo de disputas políticas. A diversidade dos atores envolvidos neste campo reforça a idéia, central para o argumento deste artigo, de que as fronteiras entre a sociedade civil e o Estado se tornaram menos determinantes para a compreensão dos processos pela democratização dos direitos sociais. Mais importante do que identificar de que lado desta fronteira um determinado ator se localiza, é analisar como estes atores se articulam e como estas fronteiras na contemporaneidade são fluídas e flexíveis, o que traz consequências importantes para o campo da organização do espaço público nacional.

Não há mais uma relação unidirecional entre as demandas do movimento social e suas respostas pelas políticas públicas, na constituição da política de cidadania e identidade LGBT. Nem sempre quem reivindica e responde estão respectivamente nesses lugares políticos de forma fixa. Por vezes, nota-se a ausência de demandas nos movimentos sociais ou a presença de fronteiras na construção de respostas em que as funções dos diferentes atores sociais não estão tão definidas. Hoje ocorre um fenômeno de capilaridade dessas instâncias, verificado no movimento de profissionalização da militância e de um caráter de ativismo entre determinados agentes públicos, nos interpelando a repensar concepções de políticas públicas que não tem conseguido abarcar essa nova e complexa rede de articulação dos atores sociais em cena<sup>7</sup>. Entretanto, isto requer que o comportamento político seja interpretado como um fenômeno que se dá em um diversificado campo de interações, se apresentando num contínuo

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<sup>6</sup> Para uma análise do histórico e atuação dos grupos que compõe e compuseram o cenário da militância LGBT de Belo Horizonte, ver Machado & Prado (2005) e Machado (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Ver discussões sobre concepções de políticas públicas a partir de Cabral, 1999; Carneiro, 2004; Costa, 2004; Cunha e Cunha, 2002; Gershon, 2005; Nogueira, 2006 e Rocha, 2001.



que abrange comportamentos individuais e coletivos, e espaços privados e públicos (Sandoval, 1997).

### **3.1) Formas e Espaços de Politização**

Atualmente, diversos vínculos institucionais têm sido desenvolvidos entre os movimentos homossexuais e variados atores da sociedade, entre os quais apontaremos alguns que são fundamentais para a atuação dos grupos LGBT de Belo Horizonte, tais como órgãos governamentais Municipais, Estaduais e Federais; Empresas; Universidades; ONGs, Movimentos Sociais e muitos outros.

Compreender como se dinamizam os atores políticos interagindo em espaços tão diversos e a partir da identificação das fronteiras políticas que eles estabelecem, com seus aliados e adversários, requer um enquadramento suficientemente amplo desta arena de atuação.

Sandoval (1997) argumenta que o estudo do comportamento político é por natureza transdisciplinar e que para melhor compreendê-lo devemos lançar mão de abordagens construtivistas e interacionistas. Nesse sentido, o comportamento político deve ser pensado como um processo dinâmico que se desenvolve dentro de cenários sociais e institucionais:

*Os atores políticos são construtivistas na medida em que eles conscientemente vão se posicionando em arenas onde eles irão agir. Já que não há teoria que explique a priori os determinantes de processos de comportamento político, teremos que assumir abordagens que privilegiam o inter-relacionamento das esferas de ação e do voluntarismo dos atores (Sandoval, 1997).*

As abordagens construtivistas são importantes por reconhecerem que as identidades dos atores políticos se formam através de investimentos contínuos que podem se cristalizar tanto em redes informais e temporárias, quanto em formas organizativas e sistemas de regras próximas de formas institucionalizadas do agir social (Melucci, 1996), e que serão reguladas interna e externamente, dada a importância do estabelecimento da relação NÓS versus ELES (Prado, 2001). Nas palavras de Melucci (2001: 69), *o processo de construção, manutenção, adaptação de uma identidade coletiva tem sempre dois ângulos: de um lado, a complexidade interna de um ator, a pluralidade de orientações que o caracteriza; de outro, a sua relação com o ambiente (outros atores, oportunidades/vínculos).*

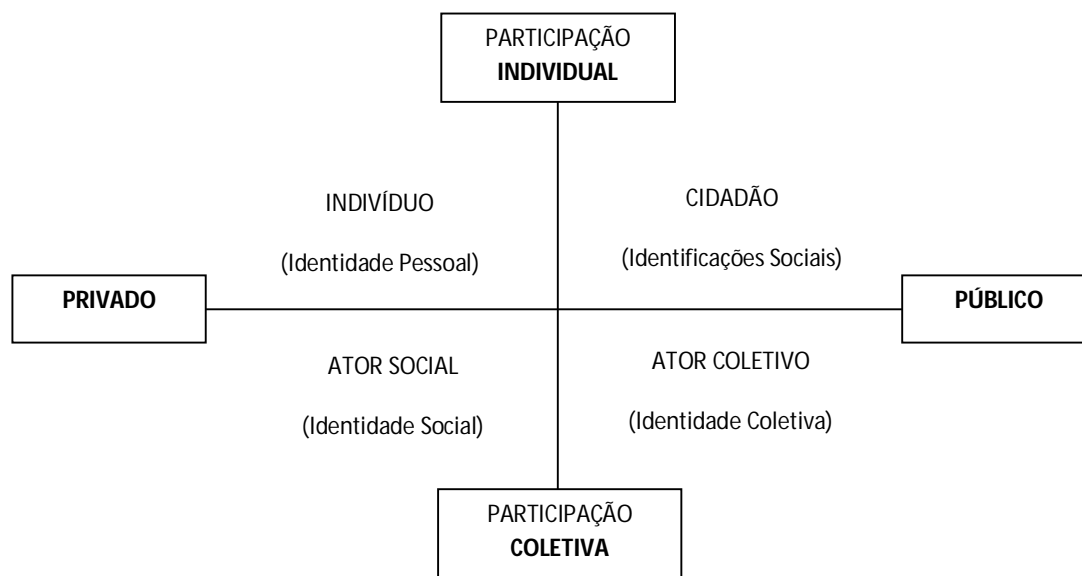
O movimento LGBT apresenta formas de comportamento político que cobrem um amplo espaço de sociabilidade, o que nos leva a uma reflexão sobre quais seriam os espaços e as formas que o comportamento político desse movimento pode assumir.

Sandoval (1997) desenvolve um quadro conceitual, apresentado a seguir, no qual é possível localizar o comportamento político a partir de três eixos contínuos:

1. Atitudes individuais e coletivas;
2. Espaços privados e públicos;
3. Espaços formalizados e não-formalizados de participação.

Estes três eixos descrevem uma interdependente rede de fenômenos que determinam, em grande parte, a mudança social. Os quadros abaixo podem ser compreendidos a partir da idéia de uma relação circular entre indivíduo e sociedade, sinalizando para a importância dos modelos construtivistas na compreensão dos fenômenos políticos. Além disso, busca-se superar os hiatos produzidos pelas teorias que reduziram o fenômeno do comportamento político a apenas um destes quadrantes.

## LÓCUS DO COMPORTAMENTO POLÍTICO<sup>8</sup>



## FORMAS DE PARTICIPAÇÃO POLÍTICA



Ao sobrepor estes dois quadros, teremos um gráfico tridimensional que nos ajuda a organizar o comportamento político em função dos espaços e das formas que assume nas sociedades contemporâneas. Isto colabora para uma melhor

<sup>8</sup> Quadros retirados de Sandoval (1997).

compreensão da importância de ações políticas desenvolvidas em âmbitos privados ou públicos, bem como suas influências mútuas, o que seria muito importante para uma melhor caracterização do ativismo LGBT.

Como aponta Sandoval (1997), estes quadrantes são interdependentes e, muitas vezes, ações desenvolvidas no âmbito privado extrapolam os espaços virtuais e chegam até a esfera pública. Do mesmo modo, ações mobilizatórias que interpelam as políticas institucionais em âmbitos públicos reverberam em espaços privados, influenciando novos comportamentos e ações tanto individuais como coletivas, em espaços institucionais ou não-institucionais.

Atores que se posicionam favoravelmente à luta contra a homofobia se localizam em lugares que dificilmente identificaríamos se limitarmos nosso olhar às formas de resistência produzidas em apenas um dos espaços da política<sup>9</sup> (Sandoval, 1997). Nesse sentido, além das conquistas no campo jurídico<sup>10</sup>, e de veículos da imprensa<sup>11</sup>, comprometidos com a democratização social em torno da livre orientação sexual, percebemos a atuação de parlamentares, de órgãos do poder público e das universidades, que em muito contribuem, não sem conflitos e tensões, para as lutas e conquistas do movimento LGBT em Belo Horizonte.

Embora a relação entre esses atores seja de interdependência, permeada por interesses políticos, é inegável seu potencial transformador. O interesse do Estado pela cidadania LGBT se deu por ocasião da epidemia de AIDS no começo dos anos de 1980 e, embora tenha deixado marcas, começa a indicar mudanças positivas na interferência e organização de ações públicas frente ao combate ao preconceito homofóbico.

### **3.2. Cultura Política entre a Legalidade e a Justiça: fronteiras opacas**

Em Belo Horizonte, alguns parlamentares foram cruciais para a atuação dos movimentos LGBT, dos quais se destacam três: Leonardo Mattos (Partido Verde), que se elegeu vereador em 1996, deputado Federal em 2002 e hoje está afastado do legislativo; o ex-vereador e atual deputado estadual João Batista de Oliveira (Partido Popular Socialista) e a ex-vereadora Neila Batista (Partido dos

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<sup>9</sup> Em nossas pesquisas, encontramos muitas divergências sobre estilos de militância, principalmente com relação ao uso da internet (a chamada militância virtual) e à construção de alianças com atores externos ao movimento.

<sup>10</sup> Em Belo Horizonte destacamos no âmbito jurídico, o trabalho da Advogada Maria Emília Mitre Haddad, e a sentença do Juiz de Direito Marco Henrique Caldeira Brant, que concedeu o direito de adoção a um casal de homossexuais. Discutindo as estratégias jornalísticas utilizadas para noticiar este caso, Reis (2004) demonstra, a partir da distinção weberiana de direito racional e direito empírico, que estes avanços no campo jurídico geralmente se baseiam em *“princípios gerais da própria constituição ou em interpretações mais abrangentes sobre uma determinada lei”* (p.64).

<sup>11</sup> Merece nota a sessão GLS do Jornal O Tempo, que apesar de reconhecermos a concentração de tal temática nesse espaço, há anos vem divulgando notícias de interesse da comunidade GLBT, propiciando, de certa forma, espaço para as questões políticas.

Trabalhadores), que se elegeu em 2000 e cumpriu seu último mandato durante os anos de 2004 a 2008. Estes parlamentares fizeram parte do ativismo dos movimentos, tanto defendendo suas demandas, apresentando leis e apoiando a implementação de políticas públicas, quanto participando de ações e destinando recursos materiais e simbólicos para os grupos.

Leonardo Mattos (Partido Verde) defende as questões LGBT desde o seu primeiro mandato como vereador na Câmara Municipal de Belo Horizonte, e é o pioneiro na defesa deste segmento no setor legislativo em Belo Horizonte.

Leonardo Mattos, em entrevista para o Jornal Rainbow (Mattos, 2001), acrescenta que seu envolvimento com esta temática se deu pelo envolvimento com a comunidade "GLS" - gay, lésbicas e simpatizantes - da cidade e a partir das denúncias que lhe eram apresentadas quando era presidente da comissão dos direitos humanos da Câmara Municipal de Belo Horizonte. Além disso, ele aponta também, um compromisso de seu partido com esta causa: *"O meu partido, o Partido Verde, é um partido que, além da questão ambiental, trabalha muito com os direitos humanos, e a partir dessa fusão do programa do nosso partido com a aproximação com esse movimento, nós nos sentimos bem ancorados para apresentarmos esse projeto de lei"* (Mattos, 2001:4). Como Deputado Federal, Leonardo Mattos continuou defendendo as demandas LGBT, fundando a Frente Parlamentar pela Livre Orientação Sexual no Congresso Nacional.

Neste período, a ABGLT, representada por seu presidente Carlos Nascimento, estava articulando com ONGs de todo o Brasil projetos de leis anti-discriminação municipais e estaduais. Em Belo Horizonte, a articulação da lei municipal (Lei 8.176/01) se deu entre o grupo GURI e o Vereador Leonardo Mattos<sup>12</sup>, com o suporte da ABGLT. A lei estadual (Lei 14.170/02), por sua vez, foi articulada entre a ALEM e o Deputado Estadual João Batista de Oliveira.

João Batista de Oliveira (Partido Popular Socialista) apoiou as demandas LGBT em grande parte de sua trajetória política. Como vereador debateu estas temáticas na Câmara dos Vereadores e, posteriormente, como deputado estadual, levou estas discussões para a Assembléia Legislativa, sendo o responsável por apresentar o projeto da Lei 14.170, que determina a imposição de sanções à pessoa jurídica por ato discriminatório praticado contra pessoa em virtude de sua orientação sexual.

João Batista sempre legislou no campo dos Direitos Humanos e, como subsecretário de Estado de Direitos Humanos, ajudou a construir o Escritório de Direitos Humanos (EDH), que fez de Minas Gerais o primeiro estado brasileiro a implementar um mecanismo estatal que oferece à população subsídios jurídicos gratuitos de maior acessibilidade em caso de violações de direitos humanos. O EDH é uma parceria entre a Secretaria de Estado de

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<sup>12</sup> Consta nas Atas do grupo GURI que no dia 28/04/2000 membros do grupo participariam de uma reunião na Câmara dos Vereadores com a presença de Cláudio Nascimento. Para um histórico detalhado do grupo GURI, ver Machado (2007).

Desenvolvimento Social e Esportes e a Defensoria Pública do Estado de Minas Gerais.

Neila Batista (Partido dos Trabalhadores) é assistente social e sua atuação parlamentar sempre foi marcada com a atuação junto a minorias sociais. Seu envolvimento com as demandas LGBT se iniciou em sua candidatura a vereadora, em 2000, quando foi procurada por algumas colegas lésbicas que a perguntaram sobre a possibilidade de construir uma plataforma política que levasse em consideração a exclusão deste segmento.

Neila Batista foi uma das responsáveis por fortalecer os debates sobre a livre orientação sexual na Câmara Municipal realizando, junto com outros vereadores, uma série de debates, seminários e encontros. Por solicitação dos grupos organizados, apresentou projetos de Lei, tais como o que institui o Dia Municipal do Orgulho Gay (28 de junho), lei nº 8.283/01 e o título de Utilidade Pública da ALEM. Atuações como esta, além de integrarem atores e setores sociais diversos, ampliando o debate democrático, funcionam como uma ponte entre a Sociedade Civil e o Estado, capaz de dar voz e legitimidade política aos militantes do segmento LGBT.

O trabalho destes parlamentares tem contribuído para firmar na cidade, e no Estado, uma tendência que vêm se fortalecendo no Brasil e no Mundo. Essa tendência transnacional, efeito da expansão da modernidade, contribui para criar uma *cultura política* que disponibiliza elementos para legitimar o trabalho destes representantes políticos e de organizações da Sociedade Civil, ao mesmo tempo em que se realimenta das ações destes mesmos atores. Isto se deve ao fato de que a modernidade não pressupõe a democratização das relações, mas apenas cria condições para que as hierarquias sociais possam ser por vezes desnaturalizadas.

Esta nova cultura política reverbera na mídia e na cultura como um todo, permitindo e até incentivando a visibilidade de temas relativos à diversidade sexual, em determinados contextos, contribuindo para que setores da política estatal sejam obrigados a seguir determinadas tendências, por interesses políticos ou por pressão social de minorias organizadas localmente e transnacionalmente, bem como por influência de instituições sociais de outros países que, pela temática transversalizadora dos direitos humanos, muitas vezes reverberam nas políticas estatais, via acordos e instituições transnacionais. Embora a visibilidade destas temáticas esteja circunscrita a contextos específicos, a legitimidade política que conquistaram em determinados contextos facilita seu deslocamento para novos espaços políticos.

Nesse sentido, os atores que produzem politização em torno de demandas LGBT adquirem importância por representarem pólos de democratização, sendo responsáveis pela quebra de tabus na política local. Para isto, se faz necessária a interação entre atores do Estado e da Sociedade Civil, bem como a cooperação com atores representantes de outras demandas, além de criatividade para promover formas eficientes de colocar estes debates no campo da política.

Em Belo Horizonte, além da coragem para enfrentar a resistência ao preconceito, identificamos espaços de interlocução interessantes no âmbito legislativo, executivo e judiciário, que foram abertos por iniciativa dos atores locais (Machado, 2007). Podemos notar a importância da articulação entre os parlamentares e os movimentos sociais, no enfrentamento político, quando Neila Batista relata como se deu o processo de articulação de uma de suas leis:

*“eu tive um problemão com os colegas vereadores aqui, pra aprovar a lei utilidade pública da ALEM (...) criamos um caso danado, as meninas vieram pra cá, a gente arranjou uma confusão, chamamos jornal, ficamos falando mal de todo mundo. Pegou meio mal pra própria Câmara, ficar criando dificuldade pra uma coisa que não tem o menor sentido e que é carência da Câmara. (...) essa coisa de misturar o discurso religioso, aspecto moral com coisa que são absolutamente distintas (Neila Batista, citada por Machado, 2007)”.*

Observamos que foram criados espaços eficientes de discussão e, principalmente, a cultura política necessária para a interação de forças políticas do Estado e da Sociedade Civil. Isto não acontece isoladamente, alguns partidos começaram a incorporar a diversidade sexual como um tema importante de atuação, apesar das resistências encontradas tanto em partidos de direita, quanto de esquerda.

Leonardo Mattos também identifica o envolvimento com o partido, como um dos motivos que o levaram até essa temática (Mattos, 2001). Neila Batista aponta acontecimentos como o mandato da Marta Suplicy na prefeitura de São Paulo e o crescimento e politização das Paradas LGBT, como pontos importantes para que essas temáticas ganhem força. Segundo Neila Batista, o principal obstáculo para que o trabalho pela cidadania LGBT avance é a insistência de alguns parlamentares e setores sociais em tratar a livre orientação sexual como uma questão moral, misturando valores religiosos a discussões por direitos sexuais.

Ainda hoje, os que defendem publicamente a livre orientação sexual constituem uma minoria dentro das casas legislativas. Entretanto, essa minoria *“não é uma minoria que se cala, que deixa a coisa quieta não, é uma minoria mais barulhenta, então nesse sentido é mais ativa e tal, e não permite... Quando a gente tem algum acontecimento, notícia, a gente sempre tem a atitude de aprovar moção de repúdio, ou de ir atrás, pedir esclarecimentos”* (Neila Batista, citada por Machado, 2007).

Neila Batista reconhece que esta discussão avançou muito, principalmente, nos últimos seis anos. Os espaços ocupados pelos grupos LGBT na vida pública da cidade aumentaram em quantidade e legitimidade e, embora as políticas públicas para este segmento ainda estejam atreladas a área da saúde, a visibilidade de suas demandas aumentou bastante frente ao Estado. Neila Batista ilustra bem isso:

*“Você tem hoje uma situação que, bem ou mal, não é um assunto mais invisível na sociedade, não uns negócios que as pessoas fingem que não*

*tem, claro que existem muitos lugares, muitas pessoas continuam achando que ele não está, preferem esconder, deixar de lado e tal, mas no conjunto já não é mais isso. (...) Então eu acho que na medida em que isso acontece, fica muito nítido o conflito, quem está de um lado e quem está do outro, e aí é possível criar uma mediação, e nesse sentido eu acho que agente acaba, quem é, não gosto muito desse termo não mas vou usar entre aspas, "do bem", ou seja, quem acha que, com todas as suas dificuldades, é um assunto que nos precisamos tratar, precisamos ter clareza, precisamos ter abertura, precisamos discutir, **acaba convencendo o outro, nem que seja pela vergonha de ser uma pessoa atrasada**<sup>13</sup>, **a abrir o espaço pra discussão.** (Neila Batista, citada por Machado, 2007)."*

Ao analisarmos o caso destes três parlamentares, podemos apontar posicionamentos políticos tanto de defesa da causa LGBT, quanto de apoio e parceria com os movimentos sociais. Mesmo compreendendo que as relações entre as instituições governamentais e estes parlamentares, e destes com os movimentos sociais não se fazem sem conflitos, demandando tradução dos saberes e práticas políticas, identificamos comportamentos políticos comprometidos com o que estamos chamando de formalização da igualdade, pelo menos no que tange às sexualidades.

Podemos então identificar movimentos políticos democratizadores no interior do Estado, porém, quando tomamos o caso dos parlamentares, estes movimentos políticos podem estar restritos a posicionamentos de indivíduos e propostas políticas particulares, mesmo que influenciadas por uma cultura política relativamente favorável. Neste sentido, nossa análise deve ir além, buscando em que medida as instituições governamentais, ou mesmo instituições formalizadas e financiadas pelo Estado, estão se posicionando nestes processos políticos.

Dentre as várias instituições em que identificamos em nossas pesquisas, destacamos aquelas que desempenharam papéis mais imediatos, com relação à proximidade dos movimentos sociais organizados, e aquelas que desenvolvem ações específicas neste campo e alcançaram maior impacto político.

### **3.2.1) Coordenadoria Municipal de Direitos Humanos**

Constituída em julho de 1993, a Coordenadoria de Direitos Humanos (CMDH) é pioneira no âmbito nacional, por se tratar do primeiro órgão público de promoção dos direitos humanos criado no Brasil, o que representou um avanço nas políticas públicas municipais. Sua criação reflete um longo processo de

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<sup>13</sup> Estas formas indiretas de apoio, influenciadas pelo que aqui chamamos de cultura política, refletem o cientificismo e a racionalidade da esfera pública contemporânea, que obriga um refinamento dos discursos conservadores. Em outras palavras *"as pessoas estão cientes de que muitos de seus valores, interesses e preferências não podem ser tornados públicos, estendidos a uma ampla audiência"* (Reis, 2004).



articulação de ativistas do campo dos direitos humanos, que conquistaram espaço durante a primeira administração do Partido dos Trabalhadores na prefeitura de Belo Horizonte.

Importante destacarmos que a gestão de Patrus Ananias (Partido dos Trabalhadores) foi marcada pelo compromisso com os movimentos sociais que historicamente compuseram as bases de seu partido, possibilitando o contexto necessário para a institucionalização deste órgão. Além disso, sua criação reflete o espaço aberto pela influência dos movimentos sociais na Constituição Brasileira de 1988, principalmente após a abertura política do país. Atualmente, a Coordenadoria de Direitos Humanos faz parte da Secretaria Municipal Adjunta dos Direitos de Cidadania, que por sua vez, compõe a Secretaria Municipal de Políticas Sociais.

A CMDH trabalha com a concepção de indivisibilidade dos direitos humanos. Essa concepção surge afirmando a importância da interdependência entre os direitos civis, políticos, econômicos, sociais e culturais, que compõem o conjunto dos direitos humanos. Dessa forma, a instituição busca superar perspectivas neoliberais, onde os direitos são entendidos de forma estanque, fragmentada, a partir da ênfase nos direitos civis e políticos e, quando aparece, os direitos sociais, estes são focados numa prática clientelista. Em nome de um ideal de inclusão progressiva, o que se percebe é a exclusão e a segregação. É, então, argumentado que os direitos civis e políticos somente serão garantidos se os direitos econômicos, sociais e culturais forem exercidos e vice-versa (Magalhães, 2000; Trindade, 1991). A CMDH reconhece e desenvolve políticas específicas para a efetivação de determinados direitos, porém ressalta que estes devem ser percebidos como indivisíveis em relação ao conjunto dos direitos humanos. O que se torna inviável na ausência de mecanismos de proteção as violações de direitos e de exercício de cidadania, acompanhados de uma reconstrução das capacidades sociais do Estado e da participação da sociedade civil organizada na gestão pública.

No interior da efervescência desta temática no campo dos direitos no Brasil, a CMDH desenvolveu uma relação próxima com os movimentos LGBT e suas demandas (Carmona, 2006). O órgão tem uma relação histórica de parceria com os movimentos sociais ligados ao segmento GLBT<sup>14</sup>. Nessa nova gestão (2005-2008), a coordenadoria continua desenvolvendo ações nos eixos de atendimento, formação e ações afirmativas ao público LGBT. Entretanto, busca fortalecer essas ações através de atividades de capacitação dos agentes públicos para lidar com esses segmentos e da mobilização de representantes de órgãos governamentais, não governamentais, movimentos sociais e universidade para a promoção e divulgação de pesquisas e criação de uma comissão de implementação das leis municipais de proteção e promoção dos direitos

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<sup>14</sup> A CMDH, em parceria com o NPP e os movimentos GLBT da cidade, publicou a pesquisa Participação, Política e Homossexualidade: VIII Parada do Orgulho GLBT de Belo (PRADO, M., RODRIGUES, C. & MACHADO, V., 2006)

humanos da comunidade homossexual em toda sua diversidade. (Carmona, 2006).

Carmona (2006) alerta para o fato de que a CMDH vem adquirindo cada vez mais legitimidade em termos da realização de ações políticas intersetoriais, entretanto, a cada dia vem perdendo seu aporte orçamentário, o que talvez reflita o desinteresse do Estado em investir nos trabalhos em direitos humanos através de órgãos governamentais. Tal discussão aponta também o lugar de invisibilidade política com que se permitiu a entrada formal da política LGBT nas políticas públicas, conforme já foi ressaltado acima.

### **3.2.2) Centros de Referência**

#### *a) Centro de Referência da Diversidade Sexual (CRDS)*

As Leis 8.176/01 e 14.170/02 pressupõem a criação de órgãos que garantam que os princípios de proteção aos direitos LGBT sejam cumpridos. Nesse âmbito, surge a possibilidade de se criarem órgãos governamentais que defendam os direitos LGBT. Em Minas Gerais o modelo de gestão da política tem se definido pelo controle social e coordenação direta dos movimentos sociais.

Paralelamente, o Programa Federal *Brasil Sem Homofobia* – Programa de Combate à Violência e à Discriminação contra GLBT e de Promoção da Cidadania Homossexual da Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República – garante a criação de instituições financiadas pelo governo com o objetivo de implementar suas propostas. Neste contexto, foram criados centros de referência em todo Brasil.

O primeiro Centro de Referência do Estado de Minas Gerais foi o Centro de Referência da Diversidade Sexual, cujo espaço foi conquistado em 2002 junto à SMADC, da Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte, por uma solicitação de Danilo Ramos (Clube Rainbow de Serviços), mas que acabou sendo ocupada pela ASSTRAV (Associação de Transexuais e Travestis de Minas Gerais). A ASSTRAV, que havia acabado de passar pela troca de presidentas e um desvio de verbas que provocara uma crise institucional, estava sem sede. Como o espaço reservado para o Centro de Referência Municipal estava ocioso, Walkiria La Roche levou os móveis da ASSTRAV para este espaço, possibilitando a efetivação do órgão e de suas atividades. Posteriormente, ela convidou o grupo CELLOS para fazer parte de uma coordenação participativa no Centro de Referência da Diversidade Sexual (CRDS).

O CRDS serviu para diversos fins, tais como aproximar os movimentos LGBT de Belo Horizonte dos espaços institucionais de atuação política, abrigar e dar estrutura a estes grupos e, acima de tudo, prestar atendimento psicossocial, jurídico e acolhimento às vítimas da violência homofóbica, unindo experiências e metodologias de atendimento dos movimentos sociais e da CMDH.

Em 2007, em virtude de um projeto desenvolvido pela equipe da CMDH para ser integrado às ações do Governo Federal, o CRDS se transformou no CRGLBT

– Centro de Referência pelos Direitos Humanos e Cidadania de GLBT vinculado à CMDH. Ao contrário do CRDS, que funcionava com trabalho voluntário, o CRGLBT recebe verbas federais, no âmbito do Programa Brasil Sem Homofobia, o que possibilitou a ampliação da equipe técnica, por meio da contratação de profissionais e estagiários das áreas do direito, serviço social e psicologia. Carlos Magno (CELLOS) foi o coordenador do CRGLBT no período de 2007 a 2008. Atualmente, permanece na estrutura política da SMADC, se constituindo como um espaço utilizado como sede de atividades cotidianas do movimento LGBT, mantendo nesse novo contexto uma porosidade nas definições das funções do poder público e do movimento social.

*b) Centro de Referência de Gays, Lésbicas, Bissexuais, Travestis, Transexuais e Transgêneros (CRGLBTTT)*

A criação do centro de referência estadual foi prevista pela Lei 14.170, e sua implementação provocou conflitos entre militantes da comunidade LGBT de Belo Horizonte. Inicialmente, o projeto havia sido apresentado por Danilo Ramos e a aprovação já havia sido decretada pelo governador Itamar Franco em 2002. Os demais grupos da cidade, se sentindo excluídos do processo, embargaram este projeto e o reapresentaram com respaldo coletivo. Danilo Ramos manifestou profundo descontentamento contra esta atitude dos grupos locais, afirmando ter convidado todos para a construção do projeto, e que nenhum deles manifestou interesse em contribuir. Este conflito reforça o argumento da indefinição das fronteiras políticas entre o Estado e a sociedade civil, nos processos de formalização da igualdade.

Assim, após um longo processo, o Centro de Referência foi implementado em 2005 e Walkíria La Roche vence Danilo Ramos na disputa pela sua direção. Este fato constitui um marco histórico, uma vez que Walkíria La Roche se torna a primeira transexual a assumir um cargo público no Brasil.

Como discutiremos adiante, os Centros de Referência refletem, não só os resultados do ativismo político dos movimentos sociais, mas o jogo de interesses do Estado na visibilidade deste ativismo. Uma de nossas entrevistadas identifica o interesse do Estado no seguinte depoimento:

*O Centro de Referência, por exemplo, o governo tem interesse, né? por uma questão política mesmo... Porque está em voga agora a homossexualidade, como plano de governo, aí o Brasil inteiro tá trabalhando nisso, tem que ter esse trabalho com negros, deficiente, la... la... la... dos homossexuais, né?, quer dizer, dependiam da gente (Militante Transexual, citada por Machado, 2007).*

*3.2.3) Núcleo de Direitos Humanos e Cidadania LGBT (NUH)*

O NUH também foi criado no âmbito do programa Brasil sem Homofobia, e foi estruturado na Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais em dezembro de 2006. Ao contrário dos outros centros de referência, que se consolidaram a partir de

uma tradição de militância política, o NUH surge de um percurso acadêmico-ativista.

É importante ressaltarmos que as pesquisas que culminaram com a fundação do NUH, foram desenvolvidas a partir de uma relação de proximidade com os movimentos sociais da cidade. Esta proximidade permitiu que a Universidade, representada então pelo NPP (Núcleo de Psicologia Política) e por projetos de pesquisa de outros centros e departamentos da Universidade, se aproximasse das questões estatais e das políticas públicas.

Embora este núcleo não pretenda abandonar o viés acadêmico, sua produção científica buscará manter constante interlocução com a Sociedade Civil e com o Poder Público. O NUH, além de intensificar pesquisas como as que lhe deram origem, aprofundará o debate com a sociedade através da capacitação de agentes públicos para a efetivação de programas sociais e políticas públicas vinculadas às questões dos direitos humanos de LGBT, bem como a formação de novos profissionais através da inclusão nos cursos de graduação de questões relativas ao núcleo central da proposta e articulação e consolidação das práticas de atendimento social, psicossocial e jurídico de vítimas de violência homofóbica através do trabalho em rede já instalada pelo Estado de Minas Gerais e pela Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte.

Além disso, o NUH tem como propostas centrais: a qualificação de técnicos; a organização de banco de dados sobre o trabalho de atendimento; a criação de uma metodologia de atendimento a vítimas de violência; e, por fim, a criação de mecanismos institucionais e públicos para o incentivo as demanda já que, como se sabe, a comunidade vitimada não reconhece ainda o poder estatal e as políticas públicas como referência institucional para a questão dos direitos humanos. A questão das denúncias é bastante complexa, podendo inclusive tornar invisível as práticas da violência quando vistas simplificadaamente como uma questão jurídica já legislada ou mesmo como uma questão apenas psicológica, impedindo a constatação dos aspectos psicossociais que envolvem o fenômeno da homofobia.

O NUH tem como proposta a investigação em três campos de trabalho: homofobia e suas variações da violência, gênero e identidades, mídia e diversidade sexual. O NUH vem desenvolvendo ações de articulação com os movimentos sociais da cidade e outras organizações tendo atualmente constituído o Fórum de Entidades de Luta contra Homofobia que congrega movimentos, ONGs, conselhos profissionais, universidades e áreas do poder público.

Os discursos sobre a homossexualidade sempre estiveram interpelados por diferentes formas de saberes e, desde o século XIX, por saberes científicos produzidos na academia. Neste sentido, a produção de conhecimentos sobre temáticas LGBT assume um viés político, que pode contribuir ou prejudicar as lutas contra o preconceito, a discriminação por orientação sexual e a homofobia. James Green menciona que os estudos de Peter Fry, Edward MacRae, Richard Parker e outros, fomentaram a produção acadêmica neste campo e incentivaram

o surgimento de uma nova geração de pesquisadores, e que, dentre estes novos pesquisadores, destacam-se muitos militantes proeminentes (Arney, Fernandes & Green, 2003).

Neste sentido, em Belo Horizonte, como em todo o Brasil, começaram a aumentar, em número e diversidade, os estudos que tomam as temáticas LGBT como objeto de reflexão. Algumas pesquisas, no caso de Minas Gerais, propiciaram uma relação dinâmica entre o NPP, a militância LGBT e órgãos governamentais, tais como a SMADC e a CMDH. Estes atores se encontram através de seminários, debates, grupos vivenciais e de discussão, reuniões, projetos de pesquisa etc.

Desde meados de 2003, o NPP vem realizando pesquisas junto aos movimentos sociais LGBT de Belo Horizonte, que resultaram em: um estudo comparativo de dois grupos militantes (Machado & Prado, 2005); um estudo sobre a participação política de militantes no movimento LGBT (Costa & Prado, 2006); um estudo sobre a constituição da identidade coletiva da Parada LGBT de Belo Horizonte (Machado, 2007); uma pesquisa sobre a vivência de homossexuais na Igreja Católica (Torres, 2005) e, finalmente, duas pesquisas quantitativas durante as Paradas de 2005 e 2006, sendo que o livro com os resultados obtidos em 2005 (Prado; Rodrigues. & Machado, 2006), foi publicado pela Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte.

Embora não tenhamos feito um levantamento mais minucioso das pesquisas que vem sendo realizadas sobre esta temática nas Universidades da cidade, além dos trabalhos do NPP, destacamos as pesquisas de Rios (2004), Diniz (2006) e Fernandes (2007). O trabalho que vem sendo desenvolvido sobre mídia e homofobia por Leal (2009) e pesquisas sobre as questões dos direitos sexuais e de gênero (Mayorga, 2007).

Facilmente pode-se perceber que há uma proliferação de estudos sobre a questão da diversidade sexual e, mesmo sem um levantamento formal sobre as produções neste campo, podemos afirmar que há um sem números de pesquisas de mestrado e doutorado, bem como de monografias e artigos em cursos diversos de formação acadêmica, que tem cada vez mais enfrentado a pauta da diversidade sexual, da homofobia e dos direitos sexuais.

A proliferação destas pesquisas reflete aspectos importantes para compreendermos o campo político desenvolvido em torno da sexualidade na sociedade contemporânea, dos quais destacamos três. Primeiramente, reflete a abertura da academia para agregar questões que têm conquistado legitimidade pública. Em segundo lugar, reflete a busca de formação e o interesse de indivíduos provenientes de espaços diversos, considerando que este interesse parte não só das vivências particulares de cada um, mas da própria demanda da sociedade em dar resposta às questões provenientes da sexualidade. Em terceiro lugar, reflete a necessidade e o interesse dos movimentos sociais em se apropriarem destes conhecimentos, seja por necessidade de interlocução com atores políticos oriundos no mundo acadêmico, seja pela necessidade de interlocução com as instituições públicas que, cada vez mais, demandam da

sociedade civil organizada elevada capacitação e sistematização teóricas através dos concorridos editais de fomento a projetos e da lógica tecnocrática e burocratizada de gestão estatal.

#### **4) Sociedade Civil, Estado e Universidade: Projetos de formalização da diversidade e a formalização de projetos diversos**

Neste texto, procuramos tomar o caso do movimento LGBT, como objeto empírico para discutirmos posicionamentos políticos para além da consideração do espaço originário dos atores, sejam estes espaços tomados como pertencentes à sociedade civil ou ao Estado e suas instituições. Buscando tensionar, a partir dos deslocamentos ideológicos e estratégicos que abordamos, as concepções políticas que reduzem o político a uma concepção individualista da ação política, no que tange posicionamentos individuais, ou a uma concepção de transformação social ancorada em um coletivismo ingênuo. Neste ponto, erguem-se algumas questões que nos ajudam a compreender este tensionamento: se o posicionamento ideológico independe dos espaços de origem, evitando assim uma concepção política que reforce a dicotomia entre a sociedade civil e o Estado, então como podemos evitar uma perspectiva na qual os indivíduos e seus posicionamentos individuais se tornariam o único foco de análise para a compreensão da trama dos conflitos políticos? Por outro lado, se esta análise aponta para definições que transcendam a consciência política individual, como incluir, na trama dos projetos coletivos, o desenvolvimento moral e cognitivo individual, bem como interesses e desejos individuais que se formam a partir da alquimia dos valores sociais disponível nas sociedades multiculturais, mas que são orientados pela hierarquização destes valores na gramática moral hegemônica?

Discutir questões como estas, implica em mapear a formação de identidades coletivas e políticas da sociedade civil e como estas se relacionam com o Estado, o que consideramos essencial para compreendermos os rumos e as dinâmicas da política contemporânea.

Por esta razão, discutimos na evolução do movimento LGBT no Brasil, a passagem do status de marginalidade destes movimentos, para o status de consultores e grupos de pressão/interesse junto ao Estado. Percebemos na história destes grupos, especificamente em Belo Horizonte (Machado, 2007), relações conflituosas que se estabeleceram entre discursos marcados pela esquerda tradicional e discursos assimilacionistas, que buscavam transformações sociais no campo da sexualidade a partir de uma crítica política menos estrutural e mais cultural, com forte aceitação da inserção deste debate pela via do mercado. A partir destas relações, os grupos organizados assumiram posições mais institucionalizadas, tomando como estratégias de ação, inserções no mundo público através das instituições governamentais e de modelos de atuação típicos do terceiro setor.

Percebemos que o discurso esquerdista e radical, ou mesmo discursos que agregavam demandas formando blocos amplos de embate que advogam por transformações estruturais mais amplas na sociedade, se viu enfraquecido, não produzindo lastro junto aos novos militantes ou ações políticas marcantes e criativas. Tais perspectivas também não encontraram amparo nos arranjos participativos e de diálogo político estabelecido pelo Estado. Talvez possamos afirmar que, tanto do ponto de vista dos processos de mobilização social, provenientes da sociedade civil organizada, quanto dos mecanismos institucionais de diálogo com a sociedade civil desenvolvidos pelo Estado, os processos políticos têm encontrado mais respaldo em torno de políticas específicas e identitárias. Tejerina (2005) aponta que, na contemporaneidade, os movimentos sociais que têm conseguido maiores impactos e mobilização social se organizam em torno do que conceituou como privacidades compartilhadas.

Este cenário, embora bastante diferente das formas tradicionais de mobilização política e de relação entre sociedade civil e Estado, mantém duas características históricas, tal como a distância entre discurso e ação política cotidiana, e a distância entre o discurso utópico e o conhecimento necessário sobre o sistema social, para a desarticulação dos focos de poder. Identificamos este perfil tanto nas iniciativas políticas que emergem da sociedade civil (Machado, 2007), quanto entre os atores que desenvolvem uma "gestão administrativa bem intencionada".

No caso dos parlamentares, identificamos formas variadas de absorção dos conflitos que se dão em torno das demandas sociais e do poder estatal, denotando potencialidades e limitações. Alguns militantes argumentaram que os partidos políticos muitas vezes se utilizam dos movimentos sociais sob o status de capital político sem, contudo, se comprometerem com suas demandas até o fim. Temas que levantam acirrados debates públicos, principalmente em torno de embates morais, tais como a sexualidade o faz, muitas vezes encontram dificuldades de se traduzirem no discurso público e, mais ainda, em iniciativas concretas do poder público.

Se pensarmos na posição estratégica da Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos, perceberemos que esta abriga discussões complexas, tais como as de gênero, raça, sexualidade e outras, que encontrariam grande resistência ao serem inseridas como plano de governo em outros ministérios, tais como educação, planejamento etc. Isto pode ser compreendido como uma forma do governo abrir espaço para debates internacionais, dando resposta a demandas contemporâneas, sem ter que bater de frente com os grupos conservadores que se organizam nos poderes legislativo, executivo e judiciário.

Neste ponto, as heterogeneidades do Estado e da sociedade civil se convergem, nos levando a interrogar a formação de grupos políticos e identidades coletivas políticas como estratégias de negociação de pautas políticas. Consideramos importante que a formação de fronteiras políticas entre estes atores seja discutida, na medida em que a capilaridade e heterogeneidade do Estado torna

insuficiente uma análise dos discursos institucionais para a compreensão da arena política.

Apontamos então, a necessidade de que estas estratégias se aprimorem, a partir de alternativas híbridas, que consigam escapar à antinomia entre, confrontar o Estado desqualificando os alicerces sociais, pois estas seriam alternativas utópicas que não respeitariam as ambigüidades políticas e culturais contemporâneas, e transformar a sociedade pela via assimilacionista, pois esta tem se mostrado insuficiente na formalização da igualdade a partir de projetos concretos e consistentes. Entretanto, reconhecendo o desequilíbrio de poder entre o projeto político hegemônico e outros projetos políticos, não se pode, de maneira alguma, descartar a mobilização social e as formas de enfrentamento popular.

Uma vez que a fragmentação política e ideológica implica em impedimentos para a atribuição de sentido à transformação social, a tarefa colocada para os atores deste campo será então a de criar inteligibilidade recíproca entre os diferentes grupos políticos, identificando preocupações e soluções isomórficas e esclarecendo o que une e o que separa cada uma destas perspectivas. Este trabalho pode ser conceituado pelo que Santos (2002) nomeia de trabalho de tradução, e que se ancora na teoria geral da impossibilidade de uma teoria geral.

Os diversos saberes que neste campo circulam, bem como a produção de novos conhecimentos, adquirem aqui uma função política central neste processo. Em se tratando de um campo agudamente hierarquizado, percebemos que saberes e práticas têm adquirido status diferenciados, o que limita a construção de uma ecologia dos saberes (Santos 2002). É inegável que a complexidade do campo político contemporâneo demanda a produção de conhecimentos complexos fundamentados por metodologias também complexas. Entretanto, alguns vieses comprometem que cada ator se posicione dinamicamente em relação a seus potenciais.

## **5) Considerações Finais**

A questão focada neste texto aponta para duas tensões importantes que parecem ensejar mudanças que possuem conseqüências não só para a democracia formal, mas também para o lugar e as estratégias dos movimentos sociais e da sociedade civil organizada no cenário do contemporâneo brasileiro. Portanto, conseqüências para a democracia formal e sua institucionalidade como também para processos subjacentes às instituições que produzem democratização da própria democracia institucional. Estas duas tensões podem ser nomeadas como: a) a tensão de forças entre a burocratização e institucionalização de movimentos sociais e a necessidade do Estado para assimilar estes movimentos que se profissionalizaram; e b) a tensão entre a necessidade dos movimentos criarem antagonismos políticos contra uma ação do Estado de neutralizar estes antagonismos.

Com relação a primeira tensão, pode-se afirmar que, como vimos anteriormente, os movimentos sociais contemporâneos vivem a experiência de



capacitação de ações e profissionalizações para dar conta de uma demanda que nasce a partir de antagonismos políticos, mas que é absorvida pelo Estado que a transforma em uma nova demanda de ação profissional para o desenvolvimento de políticas públicas. Ora, dessa forma, os movimentos sociais parecem assumir um espaço de politização institucional importante, no entanto, não sem consequências para suas próprias ações políticas na expansão democrática e para a própria democratização da democracia no sentido de que ela se faz a partir da emergência de sujeitos políticos no universo de disputas e antagonismos (Mouffe, 1996).

Por um lado, a profissionalização das ações dos movimentos sociais tem implicado em sua institucionalidade e burocratização, dado que o Estado anuncia novos espaços de participação, não sem pretensões assimilacionistas. Por outro lado, há também uma tensão entre a necessidade dos movimentos expandirem suas relações de adversários e de apoiadores e a sua própria inserção no amplo espectro da realização e do desenvolvimento de ações do próprio Estado. Assim, o que se percebe é uma fronteira opaca entre estas relações que muitas vezes se individualizam em lideranças dos movimentos sociais que agora se dividem entre líderes de ações de protesto e gestores das próprias políticas públicas com o objetivo de implementação e expansão de acesso e inclusão social.

Estes dilemas e paradoxos nos parecem importantes para pensarmos não só a opacidade das fronteiras entre sociedade civil organizada e Estado e entre adversários e apoiadores no campo dos antagonismos políticos, mas sobretudo, nos parecem dilemas que incidem diretamente sobre o futuro da democracia.

Considerando que a noção de fronteiras políticas e de antagonismos tem sido fundamental para pensarmos uma radicalização da democracia (Mouffe, 2000), permanece a questão sobre qual será o risco para o aprofundamento da democracia que nesta nova conjuntura das relações políticas pode-se projetar quando estas fronteiras se diluem e se multiplicam em opacidades?

Estas reflexões nos fazem afirmar que esta pergunta, no contexto atual da relação entre sociedade civil e Estado, não deve ser tomada como um simples impedimento, mas sim como uma questão instrumental para os fazeres da própria política, devendo ser evocada como um dilema ético que interpele os riscos da democracia. Assim, o dilema ético aqui descrito, a partir de uma experiência local, deveria ser interpelador, toda vez que a opacidade das fronteiras se tornarem um impedimento para a radicalização democrática.

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## **Civil society, un-civil society and the social movements**

**Grzegorz Piotrowski**

### **Abstract**

*This article discusses the experience of civil society and social movements in Central and Eastern Europe both before and after the events of 1989. It shows how the different paths to the development of "civil society" as an organising concept in the pre-1989 period impacted on experiences after that date, and relates this to broader theoretical debates on the concept. In particular, it argues that the movements of "un-civil society" often fulfil a more substantial political role than the NGOs of "civil society", for a range of reasons. The article draws on a series of interviews conducted with "alter-globalisation" activists in the region.*

The social mobilization in Central and Eastern Europe has changed radically after the wave that took communism down in 1989. The question to be posed is what was the nature of that wave: was it preparing the ground for civil society in the region, or one should speak perhaps more of a social movement? Civil society is nowadays recognized as an important part of the democratic order filling the gap between the state, the market and the private, but social movements also claim this. What are the relations between these two? Do they have different functions or do they have to compete for supporters, popular recognition and resources? And is the civil society different in Central and Eastern European countries or does it follow similar patterns of development? If it is different, what are the most important factors for that: are they constituted within the concept of post-socialism, being on the one hand a result of historical bias from almost 50 years of communism; or rather a consequence of the rapid pace of political, social and economic transformation of 1989?

In order to take a deep insight into that question I would like to (1) first review the most popular concepts of civil society and (2) give a brief history of it in Central and Eastern Europe. I am especially interested in the way the former dissidents changed into the new elites and what were the consequences of it, especially for the people that went to activism. Subsequently (3) I will focus on the concept of the 'uncivil society', that is designed to explain the phenomena of political radicalism, violent groups and other outcasts of the political system, to see whether the social movements I am interested in fall into this category. For the empirical evidence for these reflections, I will use interviews with activists that might be included in the category of 'alter-globalist' activists, with whom I spoke about the position of the movement and activism in Central and Eastern European societies.

Despite the fact that these movements are outnumbered and marginalized, their presence in mainstream discourse is a good example of an idea given by Roland Barthes that was picked up by many anthropologists. By looking at the

'malfunctioning' parts and 'deviations' or phenomena that are on the fringe of the mainstream (society in this case) one can get more information about the majority. The situation looks a little bit like when a neuroscientist tries to explain the way the human brain functions, by pointing out possible disorders and malfunctionings of it. In other words, looking at radical social movements, their claims, their self-image and the way they position themselves in society, we can tell more about the processes within that society. And in our case, more about the quality of civil society itself. (4) Finally, many of my informants were very critical about civil society actors and about Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in particular, by looking at these arguments one can get a better perspective on the social movements themselves.

## **Introduction**

When looking at the political and social life in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (particularly Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, which are my field of research), especially at activities that are not connected to the state, one can observe several specificities. Especially when looking at contentious politics and keeping in mind mass mobilizations that forced the communist regimes to hand over power in 1989, one can observe a significant decline in terms of numbers of people taking part in them. Also the activism of the less radical parts of the political scene seems to be a little bit less dense. My hypothesis is that civil society in the region is different to its Western counterparts in terms of numbers and structure. I claim that the reasons for that might be found in (1) the historical context and the specifics of the projects of civil society before 1989, and (2) in the short period of its development after the transformation.

Connections to the alter-globalist movement can be made at several levels: the movement sometimes claims Global Civil Society as its aim and the potential remedy for the injustices of this world, with actors from the movement and NGOs cooperating upon specific campaigns and events. Also, participation in both of them seems to be the domain of young people, so potential competition might take place, assuming limited resources (for example mobilization).

## **Definitions of civil society**

The beginning of the modern understanding of the term 'civil society' comes from G.W.F. Hegel, who described the processes he observed among the development of the modern capitalist societies and the states. Hegel saw a differentiation between the state (central government) and civil society, which represents and promotes the interests of social classes and individuals and autonomous corporations, and in turn the social sphere of social institutions (like courts) – which regulates and takes care of society. For Hegel, civil society manifests contradictory forces. Being the realm of capitalist interests, there is the possibility of conflicts and inequalities within civil society, therefore, the



constant surveillance of the state is imperative to sustain the moral order in society. What is worth adding, is that for Hegel the state is also a moral organism, in fact the ideal one, therefore, the state should have the capacity to model the ethics of its citizens.

According to Marx, who concentrated on the economic sphere and the means of production, civil society was created by bourgeois society rather than creating it. For Marx, civil society was the 'base' where productive forces and social relations were taking place, whereas political society was the 'superstructure'. Agreeing with the link between capitalism and civil society introduced by Hegel, Marx held that the latter represents the interests of the bourgeoisie (Edwards 2004:10). Therefore, the state as superstructure also represents the interests of the dominant class; under capitalism it conserves the domination of the bourgeoisie and defends its gains, therefore is contradictory to the interests of the working class. Interestingly, this way of thinking is accepted by many of the activists in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), who told me, that the main reason for lower numbers of social activities is the lack of 'base'.

Reinterpreting Marx, Gramsci did not consider civil society as linked with the socio-economic base of the state. For Gramsci it was the "ethical content of the state" and he located it within the political superstructure. He stressed the crucial role of civil society as the contributor of the cultural and ideological capital for the survival of the hegemony of capitalism, and reproduced it through cultural terms (Žuk 2000:102-108). But for Gramsci civil society became also the arena where the struggle over hegemony takes place and where the societies can defend themselves against the market and the state. Gramsci's concept might have been inspirational to the leaders of the New Left, inspiring the ways of thinking that developed in Western countries and were also discussed in CEE countries, both by dissidents before 1989 and by the moderators of the changes after that date:

*"The antithetical relationship between civil society and the state, central in the conception of Antonio Gramsci and so dominant in the writings of key East European dissidents (e.g. Havel, Konrad) is still very influential in both the writing on, and the beliefs of activists within civil society in post-communist Europe. In that, many contemporary CSOs do exactly the same as their historic predecessors: they distrust and oppose the state in general, and (party) political elites in particular"* (Mudde 2003:166).

Today's two-way understanding of the concept of civil society is closely linked to the emergence of the nongovernmental organizations and the new social movements (NSMs) in the late 1980s and in the 1990s. In the globalized world, civil society as a third sector - opposed to the state and the sphere of economic and business institutions. (Žuk 2000:114) It became a key terrain of strategic action to construct 'an alternative social and world order.' Because of that, postmodern usage of the idea of civil society became divided into two main paths: as a political society and as the third sector, more professionalized and politically neutral. Civil society in both areas is, however, often viewed in relation to the state, remaining a counterweight and complement rather than an

alternative. With the growing importance of neoliberalism, civil society understood as the 'third sphere' began to be seen as a solution to the desired shrinking of states and minimizing their social functions. Based on the principles of the Washington Consensus, social programs run by the states were cut because of inefficiency, leaving many people's needs to be met by other groups. This also had an impact on the definitions of the civil society, becoming broader and blurred at the same time, incorporating the actions of civil militia and sports clubs, and hobby groups and religious groups, and so forth.

The London School of Economics' 'Centre for Civil Society's working definition is a good example:

*"Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups<sup>1</sup>".*

As we can see, the range of the actors that might be included in that category is very wide, making it difficult to understand and cover. Acknowledging differences around the world, Linz and Stepan define civil society in broader terms as an *"arena of the polity where self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests"* (Linz and Stepan 1996:7). What seems to be interesting is the inclusion of movements within the concept of the civil society. Moreover, other aspects of this definition call for more precision in the definition, especially the self-organization and the 'relative autonomy from the state'. For example, could the opening chapters of international NGOs (hence actors of the civil society) with their own organizational culture might still be called self-organization? Or the very active role of think-tanks and instructors from other countries that try to shape and build civil society, which was often the case in Central and Eastern European countries?

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996), who distinguish between the 'arenas' of civil, political, and economic society, provide a good example of such conceptualization, which is nowadays widely used in democratization studies. Self-organized groups, movements and associations (civil society) may have a relationship with the state, but they do not aim to occupy it. The contest over the

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1 "What is civil society?". Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics.  
[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what\\_is\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm); accessed 1.3.04

control of public power and the state apparatus is the imperative of political society (e.g. political parties)" (Kopecky 2003:8-9). The question is whether civil society should help and complete the state structures and help to develop the confidence ties between the state and society or whether its aim should be to control it. Putnam (1993) argues that CMOs: *"generate interpersonal trust and norms of reciprocity that underpin the functioning of political institutions. The denser the web of such social networks between the people, the stronger the efficacy of institutions, and the better the democracy"* (Kopecky 2003:10). This argument also shows the potential subversive feature of civil society, either in the case of more authoritarian regimes but also within democratic systems. This threat might explain, why some groups than are labeled as uncivil society.

Most standard approaches regard civil society in the conventional way as the sphere occupying the space between the state and the family, or possibly also between the state, the family and the market, but according to Szacki (1997:59) there is a contradiction within the modern understanding of the civil society, who: *"on the one hand a kind of cult of spontaneous activity, not planned nor lead [...] on the other – acknowledgment of individualism and plurality as values to be defended and secured by the law"*. In many cases it is not what the civil society actors actually do but rather a question of what is being expected from their actions. In countries that went through democratic transitions, the potential of society building by civil actors is even bigger, since it is believed, that these actors (and their controlling functions) make the system more stable.

Robert D. Putnam argues that non-political organizations in civil society are vital for democracy and its sustainability. They are supposed to build social capital, trust and shared values, which are transferred into the political sphere and help to hold society together. Civil society actors, by involving many people in their actions play an informational role and also increase the trust in democracy (but not in politics) by creating a common *polis* (Putnam et al. 1994). Through political or non-political actions they create also a common space and responsibility for preserving it.

While acknowledging the processes of globalization, questions about its relations with civil society also emerge, especially as many of the actors cross the boundaries of national states. The call for a Global Civil Society is seen as the main claim of the more moderate actors of the globalization-critical movements, stressing their controlling function within the society and over states and markets and extending the range to the world level. As some critics say, the rapid development of civil society on a global scale after the fall of the communist system was a part of neoliberal strategies linked to the Washington consensus (Zaleski 2006). This might suggest that the growth of civil society is permanently linked to the neoliberal doctrine and is a crucial factor of it, especially when the nation states are weakened. With more funding coming from corporations and supranational bodies, such as the EU for example, a question is raised (often by activists) whether one might talk about other patterns for dependency.

The situation is even more complicated in countries where civil society (and other features of democratic institutions) are relatively new and the expectations are much bigger than in more stable regimes and where they are much more idealized. Therefore, to study the development of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, Marek Skovajsa suggests that the classic definitions should be extended, with a division between 'core civil society' and 'broader civil society', if one wants to understand the development of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe.

### **Civil society in Central and Eastern Europe**

The situation of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe nowadays is deeply rooted in the history of development of this concept in the region and the tensions between the actors already existing in communist societies (despite the Marxist notion of its role of preserving the unwanted social relations and defending the privileges of the middle class). Many people were members of sports clubs, trade unions, environmental groups (although these were different to the groups that are known today: their function was more educational than an actual fight with the authorities over environmental policies), and religious groups. Their actions, or to be more specific, their elites that decided over their actions, were controlled by the communist parties in the region and did not pose any threat to the system itself.

Therefore, the call for the autonomy of civil society was in fact the call for freedom and the creation of parallel and independent structures as a means to achieve it. As one of the leaders of the democratic opposition in Poland, Bronisław Geremek said, *"the idea of a civil society – even one that avoids overtly political activities in favor of education, the exchange of information and opinion, or the protection of the basic interests of the particular groups – has enormous anti-totalitarian potential"* (1992:4). Everything that the authoritarian regime cannot control, in the public sphere (and to some extent in the private one) was a threat for the authorities. The politicized concept of the building of civil society in communist countries, already existing actors (such as cultural and sports associations, trade unions legitimized by the system and so forth) were not seen as potential partners, because of their dependency. As Skovajsa argues: *"In countries with particularly repressive and stable post-totalitarian regimes, the dissident conceptions were characterized by deep distrust toward the state and the state-dominated civil society structures"* (Skovajsa 2008:53). Therefore, the parallel society that most of the concepts have argued for, had to be independent from the state in every possible way: structurally, in terms of power distribution, and financially. Besides political claims, in particular the fight with the communist regime, one of the aims of the project of civil society was to re-establish the *"authentic social ties that had been damaged by communist social engineering"* (Kopecky 2003:4).

This concept might be described by a metaphor that was in use during communism and that was referring to the publishing of books and magazines.

During communist times a phenomenon of the 'second cycle' was created and it was referring to publishing cycles, with the first one – the official, and the second organized by the dissidents. This corresponded with the idea of building 'alternative' or 'parallel' societies within the communist regime as on the one hand the foundations for future civil society and on the other as for creation of the base for protest movements. Marek Skovajsa writes: *"The strategy of the 'new evolutionism', propounded by Adam Michnik in his famous 1976 essay, aimed at fostering and developing a parallel society independent of the state, and at first sight did not look too different from Benda's proposal<sup>2</sup>. The crucial difference was, however, that while the Czech dissidents regarded the expansion of antiregime activism into a society-wide phenomenon as little more than a utopian hope, Michnik foresaw the constitution of a mass and nonelitist parallel social structure"* (Skovajsa 2008:54-55). Since most of the influential dissidents were part of the *intelligentsia*, most of the energy was devoted to publishing books that would otherwise be stopped by the censorship committees, leaving the development of the parallel food supply system to more spontaneous actions of the rest of society.

The institutional foundations of the civil society project in Poland, for example, were the Solidarność trade union and the Catholic Church - institutions, whose participation in the civil society is widely discussed until today. The call for autonomy of the civic activities was, in the environment of the authoritarian regime, a call for freedom. This call still influences the debate over civil society in Poland, which is understood as activities oriented on the realization of the common good, not as protecting the interests of one's own group. This assumption is important since many of the actions taken in public are either politicized, involved in economic struggle or refer to the interests of a group - although with the growing economic dependence of NGOs and other actors, the boundaries that can be drawn between these lines becomes a difficult task. Also in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, civil society constructed by the dissidents was *de facto* an anti-regime project trying to involve the mass society within the struggle. In all of the countries of the region, civil society was an anti-regime and as a result, anti-state activity, the kind of which was definitely unwanted after the regime change.

The Hungarian case might be located between Poland and Czechoslovakia, with a significant withdrawal to the private sphere and a stress on the moral aspects of surviving within the communist regime. The antipolitics of Gyorgy Konrád relied on mass involvement on a relatively non-political level, more as a form of the social self-management than the foundation of a mass social movement. As Skovajsa summarizes what the project was about: *"decent survival in a communist society is best possible by making conscious effort to preserve one's moral integrity in everyday life and to lead a fulfilling life where only it is*

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2 Benda called for the creation of various parallel structures, such as a parallel culture, economy, system of education, information network, or political activities that would fulfill those vital social functions the official structures were unable to satisfy. (Skovajsa 2008:53).

*possible, that is, in the intimate circle of members of the family and close friends"* (Skovajsa 2008:55).

This withdrawal to the private sphere (as much as it is possible to define and to draw the boundaries) resulted in a relatively low level of social mobilization and definitely the lack of history of it. In fact, one of the biggest social mobilizations in Hungary during the communist times was the 'Danube Circle' – an environmental campaign against the project of building dams on the Danube river, which brought together activists from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. There were problems with mobilization ('mobilization fatigue') after the changes in 1989. The "Danube Circle" and its counterpart in Slovakia were working against the plans of a hydro power plant meant to be built on the bordering river of the Danube since 1977 – one of the outcomes was the openness of the negotiations and a public debate about the whole project (for more see Pickvance and Luca 2001:105-108). This was not only a transnational campaign (and a successful one to some extent) but it was also inspired by ideas that came from western Europe, of environmental protection understood as a conflict and criticism of state policies. It was also – in a way – an attempt to redefine the policies of development. After the transformation of the regime this social capital might have resulted in the central role and dominating position of environmentalist groups in present-day Hungary on the stage of social activism and of the broad range of the claims raised by these groups (not solely limited to environmental protection but also involving human rights and social problems).

In Czechoslovakia, the civil society project was initiated by a poet who later became the president of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, by Vaclav Havel. The project was morally based and at the same time pretty mystical, with a universal claim for withdrawal from the political of the regime and rejection of collaboration with it. This was the universal foundation for all projects of this kind within the region, as Petr Kopecky, in the opening chapter to the 'Uncivil Society? Contentious politics in post-communist Europe' says: *"The crucial element of this conception of civil society [in CEE] was the critique of state power. The experience of suppression and underlying anti-totalitarian tendencies led many dissidents to the conclusion that East European states were to a large extent defined by their hostility towards organizations outside state control"* (Kopecky 2003:3).

But at the same time Havel remained realistic; it was a distinctive feature of the Prague spring, that, in contrast with Hungary in 1956 and of Poland in the 70s and 80s, Czechoslovak society didn't want to restore capitalism, but accepted socialism, in an appropriately reformed (and Moscow-independent) form. Only a few went beyond the dogma of the managerial role of the communist party. Havel, in an article published on 4 April 1968 in the Literární Listy magazine, rejected the conception of the opposition as partnership. 'Charter 77' activist Václav Benda, raising his concern that the Charter's grounding in an overly abstract project which might be too complicated and sophisticated to be accepted by the masses, suggested that the dissidents should create a "parallel polis" in order to form the base and capacity to overthrow the regime.

Benda called for the creation of various parallel structures, such as *"a parallel culture, economy, system of education, information network, or political activities that would fulfill those vital social functions the official structures were unable to satisfy"* (Skovajsa 2008:53). Nevertheless, as Skovajsa continues: *"The Czech dissident political theorizing trusted much more the independent civil society, composed of small dissident enclaves, to which all the theorists belonged, than the broader civil society that extended too far into the semiofficial and official sphere. Poland was the country in East-Central Europe that represented the most extreme opposite to Czechoslovakia. Poland saw the emergence of a strong and successful antiregime mass movement and a critical weakening of the communist state as early as 1980"* (Skovajsa 2008:54).

The concept of civil society was composed of intellectuals who were on the one hand elitist and exclusionary, and on the other hand, seemed to be treating it as the vanguard of the desired political change. The small scale and elitism of the Czechoslovak dissidents movement is outlined by Skovajsa: in Czechoslovakia, the yearly numbers of new signatories to the Charter 77 declaration in the 1980s remained below fifty, with a slight increase at the end of the decade<sup>3</sup>. (Skovajsa 2008:67-8).

This situation was potentially 'softened' by the case of the 'Plastic People of the Universe', a rock band, who faced a trial related to the lyrics of one of their songs and who were in fact repressed by the regime almost since their foundation in 1969. As a sign of solidarity, an open letter was written and signed by many of the people involved in Charter 77, the main oppositional organization. However, the whole process seemed to have been done behind the backs of, and with little participation of the group itself, and therefore were perceived by some as lacking credibility (for more, see Johnston 2009:17). As a result, the dissidents were evolving in their own sphere, so had the more counterculturally-based underground. One of my informants from the Czech Republic summarized this situation as following:

*"- In Czechoslovakia the dissident movement wasn't so big (as it was in Poland) and so radical, although it was very influential, right?*

*- It was some kind of intellectual and economical and professional elite, but there was also the underground. Based on music and culture, and there were many people in the underground and they worked on different principles than the dissidents.*

*- So, these two were not connected?*

*- Not very much, because there were some problems between those two groups, because the dissidents were like intellectuals, very academic people and thinkers and the underground was like normal people or the people who reject socialism based on socialist principles. And sometimes*

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3 The numbers were under 30 per year in the mid-1980s, 108 in 1988, and 442 in 1989 (source: Libri Prohibiti Archive, Prague).

*they were drinking too much, you know, a different culture, long hair, dirty clothes, and you see a dissident was with an intellectual with nice clothes with different words....*"<sup>4</sup>

### **The 'third cycle' – youth between the communist party and the dissidents.**

From the mid 1980s, with the growing popularity of subcultural-based movements (such as punk or concepts of deep ecology) and the lack of interest in them from the dissidents, a 'third cycle' was created, consisting mostly of zines, brochures and pamphlets, but attracting lots of attention from young people. It is worth noticing that subcultures in Poland under communism were much more politicized than in western countries and belonging to one was not only a lifestyle choice, but also a political statement. Starting from the 1950s, communist authorities were heavily suspicious of subculture, anything that was alternative or even fashion trends (especially in the beginning) – anything that they could not control. Many music groups had politicized lyrics, usually hidden under metaphors and events such as the punk festival in Jarocin, that took place for the first time in 1984, became icons of the youth movement and still remain as such for many activists (even those who are too young to be there and remember it). This split between the more and more professionalized dissidents and the creative youth grew stronger, as more the Solidarność movement was leaning towards liberal or neoliberal positions (for more see Ost 2005). This situation was portrayed by one of my informants, who said:

*"environmental issues, antimilitarist, whatever from this flank, a break away from this national independence rhetoric, from martyrdom, from Katyń<sup>5</sup>, from Siberia, and here such a fresh way of looking at it. It this way it was never done.... The majority of people were definitely passive, a myth of strikes attesting to it in 1988, which were supposed to lead to the round table, it is a myth, there were almost no strikes generally speaking, now sometimes it is possible to read something about it. There was an article a few days ago in Gazeta Wyborcza, that these strikes, these were no real strikes, these weren't mass protests, it was mounting gates in work places by young workers, strengthened by activists from WiP, or anarchists or youth nationalist organizations."*<sup>6</sup>

One of the binding features of the Solidarność movement and the main frame used by it was the fight for national independence and the link with traditional values connected to the Catholic Church. Public declarations of faith, the use of

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4 Interview 3.

5 Katyń is a Russian city where in 1941 Soviet soldiers executed several thousands of Polish POW: officers, policemen, teachers and people working for the administration. Denied for many years, Katyń became a symbol of the fight for historic truth about communism and was used by the dissidents, especially after nationalist-liberation frames started being used.

6 Interview 11



nationalist rhetoric and at the same time growing conservatism of the dissidents made participation unattractive for young people, especially for those with links to new emerging subcultures and inspired by lifestyle activism from western Europe. One of the most well known groups from these days was the 'Orange Alternative' – 'Pomarańczowa Alternatywa' (PA). It is said that the name Orange Alternative arrives from Orange being in the middle of colors representing two major political powers in Poland (until this very day) – the Red for the Communist or left, and the Yellow for the Church and the right<sup>7</sup> – this programme manifesto located the group between the two main actors of the political scene in the late 1980s and is significant for many groups of such a nature. The dissidents became more professionalized and eventually the new elites after 1989 while the communists first represented the oppressive regime and were later labeled as not having substantially changed (mainly because of the involvement of former elite members). This left many groups and individuals stranded on the political scene, with two possible ways of change: going to less politicized NGOs, or getting involved in anti-systemic social movements, often closely linked to subcultures.

### After the transformation

The first attempts to create a civil society in the region after the transformation of 1989 were of a top-down nature. Many western NGOs and foundations tried to implement the "third sector" to make democracy in the region a full one. Before that *"Poland allowed an excellent example of an authoritarian regime that allowed for 'negative freedom', i.e. a (certain level of) freedom from repression of dissent (see Ekiert and Kubik 1999; Zuzowski 1993). Hungary had an even less repressive Communist regime, as the 'Alliance Policy' of the Kadar regime also allowed for a level of 'positive freedom', i.e. the freedom to organize associational life outside the communist structures – as long as it was not explicitly anti-communist (see Seleny 1999)"* (Mudde 2003:162). Other authors take into account the fact that NGOs began to be legalized (in Poland and Hungary) in the mid 1980s, but the whole process gained its dynamics after the changes in 1989. There was also the fear that the newly introduced democracy was not a stable system and that the lack of ways to manage potential disruptive tendencies within the society might be a threat to the system itself. Democratic procedures, such as independent central banks, a judiciary system, free elections and so forth, were not enough to prevent the new democracies from falling into other forms of authoritarianism or getting caught by the spiral of nationalism (the example of the Yugoslavia shows, these fears were not necessarily lacking foundations).

One of the biggest promoters of such solutions was a multi-millionaire George Soros, a very controversial figure, described by Naomi Klein as: *"As the world's*

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[http://www.pomaraneczowa\\_alternatywa.republika.pl/orange%20alternative%20overview.html](http://www.pomaraneczowa_alternatywa.republika.pl/orange%20alternative%20overview.html)

*most powerful currency trader, he stood to benefit greatly when countries implemented convertible currencies and lifted capital controls, and when state companies were put on the auction block, he was one of the potential buyers"* (Klein 2007:236). Many of my informants (especially from Hungary) accused him of creating civil society artificially, mostly to channel the anger and rebellious tendencies among young people. The actors of this kind of civil society were supposed to be a 'safety valve' for the system because of their dependency on financial resources (mainly states, supra-national institutions such as the EU and big businesses).

Claus Offe (1992:26 - 32) suggested that in Central and Eastern Europe, there might be difficulties in creating civil society, mostly because of lacking solid democratic institutions embedded within the society. To him, most of the social groups active in the region are counter – institutional and anti – political, or at least that is their legacy. But as we look at the study of Jan Kubik and Grzegorz Ekiert (Kubik and Ekiert 1999), we can see, that confrontational actions (mainly strikes and road blockades) were the most visible ones, not the 'quiet' work done by NGOs. Because there is nothing these might call back at in structural terms, they are at risk of steaming off their mobilization powers, because they lack negotiational tactics and skills that lead to gaining in political influence (see also Żuk 2000:150). The know-how had to come from the outside, shaping the relation between the actors from the start, not allowing them to evolve in dialogical process, but there is also a hidden presumption that civil society in the new democratic countries should play a supplementary role to the state and resign from the dichotomous 'us' vs. 'them' division.

The decline in civic activism in Central and Eastern Europe, is also explained in terms of the retreat into the private sphere, being a result of the disappointment and disillusion with the new elites. As Kubik writes: *"Many people during such unstable periods tend to retreat into their private or parochial worlds. It is well established that 'the pattern of retreat into parochial institutions ... is a characteristic response for many people when faced with a larger society that is culturally unfamiliar' (Wilson 1991:213)"* (Kubik 2000:112). Firstly, in post-communist Poland there was no situation of facing a 'larger society that is culturally unfamiliar', in fact, the new cultural models that were propagated were introduced by the elites, but any cultural resistance was outnumbered (for example the feminist movement, groups with countercultural background and so on) and has not played an important role. And from today's perspective, looking at the materials collected during those times, the response was not retreating to the private sphere. Secondly, the retreat from the public sphere had rather economic foundations, since one of the biggest changes in peoples' lives was the end of the feeling of security, at least in social terms that was combined with the ethos of success and hard work. The everyday battle for survival (for some) or for more goods and better positions (for others) left no time and energy required for social activism and involvement into politics.

What is interesting in Kubik's analysis of the changes in Poland after 1989 is the classification of the elites' political culture (Kubik 2000:114-117), dividing the

scene between 'revolutionaries' and 'reformists' – a division that was created upon the Solidarity elites due to their position upon the 'settlements' with the former regime. Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki suggested a very controversial concept of the 'thin line' that should be drawn between the communist past and the present, without pressing legal and moral charges against the members of the former regime. This resulted in a major breakdown of the Solidarity camp and in the end led – among other reasons - the social democratic party (that transformed from the communist party) to power in the elections of 1993. Without going too deep into the debate, the classification of the frames seems to be interesting for this research, since similar ones seem to be used when approaching alternative activities, together with the alter-globalist movement. These conceptualizations are: revolutionaries are extreme (often with comparisons with the communist regime); they are populist (therefore are a threat to the young democracy and delay its consolidation); they are unsophisticated (not only at the level of argumentation they use, this accusation was extended also to their image and even personal hygiene); and they are evil (in the sense they do not want what is good for others, they might also have 'evil' intentions or even 'evil' eyes). Those conceptualizations that go the other way seem to be more context-dependent and therefore are not useful for my research.

The difference between other transitional countries (such as for example post-Soviet states) and those in Central and Eastern Europe was the lack of democratic dissidents and intellectuals resulted in the lack of any ideas of how the civil society should look like after the change of the regime. Of course not all CEE countries looked the same in this matter. For example some people claim that in Hungary the opposition had to be created by the communists, so they could negotiate the shift of the power with someone<sup>8</sup>, but the situation was different. In post-Soviet states the civil society had no intellectual backgrounds among local elites; therefore it had to be implemented directly from Western countries without applying the concepts to local standards and cultural context, therefore it was regarded as something alien and not meeting local needs.

This top-down process (also in terms of the top meaning external – Western – powers) was based on the transfer of know-how and of course finances: *"In post-communist Europe, where Western states and private foundations have invested billions of dollars in both the building of (domestic) civil societies and the using of NGOs to develop and implement international aid programs, following similar practices in Africa and Latin America"* (Mudde 2003:158). In post-Soviet countries the whole process was much clearly visible, and as Ruth Mandel writes (referring to her fieldwork in Central Asia): *"For the most part, the model was taken from the USA and Western Europe, with their proliferation of grassroots groups and clubs, environmental activists and an unregulated media"* (Mandel 2002:283). Because of this direct transfer of organizing structures without respecting the local context and without

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8 This claim was presented in a documentary movie System 09 produced by TV Polska (Polish public broadcaster) and shown on TVP2 on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2009.

'translating' it into the local environment, these models failed and had to be replaced with more appropriate forms. In CEE countries, with some dissident traditions and a developed pro-democratic movement (consisting of various groups such as human and womens' rights activists, environmentalists and so forth) the situation was not as obvious, but still the general impression and constraints of implementing the ideal of civil society seems to be similar. Nevertheless, participation in NGOs became more and more popular as the system went more and more stable, involving many young people with activist, countercultural and dissident backgrounds within. As one of my informants said about the development of this phenomenon:

*[the late 1980s] were a time of naivety, there is no point in fooling oneself. All this defiance [against the communists] that was strong at the end of 1980s, the contestation, got caught into the myth of non-governmental organizations. The NGOs dismantled this remarkable, revolutionary energy, energy which went inside people's heads [...] and people accepted without doubts this propaganda from Gazeta Wyborcza [a central-left daily newspaper, one of the biggest in Poland, founded by former dissident Adam Michnik], that in 1989 it is already after the revolution and they are supposed to find themselves somehow in this reality. And that is why many people went to NGOs.*

### **The concept of the 'uncivil' society.**

The main definition of uncivil society is based on the use – or on the will to use – violence, although speaking to activists who were involved in the black block actions (or any other confrontational practices), the definition of the use of violence is much more complex than among the rest of the society (the questions of violence against public property, private property, self-defense and so forth). Laurence Whitehead (1997) defines 'uncivil society' by (1) the lack of commitment to act within the constraints of legal or pre-established rules, and (2) the lack of spirit of civility, the 'civic responsibilities' or 'civic mindedness'. Kopecky and Mudde (2003) came up with a conceptualization of the term uncivil society and applied it to several countries in Eastern Europe, claiming that the rise of some antidemocratic movements and tendencies in the area is a result of lack of civil society (that had not enough time to emerge) and the tradition of anti-governmental struggles since during the communist era, the division between 'us' and 'them' was very clear. This was, because: "*first, civil society was almost completely framed as an antithesis to the (totalitarian) state [...]. Second, it was a monolithic conception, which stressed the unity of opposition of 'us' ('the people') against 'them' ('the corrupt elite')*" (Kopecky 2003:5). As a result some of the groups became regarded as anti-state and antidemocratic because of their lack of compromising skills and will, and

organizations cooperating with the state (as in Western countries) were less likely to raise.

The rise of 'un-civil' groups and antidemocratic tendencies in the politics of the Central and Eastern European countries was not only a result of the economic changes. It is also connected to the changes in political representation of some groups – especially workers, which are the biggest class in these societies. The workers' movement in Poland, for example, was the foundation for the "Solidarność" trade union that started the democratic changes in the region in 1980. According to David Ost (2005) the main problem with its elites was that they decided not to stand in the name of the workers (economic claims were only a small part of the program of the union, most of their claims were of a political nature, like for example the freedom of speech, getting rid of the censorship). Throughout all the 1980s the elites of the Solidarność movement had been trying to get rid of the workers, who in fact brought them to success and after 1989 – to power. The main argument was that one cannot build a civil society based upon the workers' class, because the workers themselves are 'unpredictable, uncontrollable, irrational, unwilling to accept compromises and not able to accept the boundaries of reality'. This criticism shows, that the elites were afraid of the workers' anger and in fact the whole shift and the criticism signifies a neoliberal shift of the post-communist Poland (and other countries) and in the end the workers lost their political representation.

In general, trade unions, as part of civil society, were constantly losing members because of their former ties to the communist party and (in the Polish case) because of the close connections to the new elites and political parties, that lost credibility themselves. Moreover, there is an ongoing tendency for the workers' movement to lose its definition as a 'class-for-itself' and with growing precarity on the job market, the workers' ethos is in decline. Recently some of the radical trade unions started to raise the questions of the job market and the security networks together with the alter-globalist movement, either in cooperation with it (such as in the case of the protest in Ożarów in Poland, when the blockade of the liquidated cable factory mobilized around 200 anarchists and other activists) or in the formation of joint political groups (such as the 'Inicjatywa Pracownicza – Workers Initiative', a syndicalist trade union in Poland; attempts to form similar groups can be seen around the whole region).

The emergence of the 'un-civil' movement might be linked to the main idea behind Ost's book: policing of anger by political parties. Since most of the mainstream parties were trying to avoid any tensions based on the re-distribution of wealth, they were trying to find a replacement enemy that would distract the attention of the frustrated classes. The politics of anger: in authoritarian regimes, the anger focuses on the Party (leaders) who possess all means of production and control over the society. In capitalism the division is not that clear, so the management of anger is far more complicated for both sides – for the movement (problems with mobilization and collecting resources) and for the government, since it is much more difficult to control it and anger might be used by competitive political forces as a means for political struggle.

The main focus is on the emotions – especially anger – created by capitalism and the scope of political parties is to manage those emotions – either by meeting the needs of the voters (workers mainly in this case) or by giving some kind of replacement, like immigrants, abortion or other substitutionary topics. This also created a situation where all class-based and economic-oriented protests were labeled as 'irrational', 'irresponsible' and not worth mentioning or discussing; a similar situation occurred with radical ecological protests or other youth based resistance, which was immediately linked to youth subcultures and therefore made banal.

### **Civil society vs. social movements (from the social movements' perspective)**

During my fieldwork with activists from groups that might be classified as belonging to the alter-globalist movement, the question of civil society emerged many times - not only the theoretical concept of it and the position of the movement within this frame, but also the cooperation with other actors of the scene, especially NGOs. These talks revealed many tensions among the anti-hierarchical groups and the more organized actors, and based on these talks this list of accusations to the NGOs and more 'professionalized' groups emerged:

They become a working place for the people so the spirit of the 'true activist' is being lost. One of my informants from the Czech Republic said, that: *"[when can one define itself as a 'true' activist] it also depends on your lifestyle and I don't think I live according to anarchist principles. It's connected to being active in everyday life, not only anti-capitalist but also anti hierarchic and I work for a NGO and I support through this NGO this system. I work... I'm a leader of this organization, and that doesn't fit my conception of anarchism"*<sup>9</sup>. This corresponds with the observation of Cas Mudde, who says: *"Most NGOs in post-communist Europe are cadre organizations with no grassroots support whatsoever. Their members are generally full-time employees, for whom their work is a job rather than a calling. In sharp contrast, many of the 'uncivil' movements do represent and involve parts of society, though in a more fluid and ad hoc manner"* (Mudde 2003:167).

For some people in the NGOs (especially those collaborating voluntarily) the reason for the actions is not political (even in the postmodern meaning, where even "the personal is political"). For many of them it is just an attempt to find a way in their lives and it's not a 'true involvement' simply because they are looking for ways to live their lives.

The groups are becoming more professionalized so they become detached from the cultural milieu of the movement, from its 'roots'. The activists are becoming more serious (for example they dress up more smartly) which corresponds with the first point. That would suggest that the alter-globalist movement is strongly connected to the counterculture, although many informants claim not to be. My

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9 Interview 2

respondents told me, that either (a) they joined the movement through punk rock (hardcore was mentioned occasionally) as the early stage of their involvement or (b) stressed that their way was unusual because they DID NOT entered the movement through the music subculture, the dependency on resources offered by authorities or big businesses – not only financial, but also offices and other places. That limits the repertoire of contention that might be used and makes these groups more moderate and detached from direct action principles. Fund raising is seen as a method to control these groups by the 'system' – big business (especially as represented by George Soros, who has a clear and precisely defined vision of the post-totalitarian society) and states. But some members and leaders of NGOs say that this image is oversimplified:

*"for me it is a bit funny, because from the start world revolutionary movements drew money from different dubious sources, and I think that making a start in a grant competition or releasing a record, isn't less ethical than attacking the bank or organizing an illegal concert. I don't also see any alternative option here for getting funds, especially for stationary action [...] of course becoming independent from grants is our dream, it is no secret, however at the moment we don't have such an option, it is a regrettable necessity, it is a huge bureaucratic task"<sup>10</sup>.*

This seems to be a particular problem for anarchist-based groups (or those who claim to have 'anarchist strains', as one of my Hungarian respondents said), but people from NGOs also said that it prevents them from posing more political issues or projects. This can be seen in one of the conversations I had with an NGO leader:

*"- I heard, that the fact that people are becoming involved in NGOs they aren't becoming involved in more radical actions?*

*- Well, that this way rather than differently it is blurring the fact that people are becoming involved in radicalism. I agree with it to some extent, but it is also an issue of a way. We assume, that in Poland only there is a time for construction of the base for a grassroots movement, therefore action that strictly is political unnecessary and premature. [...] And also radical action... Don't know how you understand it?*

*- More direct actions, painting passwords on walls, squatting of buildings, different kind of blockades...*

*- Officially and this way nobody will admit to it to you, to squatting, for example to the policeman, or something.*

*- But people are claiming these actions with names of their groups.*

*- They can allow themselves to do it, because they aren't legal entities [...]"<sup>11</sup>*

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10 Interview 12

11 Interview LS

NGOs and similar organizations become a 'security valve' for the system, because they are channeling potentially dangerous and subversive energy of (dominantly) young people into less political campaigns and problems: *"there is a great discussion, whether NGOs are more a safety valve for the system or a method of the fight against it. I assume that it's like with the rifle which can be used to a lot of ways, perhaps to be given to the policeman who will shoot at workers, or it can be given to workers' militia forces to defend against it. The same with NGOs"*<sup>12</sup>. But later my respondent admitted that the groups he is active in are rather an exception than a rule. By attracting these groups or individuals they are not taken over by more radical social movements and don't become political. It seems that there is a competition between the groups over the newcomers, who might be potential participants of the groups.

By getting involved in local problems they miss the background of it, for example by turning the energy to save a park or a national reserve, they don't see the neoliberal ideology that and its logic that led to such investment or forming a program that deals with the Roma children and provides them equal educational opportunities, the logic of identity-based exclusion and oppressive politics are neglected. Some groups try to adopt this broader perspective, saying that:

*"it is a foundation, it is necessary to explain to the people the facts of life, that things are connected with themselves, that human rights in Tibet are inseparably connected with the situation of the dollar on foreign exchange markets, with the global ecological crash, with the situation in Poland; it is a system of connected issues. Without that one will never enter other than the ethnocentric perspective: nothing beyond what is happening in their work place, in their small country, with their gender, with their sexual orientation"*<sup>13</sup>.

But the issue here is again the question of the politicization of the claims, not only in reference to the world or national economy (for which the politicians are mostly responsible) but also in terms of moral context, for example when addressing the politics of the Law and Justice party which was in power in Poland in the years 2004-2007, with its president Lech Kaczyński, a former mayor of Warsaw, who blocked an 'equality march' (later labeled by the media as 'gay parade'). His actions were described by Naomi Klein as following: *"Poland is now ruled by President Lech Kaczyński, a disaffected Solidarity activist who, when he was the mayor of Warsaw, made a name for himself by banning a gay-pride-day march and participating in a "normal people pride" event* (This prejudice is not unique for Poland. In March 2007, London's mayor, Ken Livingstone, warned of a dangerous 'gale of reaction against lesbian and gay rights blowing across eastern Europe') (Klein 2007:449). The issues of sexual orientation became therefore political statements not only in the moral context but also in regard to freedom of speech and the struggle over the aim of politics.

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12 Interview

13 Interview



The whole discussion between NGOs (seen as the representatives of civil society) and social movements seems to revolve around two main questions of definition: who is an activist and what is a social movement? What kind of actions in public are movement actions and what counts as civil activism? And what is 'real' activism? Out of many debates, the notion of being 'real' seems coming back again and again like a boomerang, the orthodoxy of the movement seems to increase with its radicalism and to what extent the ideology matters: the issue of being a 'true one' is much more important for anarchists or Trotskyists than for ATTAC or Greenpeace members. The first ones are more related to their ideology, than to the aim of the organization, whether it is preserving nature or the introduction of the Tobin Tax. Of course, being a 'true' activist and being devoted to the movement does not reflect the position of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century revolutionists, who were supposed to be, at least in Sergiey's Niechayev's pamphlet: *"The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no affairs, no sentiments, attachments, property, not even a name of his own. Everything in him is absorbed by one exclusive interest, one thought, one passion – the revolution"*<sup>14</sup>. But for today's activists being honest with oneself also in terms of lifestyle and everyday decisions is important, as one of the group leaders I spoke to said:

*"It is only an question of the lack of engagement of the people in the movement, if these people at least only filled the issue up with the minimum effort, namely if they spent one zloty for activity more than for the consumerism, they devoted one hour more to the activity than on pleasure – here are these unfortunate alternative concerts – if they would devote themselves to specific activity so as preparing and doing different projects, talking to neighbours, handing out leaflets it is this movement would look totally different. If people started giving up alcohol, giving up nicotine, we would already have as many as half of the national television in our hands"*<sup>15</sup>.

The main criterion here could be the time of action of the group, civil society, by definition, is more institutionalized and is active in a bigger time span, although cases of social movements or their campaigns that lasting for years can be clearly shown (for example the gay rights movements in the US or European anti-nuclear campaigns). The attributes that could help drawing a line could be:

- source of financing: for civil society actors it comes from states, supranational organizations (in Europe usually from the EU), for social movements it is more 'grassroots' and relies on benefit actions (like concerts) and raising money among the participants or supporters but avoiding institutionalized actors;
- attitude towards the state: social movements are confrontational and

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14 <http://www.spunk.org/library/places/russia/sp000116.txt>

15 Interview 12

present their lists of demands, which if fulfilled mean the end of a campaign / movements whereas civil society actors (understood as NGOs) often cooperate with governments and authorities, criticizing it occasionally but not getting confrontational;

- social movements, at least in recent years, tend to politicize their claims; civil society actors play a much more supporting and ideologically neutral role than the movements. This is applicable to both left-leaning and more right-wing oriented groups;
- there is no collective identity of civil society actors and the reasons for participation are not rooted in the ideology or counterculture, but are a result of other reasons. What is more, being active in an NGO does not require devoting as much time or changes in the lifestyle, which becomes totally unrelated to the issue of activism. This professionalization is often one of the major accusations made towards the NGO sector as being unrepresentative of the civil society. As Cas Mudde summarized it: *"In many ways 'uncivil movements' [...] are more authentic representatives of civil society in post-communist Europe. Not only do they indeed fill the space between the household and the (national) state; they also play an important role in the process of democratization, be it directly or indirectly (by provoking 'civil' movements to respond their challenge). Moreover, unlike many prominent 'civil' organizations in Eastern Europe, which are elite-driven NGOs detached from society, many 'uncivil' organizations are true social movements, i.e. involved in grassroots supported contentious politics (cf. Tarrow 2002)"* (Mudde 2003:164).

## Conclusion

In the preceding section I tried to show how within the main discussion about civil society, the emergence of it is seen both during the communist times and after the changes of 1989. I had a few aims I wanted to achieve: firstly to show that the foundations of the development of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s was a very politicized project, based on the distinction between 'us' (the society) and 'them' (the communists). Although strategies to make this plan succeed were different in different countries, the goal was to create a parallel structure within the society to form the base for a mass movement to overthrow the regime. This juxtaposition was initially a non-political concept, if anything the communist countries could not be political these days. But together with the development of these individual structures and the leaning of the dissidents towards more neoliberal positions some people couldn't find their place on the scene. Especially young people who were trying to apply the concepts imported from Western countries, either on the level of subculture or of ideas (for example concepts of radical ecology). With the dissidents recruiting from *intelligentsia* and intellectual elites, less and less

space was left for spontaneous and creative actions, what led to the creation of the 'third cycle' was especially that the issues important to these people, like the already mentioned environmental protection or compulsory military service, were not raised by the dissidents.

This division has a few consequences. Firstly, because the new sphere was created mostly by young people, the size of it was much smaller, especially after the transformation, when many former dissidents became the new elites or moved to businesses. This kind of generational gap on the one hand stigmatizes the alternative movement as connected to youth (sub)culture, and on the other hand might result in its smaller (compared to Western countries) size. Also, with the shift of the elites, many parts of the society became obsolete for the new elites, or at least they lost their representation, with the best examples of the workers and Solidarność movement. With 'cultural anticommunism' dominating the mainstream political discourse, the rise of the left-leaning groups was difficult, so some parts of these abandoned groups were 'managed' by the radical right and populist parties and groups.

The second important issue is the way social society institutions were introduced within the region after 1989. The neoliberal model of the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector, complementary to the state and the market, that became funding sources. Most of the civic initiatives were formed into the patterns of NGOs, becoming less and less political. This form of civil society was imported 'from the outside', and – paradoxically – had a political context (despite attempts to be against this kind of involvement) and was meant to secure the young democracy. Not only it was seen as a necessary part of a stable system, legitimizing the changes and giving a stable foundation for political institutions, but also responded to the fear of instability of the new states. As the Balkan case shows, the fear of the new countries falling into a spiral of nationalistic violence and populism, was not completely without a reason.

Nevertheless, some groups had emerged who might be labeled as 'alter-globalist' – representing grassroots activism and mobilizing people around more political issues than the NGOs. Being also different in their organizational forms – they are fundamentally skeptical of hierarchical models – and often critical about the relationship with the state or the market. Being independent from these, they have much more space for action, but at the same time far less resources. The relations between these two currents are a line of tensions revolving around the questions of level of engagement, relations with the state and authorities, ethical concerns of financing their activities. Both of them share though one thing in common, which is the scale of the social activism in Central and Eastern Europe, which everyone I spoke to claimed is very low. The situation also looks like this in the eyes of scholars and experts on civil society: *"compared to other regions in the world, including other (Western) democracies and the post-authoritarian states of Latin America and Southern Europe, membership in voluntary organizations in post-communist Eastern Europe is distinctly lower (Howard 2002; Curtis et al. 2001). Moreover, public trust in various civil and political institutions - another oft-used indicator of the vibrancy of civil society*

– is also remarkably low throughout the post-communist region (Sztompka 1998; Rose 1994)" (Kopecky 2003:5-6).

This might be a result of the communist legacy (where either one was engaged in anti-regime activities or were 'collaborators' of it) or with the more general trend of disillusionment and disappointment with politics and as an extension with everything that takes part in the public sphere. This might be the secondary cause of the low level of activism and at the same time a consequence of the changes: the individualization of everyday life, as well as political life, left much less space for cooperation.

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### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/piotrowski.pdf>

## **Feminist media as alternative media? A literature review<sup>1</sup>**

**Jenny Gunnarsson Payne**

### **Abstract**

*This article surveys a strand of literature that has as its concern political movements and the strategic importance of developing media networks as a core component of political mobilisation. This article is especially interested in feminist movements and how this specific mode of political action relates to a more general set of debates about the nature of the connection between political movements and media production. Importantly, I see in the inattention given to the constitutive function of media forms within studies of feminist movements as casting a long shadow over more general debates surrounding the intersection between political movements and media production. My particular focus for this article will in the first instance be a particular tendency in media research, namely 'alternative media studies'.*

*The purpose of this intervention is to examine the existing literature and to offer an assessment of the tools that this literature makes available for the specific treatment of feminist media production. I argue that the established setting of alternative media studies raises some interesting questions about how one might go about analysing feminist media, but that ultimately much of the contributions are marred by a set of generalities and typological idealisations insensitive to the specific analytic demands generated through engagement with feminist media production. I contend that it is only outside the established coordinates of alternative media theorisation that one can locate more appropriate resources enabling an enriched and variegated account of feminist media.*

Forms of media—in the broadest sense of this term—are an invaluable part in furthering the determinate goals and specific demands of a given political movement. This might seem a harmless enough contention. For what would a political movement be without any means of disseminating and circulating its ideas to a wider political constituency? If winning support and forging alliances are necessary prerequisites for a movement to gain what is colloquially regarded as 'critical mass' then with what means is political momentum (which a

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<sup>1</sup> The work on this essay has been conducted within the project *Feminist Media Production in Europe*, which is supported by the Austrian Science Fund (P21187-G20). I would like to thank my colleagues Elke Zobl and Red Chidzey for their support and inspiration in our collaborative work which have provided me with crucial insights for the argument of this paper. Many thanks also to David Payne for his thorough in-depth commentary on various drafts of this essay.

movement thrives off) possible other than through the effective, meaning the *affective*, transmissibility of ideas between a movement and what is outside of that movement? At its most basic level, the delivery of a political message between the sender and recipient entails a 'medium' that shuttles between addresser and addressee. Consider the array of possible media forms that function as a transmitter of political content: more often than not the forms of delivery are associated with strictly textual output (for example, newspapers, bulletins, zines, flyers and leaflets, etc.) But this is not exclusively the case. The mode of its delivery could just as well be 'performative', including street theatre or musical performance, graffiti and other art forms. Today, with the development of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), the platforms open for the transmission and dissemination of political agendas have multiplied greatly (for example, weblogs, ezines, social messaging utilities such as Twitter, etc), providing the possibility for more immediate and responsive media output, which are in a synergetic relation with a movement that changes in accordance with the changing times and terrains of its struggles.

Given the obviousness of the connection between political movements and media production, it would be expected that much literature has dedicated its efforts to theorising this relation. To this the answer is somewhat ambivalent. Both a 'yes' and 'no' is appropriate. This article surveys a selection of the literature that broaches the linkage between political movements and the strategic importance of the development of media networks. On this basis, it is readily acknowledged that a rather significant body of research exists at the intersection of the study of media and the analysis of political movements. The question however is whether these understandings capture the full complexity of the function of media production in political movements.

As a feminist scholar my entry into these set of debates is somewhat particular, this from the outset I readily concede. My own understanding of these issues has been shaped by two related observations about feminist political struggles, specifically. First, that the history of the women's movement has demonstrated time and again the central role of 'activist' media in the production of feminist collective identities and yet that second on a theoretical level this essential connection has been largely glossed over.

Already in the latter half of the nineteenth century, suffragist and anti-slavery activist Sojourner Truth (born Isabella Baumfree) sold photographic, *cartes-de-visite* of herself as a way of disseminating her politics and as a means of supporting herself financially (Irvin Painter 1994, 482-488; Downing 2001, vi-vii). More generally women within the suffrage movement(s) were known to be avid producers of their own press, cartoons, postcards and posters (Israels Perry 1993; DiCenzo 2003, DiCenzo and Ryan 2007). This rich and multifaceted element of feminist movement history was to continue well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and has, over the years taken on a multiplicity of formats, genres, modes of expression and political agendas. British publications *Sempstress*; *The English Woman's Journal*; *Votes for Women*; *The English Woman*; *The Free Woman*; *The Vote*, and Swedish radical women's magazine *Tidevarvet* constitute notable



examples of print media produced in the decades around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Feminist publishing peaked once again during the so called 'second wave' of feminism which prospered in the spirit of 1968 with titles such as the American news journal *Off Our Backs*, (since 1970), magazines such as long lived and influential UK feminist magazine *SpareRib* (1972-1993); The 1980's witnessed the birth of significant media contributions; internationalist UK feminist newspaper *Outwrite* (1982-1988); and the self-proclaimed first ever feminist radio station *RadiOrakel* (ongoing since 1982) in Norway. In the mid eighties, the world's first known unlicensed women's radio, *Radio Pirate Woman* had its inaugural broadcast in Ireland. The 1990's saw the emergence of Nicaraguan feminist quarterly *La Boletina* (since 1991, since 2005 also available online); and Iranian independent feminist journal *Zanan* (subsequently banned in 2008). The decade also witnessed what has often been referred to as the transnational 'grrrl zine revolution'; young girls becoming involved in feminist politics through the development of feminist zine networks (small not-for-profit publications, generally authored and edited by a single author or a small editors' collective) (Harris 1998; Zobl 2004a&b; Schilt & Zobl 2008; Kearney 2006; Baldauf & Weingartner 1998; Chidgey 2007). Today, feminist media production continues to flourish. New titles of magazines (such as Norwegian *FETT* since 2004 and Swedish *FUL\_* since 2004) and broadcast media such as Swedish community and online TV *HallonTV* (since 2008) and *an.schläge tv*—the sister project (since 2005) of the long established Austrian feminist magazine with the same name appear alongside 'new media' and hybrid genres such as the e-zine *The F-Word* (UK since 2001), weblogs such as Romanian *F.I.A.* (since 2005) and the extension of queer feminist *FUL* magazine with a monthly pod radio programme (Sweden since 2008).<sup>2</sup>

Given this rich history of feminist media production it is doubtlessly surprising that—despite the vast amount of research conducted on other aspects of the feminist movement—the terrain is somewhat uncharted (Riaño 1994, Steiner 1992, 122, Byerly & Ross 2006). This inattention can perhaps be partially attributed to the general focus within disciplines such as media and cultural studies, which have privileged the study of mass media at the expense of smaller and more marginal(ised) practices of communication (Atton 2002, 7).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There is little doubt that contemporary feminist media production has gained the attention of feminist scholars recently. In the growing area of studies concerned with feminist zine making and online media production (Zobl 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Chidgey 2006, 2007; Kearney 1997, 2006; Leonard 1997, 1998, 2007, Byerly & Ross 2006) there is much to be commended, especially the way in which researchers have elevated marginal practices, such as zine making and online weblogs, to the dignity of political operators. Such practices are considered by many as a central component in the revivification of a feminist politics today. Not that one should be too quick to infer that the importance some researchers have ascribed to the media production in the history of feminism is without precedent. Throughout history, feminist self-publishing has played a crucial role in women's political mobilisation and struggles for the right to vote, study and participate in political life (Steiner 1992).

<sup>3</sup> This is to say, an analysis of the negative role that 'mass media' plays in the circulation of gendered norms and rigid stereotypes, which perpetuate relations of subordination and inequality between the sexes, comes at the detriment of giving visibility to 'alternative' forms of

How this specific situation in feminism relates to a more general set of debates about the nature of the connection between political movements and media production is far from being restrictive. I see in the inattention given to the *constitutive* function of media forms within studies of feminist movements as casting a long shadow over more general debates surrounding the intersection between political movements and media production. I shall therefore argue that it is far from being the case that we can plug the holes and deficiencies of feminist research by using resources and tools available from theoretical quarters which have, in a more general manner, expended much time and effort to the precise relation between political movements and the media form deployed by such movements. Rather there are significant limitations with the more general literature on media and the role it plays in political movements, which, when used to make sense of the specific demands of the feminist movements and its vicissitudes, does not satisfactorily capture the ambiguities and complexities of that movement. My particular focus for this article will in the first instance be a trend in media research captured under the appellation 'alternative media studies'. 'Alternative media'—a contested term in itself, and one to which we shall return in this essay—was until recently largely neglected both in Media and Cultural Studies as well as in the studies of social movements (Downing 2001, v, 26). Alternative media scholarship (in its various guises) has gained increased attention in recent years (see Bailey et. al. 2008; Waltz 2005; Atton 2002; 2004)—a development which, in combination with the important contributions already made within feminist media studies more generally, offers hope for future developments in the study of feminist alternative media. The purpose of this intervention is to examine the existing literature and to offer an assessment of the tools that this literature makes available for the specific treatment of feminist media production, still largely lacking systematic engagement. I shall argue that the established setting of alternative media studies raises some interesting questions about how one might go about analysing feminist media, but that ultimately much of the contributions are marred by a set of generalities and typological idealisations insensitive to the specific analytic demands generated through engagement with feminist media production. Rather it is outside the established coordinates of alternative media theorisation that perhaps one locates the most appropriate resources enabling an enriched and variegated account of feminist media.

With these broad intentions outlined, the structure of this intervention shall take the following form: I will firstly begin by addressing the strand of theorisation which emphasises alternative media as mainly 'oppositional', or counter-hegemonic, in their relationship to state and market, here mainly represented by alternative media scholars John Downing and Chris Atton. Secondly, I will discuss a number of critiques that have been raised against these former approaches, and via these critiques introduce alternative conceptualisations,

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media production, examples of which can be understood as bringing about 'emancipatory' effects by actively challenging the prevailing system of gendered relations.

especially on the notions of 'citizen media' as developed by Clemencia Rodriguez (1992) and the more recent 'rhizomatic media' as formulated by Olga Bailey, Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier (2008).

### **Defining Alternative Media: The Uneasy Relationship between Formal Specificity and Historical Complexity**

Suffering from being largely under researched, the field of alternative media can be characterised by the continuous attempts made by researchers to find and refine suitable frameworks as a way of, first, complementing existing media theories which have proven insufficient at understanding the *specificity* of these media forms in opposition to dominant mass media, and second in a way that takes into account the vast *complexity* within this subset of media production. These overarching—and occasionally conflicting—aims often pose a dilemma in distinguishing 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' from 'alternative' media at the same time of avoiding the reductive, and inflexibility of, binary oppositions drawn between the 'mainstream' and the 'alternative'. The field is characterised by what I see as a problematic tension which is present in the various attempts at theorising alternative media, namely the tension between 'formal specificity' and 'historical complexity'.

Clearly the problem begins as a disciplinary one, inasmuch that alternative media circumscribes a particular area of study on the basis of it existing as a specifiable object in the world. The question that goes begging is 'what' is it precisely about 'alternative' media that is different from its putative antipode, 'mainstream' media? 'What' divines the 'alternative' from 'prevailing' forms of media? Much rests on the answering of these questions. Nothing short of the existence of the sub-discipline, 'alternative media studies', depends on providing a definition that can disclose a phenomenal difference between media forms. Without the difference 'alternative media studies' would lose its reason for existing. Despite several attempts to challenge and, as it were, find 'alternative' terminologies, the contested concept of 'alternative media' still lingers, and remains predominant in the field. This section will dedicate both time and space to a surveying of the various ways in which 'alternative media' is described in the literature.

At its most anodyne, alternative media is defined as *any form of media which constitutes an alternative to, or positions itself in opposition to, widely available and consumed mass media products* (Waltz 2005, 2). A very general and formal definition, the inclusiveness of it is only a strength for as long as it is used as an intuitive, 'commonsensical' umbrella term. Here the problem is that the terminology contributes very little to any sustained and rigorous study of these phenomena (see also Comedia 1984, 95). Indeed, at this, the most basic definitional level, many have questioned the utility of the appellation, 'alternative', claiming that its nebulous nature means that what counts as an instance of 'alternative' media is easily abused by personal predilection and self-definition (see Abel 1997). John Downing describes the term 'alternative media'

as nearly oxymoronic, so that it appears that “[e]verything, at some point, is alternative to something else” (Downing 2001, ix).

The most commonly deployed solution within alternative media scholarship to the vagueness of the term has been to denounce vague definitions and conceive of ‘alternative media’ not merely as ‘alternative’, but more specifically as media positioned in opposition to dominant mass media—as *counter hegemonic*. This has the merit of excluding ‘apolitical’ media forms such as niched special interest media such as sport clubs newsletters) (see Downing 2001, xx).<sup>4</sup> More specific still, Michael Traber’s defines alternative media as media which aims to effectuate “change towards a more equitable social, cultural and economic whole in which the individual is not reduced to an object (of the media or the political powers) but able to find fulfilment as a total human being” (Traber 1985: 3, also in Atton 2002: 16).<sup>5</sup>

The definitions so far surveyed all make the same assumption, namely that in both form and content ‘alternative media’ breaks free from the status quo, presenting alternative resources antagonistic toward ‘mainstream’ and ‘official’ channels. The work of James Hamilton is in this regard conspicuous in the attempt he makes to complexify the prevailing way that ‘alternative media’ is understood. Notably, Hamilton sees congruence in the ‘ends’ of media production, whether alternative or mainstream. Both tend to ‘educate’ and ‘mobilise’ a general public in the sense of a particular movement or political cause. Hamilton continues by naming this as a particular hazard in putative instances of alternative media production:

[...] for a theory and practice of alternative media to be fully democratic, a major conceptual hurdle to be overcome is the habit of conflating ‘media’ with ‘communication’. If seen simply as a technological process of

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<sup>4</sup> For media scholars Nick Couldry and James Curran, for example, the counter hegemonic aspect of alternative media is mainly positioned in opposition to mainstream media, and defined as any “[m]edia production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations” (2003: 3). In a similar manner, Tim O’Sullivan has previously formulated a definition of alternative media as media forms which “avowedly reject or challenge established and institutionalised politics, in the sense that they all advocate change in society, or at least a critical reassessment of traditional values” (O’Sullivan 1994: 10)—later adding that the criteria for these media must follow “a democratic/collectivist process of production”, and show a “commitment to innovation or experimentation in form and/or content” (O’Sullivan 1994: 205, see also Atton 2002: 15).

<sup>5</sup> Within the category of ‘alternative media’ Traber advances a further distinction between *advocacy media* and *grassroots media*. Alternative *advocacy media* is any media project and product embodying values other than the established ones and which in the process introduces ‘new’ social actors (such as the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised etc), but is nevertheless produced ‘professionally’. *Grassroots media* is a more ‘thorough’ version of alternative media, according to which the media is produced by the people whom it aims to represent. Professionals may (or may not) be involved in these publications, but if so, only as advisers to support non-professionals to produce their own independent media (Traber 1985: 3; ibid Atton).

manufacture, distribution and consumption, media/communication then simply names the *use* of media products. The resulting implications are that communication is functionally equivalent to any other consumerist practice and that it is an optional add-on to society—at best, a means of conveying ideas about more basic and important processes—rather than essential to it (Hamilton 2000: 361).

Instead, Hamilton wishes to make a distinction between ‘media’ and ‘communication’, defining the former as “physical techniques of amplifying and making durable the expressions of individuals, thereby making them available to many more people than would otherwise be the case (Hamilton 2000: 361; Williams 1980). The latter, he argues, is “related to and dependent on technical processes of reproduction, amplification and fixing (making durable)”, but not equivalent to them. Instead, communication is described in terms of cultural processes, as “the creative making of a social order” (Hamilton 2000: 361). “Alternative media, therefore, must also enable alternative communication, which together make possible an articulation of a social order different from and often opposed to the dominant.” (Hamilton 2000: 362). “Furthermore, attention should focus on developing forms of alternative media/communication that (1) have barriers to participation—such as time, distance, money, and training—as low as possible; (2) strive for an everyday, spontaneous, non-corporate mode of organisation that require little if any capital outlay; and (3) should be part of other realms of life instead of divorced from them” (Hamilton 2000: 371). As such, they must be: *de-professionalised*, *de-capitalised* and *de-institutionalised* (Hamilton 2001a in Atton). The fulfilment of such laudable aims would assist in eliminating the separation between production and consumption; media becoming a fully popular means of cultural organisation and not as merely an individualised media product to consume (Hamilton 2000: 371; Benjamin 1934/1978; Downing 1984: 156, 351-54).

Hamilton offers a corrective to those guilty of overt ‘idealisation’ of the extent to which concrete instances of ‘alternative media’ break with (challenge) the ‘mainstream media’, pointing out how often ‘alternative’ forms of media have maintained certain practices and assumptions from dominant media forms. The outcome of this, however, is not a more nuanced understanding of how would-be ‘alternative’ media operate. Rather, Hamilton ups the ante further, by wishing to present a more pure conception of ‘alternative’ media—a normative schema (ideal and formal) as to how best ‘alternative media’ may realise itself.

The work of Downing, more contextual and descriptive than Hamilton, offers an improved definition of ‘alternative media’ which avoids both the risk of vacuous generality on the one hand and a specifiable purity as to what ‘alternative media’ ought to be, which rarely if ever exists in reality other than in the books of normative theorising. Thus, and in an attempt to offer a more workable terminology, Downing defines ‘alternative *radical* media’ as any “media, generally small-scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative

vision to *hegemonic* policies, priorities, and perspectives (2001, v; *emphasis added*)".<sup>6</sup>

Apart from this definition, which positions radical media (or radical alternative media) as distinctive from merely the 'alternative', Downing steers clear of any clear-cut definitions. Instead, he argues that: "[t]here is no instantaneous alchemy, no uncontested sociochemical procedure, that will divine in a flash or with definite results truly radical media from the apparently radical or even the nonradical" (2001, vii). This is already progress from Hamilton and others. Instead of resorting to simple binaries, Downing argues that *context* and *consequences* should be key to demarcate the radicality of a specific medium (Downing 2001, x). To give an example, Downing highlights the contextual importance of Truth's *cartes-de-visite* depicting her as a 'lady', a respectable woman of her times most often sitting down with her knitting placed on her lap (Downing 2001, vi, vii), often dressed in glasses and sometimes (notwithstanding her documented illiteracy) with a book strategically placed on her side table (vi, vii; Irvin Painter 1994; Israel's Perry 1994). While, when measured by contemporary standards, this representation of femininity could hardly be considered revolutionary, in the context of the mid- to late nineteenth century, it is to be read as a radical refusal to identify with her previous status of enslavement. This historical example therefore represents a potent re-articulation of black femininity.<sup>7</sup>

Chris Atton, author of the book *Alternative Media* (2002), has celebrated Downing for his nuanced and theoretically eclectic approach of drawing together theories of counter-hegemony, counter-publics and resistance, but sees, at the same time his approach as overemphasising the collective dimension of radical alternative media production, thereby constructing a theory suitable mainly for the study of the media production of social movements. By doing so, Atton argues, Downing ignores the fact that "hybridity and purity as problematics of alternative media are certainly accessible through an examination of new social movement media, but they can also be approached through media that accommodate themselves rather more cosily with mass media and mass consumption. (Atton 2002, 21)"

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<sup>6</sup> In a related manner, Waltz have stressed the need for further terminologies to complement the notion of 'alternative media', using instead the overlapping but (not equivalent) distinction between 'alternative' and 'activist' media. The latter would, she argues, involve encouraging readers to "get actively involved in social change" (2005, 3). Similarly to Downing's definition of radical media, activist media can include media promoting any ideological strand, ranging over the whole scale from 'left of left' to far right extremism (Waltz 2005, 3). In addition to this, however, Waltz concept of 'activist media' can—when the additional label of 'alternative' is left out—also include media which advocates views that supports what would generally be understood as 'mainstream' (such as voting) (2005, 3).

<sup>7</sup> In foregrounding context and consequences, Downing consequently downplays *intention* as a suitable criterion for the evaluation of radicality, on the grounds that effects of a specific medium are not so easily predictable by the media producers themselves (Downing 2001, x).

Atton (2002), therefore, proposes a theory of alternative media, considerably more far reaching than any of those assessed thus far. Building and expanding upon the work of Downing (1984; 2001) Stephen Duncombe (1997) and Robert Dickinson (1997) Atton constructs a theory which includes not only the more politically radical variants (or so called 'resistance media') but one which includes also media forms such as zines; video; music; mail-art and creative writing and, "hybrid forms of electronic communication" (ICTs)—forms of media production which are not necessarily in themselves aiming at radical social change. This theoretical perspective stresses "the transformatory potential of the media as reflexive instruments of communication practices in social networks", and focuses therefore on the *processual* and *relational* aspects of these media forms (Atton 2002, 7-8, see also 2004). Drawing on a wide range of discussions on alternative and radical media, Atton has constructed a 'typology of alternative and radical media', which I take the liberty of reproducing below:

1. Content (politically radical, socially/culturally radical); news values
2. Form—graphics, visual language; varieties of presentation and binding; aesthetics
3. Reprographic innovations/adaptations—use of mimeographs, IBM typesetting, offset litho, photocopiers
4. 'Distributive use' (Atton 1999b)—alternative sites for distribution, clandestine/invisible distribution networks, anti-copyright
5. Transformed social relations, roles and responsibilities—reader-writers collective organization, de-professionalization of e.g., journalism, printing, publishing
6. Transformed communication processes—horizontal linkages, networks

(Atton 2002, 27)

These six elements form the basis of Atton's model, with each element representing a dimension of alternative media. The first three elements in this typology specify 'products', the last three processes of communication ('*distributing*', '*writing*', '*printing*' rather than position, e.g. '*distributor*', '*writer*', '*printer*').

By looking at different dimensions in this manner, one does not have to ascribe or refrain from ascribing the value of 'radicality' to a particular media project, when in terms of both its form and content as well as its organisational factors it is riven with ambiguities and indiscernibles. Atton's procedure allows, in principle, for a more refined and anatomical study, sensitive to the inconsistencies of a given media project. Broken down into its composite

dimensions various aspects of a specific media form can be judged specifically as to the extent to which its constituent dimensions break with established practices, modes of presentation and organisational relations respectively. For example, there could be inter-dimensional discord: the same medium can be 'radical' in terms of its distribution but 'conservative' with regards to political contents. There could also be intra-dimensional ambivalences, so that *within* each dimension there are complexities to take into account that preclude easy categorisation. If, for example, a media form allowed professionals to write, but had a collective process of decision making (2003: 28). One also needs to weigh up both historical and geographical contingencies, and appreciate that the absence of radicality (at least according to the properties listed in the typology) need not necessarily prevent its overall radical/revolutionary potential. For a certain 'dimension' might not be 'available' for radicalisation in certain cultural and historical contexts. Attention to all this, would enable an analysis of the 'mixed radicalism' of alternative media—looking at hybridity rather than a set of characteristics to determine the 'purity' of these publications (2003: 29). This is a marked improvement on previous studies abovementioned. Atton's model tries to capture the *contents* of these media, as well as their *sociocultural contexts* and *modes of organisation*. In this manner, he wishes to provide a definition which includes not only their critical reactions against cultural stereotypes circulating in the mainstream, but also to create an alternative space which builds on different values (Atton 2002: 10). These media, he argues, provide forums for the "direct voices" of "subjugated knowledges" in the Foucauldian sense (1981: 81), offering a spaces for what Raymond Williams would call *democratic communication*, the "origins" of which are "genuinely multiple", affording the possibility of "true" communication and "active response" between all participants (Atton 2002, 9; Williams 1963: 304). In the context of feminist media studies, such a possibility might hold true for media forms using easily accessible and cheap techniques such as zine production and blogging. However it would be more difficult to sustain the argument for non-commercial but established feminist cultural magazines such as Swedish *Bang* which are not free of exclusionary 'agenda setting' (even if this 'agenda' is, indeed, based on different principles than the ones found in mainstream media).

Atton states that the ultimate 'test' of a theory of alternative media would, in addition to its explanatory ability, be its aptitude to capture diversity in the phenomena under study (Atton 2002, 9). The question is whether Atton's theory itself passes this test? Despite its break away from a *rigid* dichotomisation, Atton remains faithful to the basic grammar of 'alternative media' studies, which as a consequence imposes certain restrictions on both the plasticity and durability of his proposed theory vis-à-vis concrete instances of media production. A set of normative claims infuse his typology, founding the indicators by which Atton measures the radicality of a given media form. Focussed, still, on normative judgements and evaluative criteria between radicality and non-radicality, Atton himself reintroduces the very binary opposition he wishes to avoid, preventing, ultimately, the analysis of the complex relationships of interconnectedness between various media forms. Even though it is true that much feminist media



production has indeed managed to fill the various criteria as stated by above mentioned authors (see DiCenzo and Ryan 2007), such a dichotomous logic—even in Atton's weakened version—would be detrimental for the study of feminist media production, unable, as it is to capture the diversity of these practices. Instead, study of feminist media production needs to take into account a varied range of practices, or put otherwise, analyses of feminist media production need to show an ability to capture media which, to paraphrase Clemencia Rodriguez, are 'legal, a-legal [...], illegal, pirate, commercial, non-commercial, government funded, planned, spontaneous, professional, amateur, local, regional, diasporic, mono-lingual, bilingual, multilingual, daily, weekly, monthly, once-in-a-while" (1992, 64). In order to achieve this, we will now turn to scholars of alternative media who, in their move beyond binary thinking have turned to poststructuralist accounts of textual production, politics, democracy and subjectivity. The next section will introduce and critically assess the recent development of the Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of 'rhizomatics' as a way to better understand the nuances of alternative media production.

### **Connecting Feminist Media: The Rhizomatic Alternative**

Instead of, and in a response to, the aforementioned attempts to distinguish between more oppositional, radical or activist media forms, Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's have formulated a theory which seeks to further the move from a rigid economy of oppositions. Building on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, which juxtaposes the rhizomatic (non-linear, nomadic, connective) with the hierarchical tendencies of arborescent, or tree-like, systems (linear, unitary, with fixed points of origin and sub-divisions) (1988, 3-25), Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier argues that this metaphor does better justice to 'alternative' media systems by accenting their contingent character in contrast to the more 'arborescent' and rigidly organised mainstream media (Bailey et al 2008, 29). Similarly, the notion of the rhizome has previously been employed as a perspective to shed light on the riot grrrl movement, arguing that their zine networks, websites and distros as typically rhizomatic, stressing their character of an "underground culture multiplying via lines of connection that are not controlled from a primary location", but rather as a polymorphous de-centralised movement without leaders, spokeswomen or a unified political agenda attached to its name (Leonard 2007, see also Piano 2002). In Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's understanding of rhizomatic media, however, the emphasis lies not primarily in the 'subterranean' nature of such rhizomatic networks. Rather, I would argue that its analytical strength lies in its ability to explore their elusiveness and contingency *as well as* possible interconnections and linkages with the state and the market (2008, 27). As such, this approach has proven useful to understand alternative media which does not easily fit into models of counter-hegemony. It extends the possible analyses of feminist zine production so as to do better justice to zines which do not fully embrace the prototypical counter-hegemonic DIY-ethos of zine culture (see Duncombe 1997).

Although the majority of existing feminist zines may subscribe to the antagonistic ethos of anti-commercialism, anti-elitism and anti-professionalism, far from all of them do. A recent case study of the Central and Eastern European *Plotki Femzine*<sup>8</sup> provides an instructive example of a media project which, while motivated partially by the knowledge of existing grrrl zines also have employed non-prototypical strategies of media production. Whilst the first edition of *Plotki Femzine* was a cheaply produced photocopied zine, the editorial team later successfully applied for funding from the German-Polish Youth Foundation in order to print a somewhat more magazine like second edition, thereby negating the assumption that zine production is inherently anarchist and anti-state (Chidgey, Gunnarsson Payne & Zobl, forthcoming). Similarly, Swedish feminist magazine *Bleck* initially employed the DIY-format of the zine predominantly out of financial necessity, in order to later be re-launched as a more costly magazine, which in turn assisted the editor Linna Johansson in establishing herself as a well known columnist in *Expressen*, one of the major tabloid newspapers in Sweden—again disproving that zine production is inevitably and always a consequence of a deeply seated aversion to capitalism and its mainstream media (Gunnarsson Payne 2006). In light of these ambivalences the concept of rhizomatic media has the asset of steering clear of simple, somewhat metaphysically infused, oppositions between ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the relationship between the rhizomatic and the arbolic is not one of mutual exclusiveness. Instead: “[a] new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch. Or else it is a microscoping element of the root-three, a radicle, that gets rhizome production going (Deleuze & Guattari 1988, 15).” The analytical value of this statement is one which should not be underestimated—but one which has yet been downplayed both in Leonard’s and Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier’s work. This is unfortunate and calls for further investigation, as it offers a much needed analytical possibility which manages to avoid romanticised ideas of ‘alternative’ media as *inherently* democratic and radical, as well as demonising and simplified notions of the ‘mainstream’ as completely devoid of any potential for the production of counter-narratives—thereby offering a potentially fruitful solution to the aforementioned tension between ‘specificity’ and ‘complexity’ in alternative media theory. Although I would agree that the former tend to be more ‘rhizomatic’ in character, and the latter more ‘arbolic’, this impasse allows for analyses of, for example, how ‘arbolic’ hierarchies can, and do, form within alternative media frameworks, and, subsequently, how journalist practices occasionally manage to subvert hegemonic meanings and instigate social change.

### **Tactical Media and Hegemonic Appropriations: Culture Jamming as Rhizomatic Media**

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<sup>8</sup> This study, which is currently undergoing peer-review, is conducted by Red Chidgey, Elke Zobl and myself, and is part of the larger research project *Feminist Media Production in Europe*.

The term 'tactical media'<sup>9</sup> has been coined as a way of expressing a position outside of both mainstream and alternative media, or, as David Garcia calls it, "a 'no-man's land' on the border of experimental media—art, journalism and political activism—a zone that was, in part, made possible by the mass availability of a powerful and flexible new generation of media tools" (2007, 6). As such, the recent developments of tactical media have been inextricably linked to the expansion of new ICTs. The growth of tactical media should, however, not be understood as a simple adaptation of movement strategies into the 'information age'. Instead, their positioning is one of refutation in relation to not only the presumed 'objectivity' of journalist practices and the elitism and person cults of the art world, but also of the disciplinary and instrumentalist strategies of traditional social movements (Garcia 2007, 6). Importantly, the term 'tactical' alludes to Michel de Certeau's distinction between 'strategy' and 'tactics', the latter referring to the art of the subordinated, as opposed to strategies being implemented from a locus of domination. Tactics, in this sense, consists of parasitic appropriations, subverting the meaning of the signifier, which makes techniques such as 'subvertising'—the practice of parodying commercial or political advertisements by, for example altering its text or images—prime examples of the 'culture jamming'<sup>10</sup> of tactical media.

Exemplary of tactical media production would be the work of *Princess Hijab*, whose provocative street art includes 'hijabizing' adverts—painting black hijabs on commercial adverts for products such as jewellery and make-up. In her manifesto she states, albeit obliquely, what could be interpreted as a feminist statement: "Princess Hijab knows that *L'Oréal* and *Dark&Lovely* have been killing her little by little. She feels that the veil is no longer that white. She feels contaminated." She declares her influence by "movements such as Adbusters", but argues that "since 9/11, things have changed" and that she therefore has chosen to subvert images in a non-American way. She claims to "know all about *visual terrorism*" (emphasis added), and rearticulates, thereby, dominant cultural representations of the Muslim terrorist, as well as the hijab, which so often in the Western context has served as the signifier of women's oppression *per se*. Her street art and manifesto subverts the meaning of the capitalist beauty industry by pointing its messages out as 'lethal', as a threat to her life in a

<sup>9</sup> Although tactical media predominantly is discussed as a 1990s phenomenon, tactics of cultural and political 'jamming' is not an entirely new. Its genealogy can be traced back to, for example, techniques of *détournement* (Debord 1959/2006) and *radical bricolages* (Hebdige 1979, 103) of the Situationist and punk movements, both of involves re-using and re-articulating elements of the dominant culture so as to subvert their meaning, thereby rendering their contingent character visible and shows how 'things could be otherwise' (see Bailey et al 2008, 138-9). In the context of feminist media production, such examples of jamming would be represented by the well known examples of eclectic Riot Grrrl zines, commonly rearticulating the 'cut-and-paste' technique of punk to creating dissonant feminist collages mixing elements from both elite, popular- and movement cultures.

<sup>10</sup> sa Wettergren has defined culture jamming as "symbolic form of protest located within a field of anti-corporate activism here tensions between democratic principles and the undemocratic principles of the 'free' market are articulated as pivotal contemporary political conflicts". As such, culture jamming includes any groups or individuals "who practice symbolic process against the expansion and domination of corporations and the logic of the market in public and private spaces", by targeting characteristically capitalist symbols such as adverts and logos (Wettergren 2009, 2).

symbolic sense (killing her little by little), as well as an epithet used by dominant culture to demonise the Muslim Other. Despite these strong political statements, Princess Hijab does not position herself within any political or religious movement, but states quite clearly her independence and dedication to art only:

"And don't forget, she acts upon her own free will. She is not involved in any lobby or movement be it political, religious or to do with advertising. In fact, the Princess is an insomniac-punk. She is the leader of an artistic fight, nothing else".

The brief example of 'hijabizing' makes a strong case for the rhizomatic approach to tactical media, particularly with its use of the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of *detrterritorialization*, shedding light on the process of undermining the authority of corporate advertising by tactically turning its own rhetorical tropes and imagery against it, and thereby destabilising their meaning. Cultural and political jamming, however, should not be understood as inherently radical modes of operating. On the contrary, what is used as tactics of subordinated groups and oppositional movements can also be used as 'strategies' (in de Certeau's sense) of the dominant. Processes of detrterritorialisation, in this sense, are always inextricably tied to *reterrterritorialisation*, a process demonstrated by Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's discussion of the ways in which corporate companies deploy jamming techniques for marketing purposes, and political parties appropriate techniques of 'jamming' in their election campaigns, as a way of mocking their political competition—in a way that presumably functions as an effective strategy in appealing to younger and 'trendier' sections of the electorate (2008, 143-147). In a feminist context, the conceptualisation of de- and reterrterritorialisation would be particularly useful in understanding the relations of reciprocity between would-be 'alternative' and 'mainstream' socio-political messages. To give some brief examples: the ways in which the Riot Grrrl slogan 'Girl Power!' has been reterrterritorialised by 'postfeminist' commercial products such as women's magazines and popular music (i.e. *Spice Girls*), and feminist jamming tactics such as 'Revolution. Because you're worth it!' (an adaptation of the cosmetics company *L'Oréal* slogan employed by Swedish feminist zine *Radarka*) (Gunnarsson Payne 2006, 69).

I would advance that a rhizomatic approach to alternative media shows a flexibility in its theoretical apparatus that is otherwise lacking in much of the literature that comprises the field of alternative media studies. The perspective offers a compelling framework for the study of the tactics, processes and connections within and between feminist media production. However, this is not to say that the approach is without its limitations. Its strength resides in its understanding of the processual dimension of media production—and an understanding that furthermore does not reduce the complexity of such processes. It is therefore particularly informative in obviating the 'how' of these connections. What it does not offer is any explanatory purchase on the 'why's' of

these connections and processes. Devoid of any notion of the subject as it is, this mode of theorisation, consequently, also lacks any notion of political subjectivity and the more 'strategic' aspects of the building of alliances between struggles. It might even be said, then, that the gains of expunging 'alternative media studies' of the dichotomies implicitly or explicitly present in the more 'counter hegemonic' approaches subsequently has carried with it the loss of explanatory value as to how these media function as crucial sites for the constitution of political identification. In the study of feminist media production, this latter aspect cannot be underestimated. On the contrary, any rigorous analysis of feminist media production needs to take seriously the ways in which 'merely' gendered identities are *transformed* into 'feminist' identities. I will now like to sketch out a further contribution to the field that at least begins to make incursions into these questions, and that thereby will I think prove an invaluable resource to any future study of feminist media production. Leaning on the important work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, two notable political thinkers, Clemencia Rodriguez has made an important intervention in making explicit the political operations at play in media production. Her approach has the merit of not being content, in dichotomic fashion, to suppose that all 'alternative media' is normatively 'good' and its mainstream antipode 'bad'. She argues that the ascription of such value judgements must be suspended at any analytical level, because it is at the political level—that is, at the level of active participation in media forms—that these normative judgements gain their importance, tied as these judgements are to the political investments that subjects make, at a particular moment in time and space, in the process of media production. Political identifications are produced from a sense of what one is struggling against—an 'other', a that-which-'we'-are-not. Here I would add the corollary that no sooner does the construction of the 'other', the 'against-whom' that one is struggling, alter than the borders between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' are redrawn once more.

### **Political Identification and the Notion of Citizen Media**

Rodriguez's starting point is the supposition that social subjects identify in multiple, contingent and heterogeneous ways, constituted by an assembly of 'subject positions' (Mouffe 1992c, 372). Social categories such as 'woman' are produced through complex intersections of various discourses and institutions, and the subordination of women cannot be understood to be constituted by a single cause or underlying essence. From this destabilised notion of the subject it follows that one cannot any longer view any member of a historically subordinated group as belonging to a certain 'interest group' with *predetermined* interests and needs (Rodriguez 1992, 18). Media representations cannot be said to represent the 'true' interests of any certain groups—whether they belong to the 'mainstream' or the 'alternative', or regardless of whether alternative media are 'advocacy' or 'grassroots' in Michel Traber's sense of the terms (Traber 1985, in Atton 2002, 16-17). Rather, from this perspective, interests do not precede political action, but are constituted in political acts. As such, alternative media

plays a crucial role in the constitution and negotiation of political interests as well as collective identities. Mediated representation of 'interest groups' is, then, seen as a constitutive practice, actually producing the very interests they claim to represent. Instead of risking to reproduce essentialist notions of 'women's writing', this perspective allows for feminist identities not to be revealed by feminist media production, but the latter to be part of producing them.

It is telling that Rodriguez dismisses the terminology of 'alternative media' altogether, arguing that it problematically predetermines these media as necessarily in opposition to the mainstream media, and thereby "limits the potential of these media to their ability to resist the alienating power of mainstream media" and claims that this "approach blinds our understanding of all other instances of change and transformation brought about by these media" (Rodriguez 1992, 20). In its place Rodriguez proposes the formulation of 'citizen media', an idea entailing two fundamental properties. First that a collective enactment of citizenship through active interventions and transformations of dominant media; ii.) that these collective practices of citizenship takes place through the contestation of social codes, legitimised identities and institutionalised social relations, and; iii.) that these interventions have an empowering—and, as a result of this empowerment, transformative—effect on the community in which it is located (2001, 20). In her notion of citizen media, Rodriguez stresses Mouffe and McClure's extensive understanding of the political, extending the political from the narrow definition of "juridical demands upon the state" to also include a "quotidian politics—a politics which extends the terrain of political contestation to the everyday enactment of social practices and the routine reiteration of cultural representations" (McClure 1992, 123). In feminist terms, this 'quotidian-ness' of politics have been long known and articulated in the famous 'second-wave' slogan "The personal is political!", so often reiterated in feminist political manifestations, relating to crucial feminist issues such as sexual violence, heteronormativity, reproductive rights and issues about body image.

Contemporary feminist media production can be said to embrace this 'quotidian' dimension of politics, not least in relation to media forms such as zines and blogs. Their common concern with producing personal narratives is something which on occasion has however been criticised by older feminists on the grounds of its apparent individualism diluting the collectivist spirit of a feminist politics. British sociologist, Nina Wakeford, for example, expresses in a newspaper interview an apprehension about the place of blogs in the feminist movement. Whilst she concedes that they might be useful to 'spark debates', she also states that their role in activism is obscure. Comparing feminist bloggers with the pastimes of feminist organisation, she is questioning whether "women can affect public policy through blogging", and rhetorically asks: "Just who are they representing?"

The value of feminist media production such as zine writing and blogging would, however, not lie in their potential to affect political policies, but rather in the contestation of symbolic codes and rearticulation of everyday experiences. Many

feminist zines, for example, offer personal accounts of negative feelings towards one's own body, thereby de-naturalising the beauty standards of commercial girl's and women's magazines:

why do i cry every time i look in the mirror? why do i look at stupid magazines ad wish that i looked like that? why is there so much fucken emphasis placed on looking "pretty"? i am not pretty and i dont know that i want to be. i just don't want to hate myself anymore for not being the delicate little flower that i am told to be. why does the media try so hard to dictate to us what is and what isnt beautiful. [...] I am so sick of hating myself. i dont want to cry in the mirror anymore. (*Revolution Rising #1*, in Kearney 2006, 181, *spelling in original*)

As Mary Celeste Kearney argues, such personal accounts are, indeed, clearly oppositional against capitalist and patriarchal media. Indeed, the latter is clearly constituted here as the constitutive outside of grrrrl zine culture—meaning that this 'outside' would not only be 'different' from feminist media production, but it's radical 'other', or 'enemy', positioned in an *antagonistic* relationship to feminist *per se*. From Rodriguez's avowed Mouffian perspective (as shared by Ernesto Laclau) antagonism lies at the heart of any politicisation of the social. It is precisely this dimension of antagonism that is underemphasised in the rhizomatic perspective.<sup>11</sup> This antagonistic relationship takes us back somewhat, showing us, as it were, the loss of an analytical strength of the counter hegemonic approaches, surveyed in the first part of this paper. From the anti-essentialist perspective of Laclau and Mouffe, however, and unlike more traditional perspectives, there is no *inherent* opposition between even the most unequal subject positions (such as 'men' and 'women'); rather, the *antagonistic* relationship occurs, if and only if the subordinated group opposes the unequal relationship, by contesting it and de-naturalising it (Laclau 1990, 6; Laclau & Mouffe 1985, 122; Mouffe 1993, 77). With its strong anti-essentialist ontology, it avoids any pitfalls of reproducing any metaphysical ideals of any inherent 'female' way of writing, or of any determinist idea of universal interests of 'all women' (see Rhodes 2005, 10-23). Instead, this perspective takes into account how feminist identities are constituted through the practice of media production, and how these identities are necessarily historical, contextual and processual. This ability to study not only the 'hows' of processes of interconnection between feminism and other various struggles, but also the 'whys', the conditions of

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<sup>11</sup> It should be mentioned, however, that precisely this lack is acknowledged by Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, who have, then, chosen to solve this problem by regarding the anti-essentialist notion of the subject as formulated by Laclau and Mouffe with a rhizomatic approach to alternative media. Although this attempt pinpoints important deficits in previous theories as well as turn our attention to the importance of a theory of political subjectivity, the ways in which this is done in their work is accompanied with a number of incommensurable ontological presuppositions which needs to be explored in more depth and further elaborated upon. Unfortunately, the length and scope of this essay does not provide sufficient space for such interventions.

possibility for feminist identification and the construction of 'chains of equivalence' between movements in an antagonistic relationship to an 'oppressive other' is crucial in understanding the ways in which instances of feminist media continuously produce spaces where gendered identities and relations are transformed into sites of antagonist struggle.

### **Concluding remarks**

There has been something of a blind spot in alternative media studies to date. The limited number of sustained engagements with the rich and variegated history of feminist media is surprising given its historical prominence over the last two centuries. The question that I wished to raise was that given the lack of attention about feminist media production can it be said of the conceptual tools available that there is an essential difficulty in teasing out the specificities and nuances of instances of feminist media? The intention was not necessarily to propose that there is something 'different' about feminist initiatives which set them apart from other modes of media production, as if an engagement with feminist media projects requires a specifically feminist theoretical perspective. Rather, the aim was to move away from theorisations of alternative media with too broad and formal conceptions, under which too many concrete examples can be subsumed and made identical to one another, to the detriment of paying attention to the differences between instances of alternative media as well as the tensions and inconsistencies internal to a particular media project. A more dynamical, as opposed to a static, understanding of media production was sought. An assessment of 'alternative media studies' reveals a wide ranging set of theoretical engagements. Ultimately each can be brought back to a common denominator of wishing to give the idea of 'alternative media' a conceptual and phenomenal specificity that overdraws the distinction between alternative and mainstream forms of media. The vicissitudes and complexities of actually existing feminist media projects are not best served by such hard-edged analytical distinctions. Examples abound within the feminist movement itself that would caution against the use of such metaphysically infused distinctions. Both Deleuzo-Guattarian and Laclau-Mouffian insights might be better harnessed to provide a more durable, a more empirically responsive theory, far more sensitive to the contingencies of the process of media production. The work of Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier as well as Rodriguez were referred to as examples that have actively developed these insights into the process of theory construction about media forms. Each departs from the attempt to define what constitutes an instance of 'alternative media' from outside the site of its particular manifestation, but at the same time brings to bear with it a set of theoretical tools that do not merely set out to describe a particular case of media production but seek to explain the processes by which media comes to be produced in a given socio-political situation. What each of these scholars advance can only be just the start, however. As far as the successes of their operationalisations of certain poststructuralist presuppositions, further advances needs to be made to fully meet the requirements of rigorous study of feminist



media production. Importantly, I would suggest that particular theoretical consideration needs to be paid to the constitution of feminist identities, furthering particularly not only the ways in which alliances and coalitions are made, but also the role feminist media production plays in the constitution of collective feminist identities. A significant, but hitherto overlooked dimension of alternative media production—and one which should be placed centre stage of feminist media production—is the central role of feminist media production for affective investment in certain feminist grammars, aesthetics and political prioritisations. Such explorations would need to combine the theoretical insights of poststructuralist approaches to alternative media and nuanced conceptions of political subjectivity with thorough further empirical research of both audiences and producers (to the extent such a distinction can be made) of feminist media.

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**URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/payne.pdf>

## **Wikipedia: community or social movement?**

**Piotr Konieczny**

### **Abstract**

*In recent years a new realm for study of political and sociological phenomena has appeared, the Internet, contributing to major changes in our societies during its relatively brief existence. Within cyberspace, organizations whose existence is increasingly tied to this virtual world are of interest to social scientists. This study will analyze the community of one of the largest online organizations, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia with millions of volunteer members. Wikipedia was never meant to be a community, yet it most certainly has become one. This study asks whether it is something even more –whether it is an expression of online activism, and whether it can be seen as a social movement organization, related to one or more of the Internet-centered social movements industries (in particular, the free and open-source software movement industry).*

### **Introduction**

Since the very beginnings of our civilization societies have been based on local communities, which continue to play a crucial role in the survival of our species (Adler and Wolfe 1968:26). On the other hand, social movements, many of which have emerged from various communities (Dillon 2003:320), are a fairly recent phenomenon. They are a little over two centuries old (Tilly 2004:147) and are still evolving, with their future is uncertain (Tilly 2004:158).

The development and spread of a new communication network, the Internet, has drastically affected both traditional communities and social movements. Barely 35 years since it was invented, the Internet is now used by over a billion people throughout the world (World 2006, Mason 2008:164). An increasing number of communities and organizations have adopted the Internet as a tool; what's more, for some it has become a primary method of interaction with other social actors (Diani 2000; Earl 2006; Garrett 2006; Lovink 2003:85; Harwood and McIntosh 2004:218; Smith and Kollock 1999:23; Lessig 2004:25; Pickerill 2003).

This raises a question: Can an online community facilitate the emergence of a new social movement? To answer this, I have chosen to look at Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. It may not be representative of the entire Internet, yet it is one of the largest and most rapidly growing online communities, and is related to several social movements, including the Free and Open Source Software Movement, Open Publishing Movement, and Free Culture Movement). It is a good example of what Benkler (2006:62) refers to as "commons-based peer production". My analysis of Wikipedia offers valuable insights about new trends

in online activism, which for the purpose of our discussion I define as any social action expressed on the Internet aiming to bring about social change.

The aim of this article is to establish whether the millions of volunteers who created and run Wikipedia might be defined as 1) a community and/or 2) a social movement. The following discussion will begin by introducing Wikipedia and illustrating that it is a social phenomenon that goes far beyond being just "an online encyclopedia". I will then prove that it is indeed acceptable to call it a community, building on both a classic definition (1988:279, 2001:xvii-xviii) and a modern discourse about virtual communities in cyberspace (Harwood and McIntosh 2004:209, Wuthnow 1994:2). Finally, I will analyze whether Wikipedia is a social movement, testing whether it fits some established definitions (Tarrow 1998:4, Staggenborg 1998, Zald and McCarthy 1999:1-2, Tilly 2004:3-4) and introducing a discourse related to the Free and Open Source Movement (Kling 1995, Kling 1996:40-59, Kling and Iacono 1996:85-105, Lehman 2004, Ekbja and Gesser 2004). (A certain caveat is in order: current mainstream definitions of the social movement are still evolving to be able to fully come to terms with the new empirical phenomena in cyberspace).

As I will illustrate further, Wikipedia stands on the outskirts of what would usually be considered a social movement. Whether it is an indicator that determines the future trend, an outlier, or perhaps not a social movement at all is left open for further debate. For the time being, Wikipedia is a case that offers insights into both the unique virtual community and the social movement process.

## **What is Wikipedia?**

Wikipedia was founded in 2001 and quickly became the world's largest encyclopedia, steadily climbing to the Top 10 of the world's most visited websites and showing no signs of losing momentum (Alexa 2009). Wikipedia was, at its inception, first and foremost an encyclopedia (Sanger 2005; Wales 2005b). It has, however, long ago outgrown that description. Its evolution has surprised even its own creator, Jimbo Wales, who admitted that the site has become more than just an encyclopedia, and is now "a community" (Wales 2006) and even "a grand social experiment" (Wales 2005a).

Wikipedia's popularity and its number of articles, now approaching three million in its English language edition alone, are indicative of its success. Yet the number of volunteers who wrote them (commonly referred to as editors or Wikipedians) is by no means less significant. The existence of these volunteers (nobody is ever paid to write for Wikipedia), solely responsible for creating Wikipedia's content, is a key feature distinguishing Wikipedia from other encyclopedias, a feature that enables us to discuss concepts of community and online activism.

The barriers to becoming an editor are low, with the most significant one being the ability to master the MediaWiki software (Viégas, Wattenberg and McKeon 2007; Wikipedia Usability Initiative 2009). Anybody can potentially become an

editor of Wikipedia, simply by spending a few seconds registering an account. English Wikipedia contributors hail from various countries, making Wikipedia's membership base extremely diverse and certainly multinational (Collaborative Creativity Group 2009). During December 2005, English Wikipedia had about 23,000 editors who made at least five edits that month and a more active group of about 3,000 editors who made more than 100 edits in the same period. A year later, those numbers doubled (Wikimedia 2008). As of late 2009 Wikipedia has had over 10,000,000 registered editors, more than the population of many countries. Even though only a few percents of them can be considered active, this translates into hundreds of thousands of people active *every day*.

The most surprising thing about Wikipedia is that it actually works: the wiki concept has been described as counterintuitive (Lih 2004) and even bizarre (Gillmor 2004:148) because, unlike in traditional common sense collaborative projects, in their basic form the wikis provide no gate-keeping function to control what is being published. Wikipedias allow all of their editors to vote and voice their opinions, and empower them to change the content of articles and organizational policies to an extent unthinkable in traditional organizations (Kolbitsch and Mauer 2006; Viégas, Wattenberg and McKeon 2007). Wikipedia's governance is a puzzle; characterizations of Wikipedia's governance range from anarchy (in the sense of its political philosophy of social change), on the one hand, (Reagle 2005) and democracy (Lebkowsky and Ratcliffe 2005:163-167) or dictatorship, on the other (Gillmor 2004:149); John Holloway and his collaborators (2005) called it a "hybrid model of democracy, meritocracy, aristocracy and monarchy".

Although wikis look fragile at first glance, they are in fact very resilient (Leuf and Cunningham 2001; Gillmor 2004:150). What allows this almost completely open editing system to function? The first part of the answer lies with the bazaar model of knowledge creation that wikis have adopted (Raymond 1999). This model follows the Linus Law, which states that if enough people are looking for errors, they will find them all. Wikis track all changes and store every version of an article edited, which means that given a sufficient number of active editors, all malicious edits (vandalism) will be quickly reverted. Because of such design it actually takes more effort to vandalize a page than to revert an article back to an acceptable version.

Therefore, in the wiki world actions that benefit the project are much more effective than vandalism which means that rational editors will prefer to do constructive work—and rational vandals will move to other, easier to vandalize communities. This makes wikis, despite their openness, quite vandal-proof, and ensures that the "fixing broken windows" mentality is even more effective in their online world than in offline reality (Kelling and Coles 1996, McGrady 2009). This asymmetry benefits the members of the wiki communities and is crucial in allowing quality content to emerge from a seemingly chaotic environment (Lih 2004).

Wikipedia's style and tone is formal, resembling, at least superficially, traditional encyclopedic content (Lih 2004, Emigh and Herring 2005). Yet

Wikipedia is more than just an encyclopedia. The Wikipedia project has also become the largest example of participatory journalism to date, evolving or copying practices similar to those of the mainstream media (Lih 2004). Although Wikipedia's MediaWiki software has allowed it to become what it is today, this social software technology is at best only half of the answer to what makes Wikipedia 'tick' (Leuf and Cunningham 2001; Sanger 2005). It seems that other social forces are at work here, forces that foster communication and collaboration with other editors and drive the development of software in the directions that the editors want; no software, no technology, can be the sole factor in creating such a social institution.

### **Is Wikipedia a community?**

Technological advances have penetrated deep into our society. From the invention of pen and paper, information and communication technologies, coupled with effects of growing literacy, have been shaping our lives (Goody & Watt 1963, Tarrow 1998:132). Those tools of change are technological but their results are social (Lovink 2003:85; Lessig 2004:7). Not only are we getting closer to McLuhan's proverbial "global village" (McLuhan 1962:21), but we have created an entirely new plane for social interactions, the cyberspace, defined as: "not simply an array of communication devices, but a new, technologically determined location that can be populated by new communities and host extensions of current ones in electronic outposts" (Harwood and McIntosh 2004:209).

The term 'community', as many other important social constructs, has evolved to have multiple meanings (Harwood and McIntosh 2004:210). I will adopt the definition of Ferdinand Tönnies (1988:279, 2001:xvii-xviii), that of the community (*Gemeinschaft*) as a group, regulated by customs and traditions, in which individuals are concerned more about the group than about their self-interest. Communities have been a part of human culture since the very beginnings of the history of mankind but the advent of cyberspace is forcing a major change of what we define as a community. Local, geographically constricted social relations are becoming less important (Adler 1988, Wellman 1998). The community is now frequently understood in non-spatial terms. Tönnies wrote about families and local communities, but later included globally dispersed religious communities among his examples, discussing community building through mental processes (1988:34:218). Wuthnow (1994:2) wrote about communities formed by small groups centered around "the private, largely invisible ways in which individuals chose to spend a portion of their free time"; such groups are increasingly present online (Harwood and McIntosh 2004:211). Empirical evidence shows that over 41.5% of Americans aged 18-24 find a "sense of community" online, and it is likely that the number is going to increase with time (Harwood and McIntosh 2004:222). One need to look no further than the increasingly popular Facebook and MySpace sites for a proof for the most popular modern examples.



Although Wikipedia is a fairly recent addition to cyberspace, it has been identified as a community in one of the earliest academic papers discussing this organization (Ciffolilli 2003) and since then it has been repeatedly described as one of the most vibrant virtual communities (Gillmor 2004:148-149, Lebkowsky and Ratcliffe 2005:163-167).

Though Wikipedia stops short of two hundred millions of users Facebook had in January 2009, it should not be surprising that the sheer number of over ten millions Wikipedians would find a "sense of community" as well. Yet those numbers are not the only reason; Sanger (2005) noted that the Wikipedia community dates to the first few days of the project, back in 2001, when the editors were creating the basics of Wikipedia's policies.

The wiki technology itself creates a friendly environment for the communities (Lih 2004; Bryant, Forte and Bruckman 2005; Emigh and Herring 2005; Kuznetsov 2006; Viégas, Wattenberg and McKeon 2007). It fosters the creation of a community by allowing its users to easily communicate with others (Kuznetsov 2006). It is through interactions with other editors that Wikipedians "begin to feel needed by the Wikipedia community" (Bryant, Forte and Bruckman 2005; Kuznetsov 2006). Over time those interactions give rise to a culture based upon customs and traditions—as most Wikipedia editors knowingly rely on the body of knowledge, policies and tools developed by others (Rafaeli, Hayat and Arier 2005; Sunstein 2006:152-153, Viégas, Wattenberg and McKeon 2007). As McGrady (2009) clarifies, the wiki technology by itself is not what makes the project work, nor can Wikipedia's success be attributed to a random outcome of the work of millions of individuals. It is the coordinated work of individuals, sharing similar goals, customs and traditions—which they have developed and agreed on themselves—that brings order to the "anybody can edit" chaos.

With regards to its governance and power structure, Wikipedia is mostly a self-organizing (adhocratic) community (Viégas, Wattenberg and McKeon 2007, Konieczny 2009). Although initially Jimbo Wales and some other early editors were influential in setting the original direction and guiding policies, the community now operates effectively with very little managerial intervention (Malone 2004:45). Members of the Wikipedia community perform various tasks, operating together under an unwritten social contract (Murdock 2004). Hundreds of them are democratically elected and recognized with titles like developers, stewards, bureaucrats, and administrators, each of which allows access to special tools. For example, administrators, who form the largest such group, are given the ability to prevent articles from being edited, delete articles, or block editors from editing—but the limits of their power are set in accordance with the policy designed and modifiable by the community. Overall, it appears that the Wikipedia model of governance is highly decentralized, and successfully prevents creation of oligarchies (Malone 2004:45, Konieczny 2009).

Further, on Wikipedia, any editor can create an organization dedicated to improving any aspect of the project; there is no need for permission or registration. Anybody can decide on the meaning of 'improvement'; if others

agree and join the project, it prospers. If not, the project becomes inactive and disappears. The ease with which one can do so resulted in the present situation, in which in addition to thousands of Wikipedia's volunteer officials, there are literally hundreds of formal, semi-formal and informal organizations gathering Wikipedians to perform various voluntary tasks—or just express their allegiance to a certain point of view. Such complexity and richness of those organizations certainly deserves a dedicated research project in itself. A brief selection of Wikipedia's organizations presented below illustrates the complexity of Wikipedia's community:

- *The Arbitration Committee (ArbCom)* is an elected body that acts as Wikipedia's court and has the power to permanently ban disruptive editors from editing.
- *Mediation Cabal* tries to resolve disputes before they appear before the ArbCom.
- *Counter-Vandalism Unit* and *Recent Changes Patrol* specialize in reverting malicious changes monitors.
- *Guild of Copy Editors* and *Good Article Reviewers* concentrate on improving each article's content.
- *Welcoming Committee* takes care of welcoming newly registered editors to the project.
- *Wikipedia Signpost* is the online Wiki newspaper.
- *Regional Noticeboards* gather Wikipedians associated with specific geographical locations or languages.
- Other noticeboards like *Biographies of living persons noticeboard*, *Reliable sources noticeboard* or *Fringe theories noticeboard* provide places for centralized discussions of more general issues.
- *Wikidemia* or *Wikimedia Research Council* are dedicated to fostering and even studying the community
- In addition, hundreds of *WikiProjects* provide places for those interested in particular issues (for example, WikiProject Sociology, WikiProject University of Pittsburgh or WikiProject History of Poland).

This list offers a brief glimpse into the community that Wikipedia has become. Wikipedia has even evolved its own internal "philosophies", with hot debates raging between proponents of *Inclusionism* ("information should be liberally added to Wikipedia") and *Deletionism* ("only information that fulfills rigorous standards should be added to Wikipedia"), to name just two of more than a dozen factions that are now in existence (Meta 2009). At the beginning of 2009, Wikipedia's own "Category:Wikipedians by Wikipedia editing philosophy" contained over 300 editors who declared their allegiance to deletionism and over 1000 followers of inclusionism.

Self-awareness (Weber 1978:361-362) and collective identity (Bergquist and Szczepanska 2002, Melucci 1996:68) are important for a sense of belonging to a community, and indeed many Wikipedia contributors identify themselves as members of the Wikipedia community (Rafaeli, Hayat and Arier 2005). There are many editors' essays that refer to the Wikipedia community (Meta 2008). The "Community Portal" is accessible from every page of the Wikipedia through a link always visible to the left of every Wikipedia article; its main discussion forum is called the "Village Pump" (Rafaeli, Hayat and Arier 2005). Kriplean, Beschastnikh and McDonald (2008) discuss how the Wikipedia community was strengthened by development of an award system. There are now hundreds of community designed awards, such as the Anti-Vandalism Barnstar that "may be awarded to those who show great contributions to protecting and reverting attacks of vandalism on Wikipedia" or the Human Rights Barnstar which "may be awarded to an editor who contributes significantly to expand or improve an article related to human rights". The development of specialized language (with words like *wikipedian*, *wikify*, *wikiholiday*) or products (T-Shirts, mugs) that allow fans to display their allegiances and support the project are another indicators of a community with a rich and constantly evolving culture (half of the profits from the sale of Wikipedia-brand items are donated to the Wikimedia Foundation).

Finally, the of editors' motivations are of interest. Several studies related to motivations of Wikipedia's contributors have consistently pointed to similar factors. Kuznetsov (2006) wrote that on Wikipedia, "the values of reputation, *community*, reciprocity, altruism and autonomy" are crucial in motivating editors. Nov (2007) found in his survey that the top three motivations of Wikipedians were: fun (enjoying oneself), ideology ("information should be free") and values (helping others). In the most recent study of Wikipedia's editors motivations, Schroer and Hertel (2009) found that significant factors positively influencing editors' activity included identification with the project goal—providing free access to information—as well as *identification with the Wikipedia community*. It is interesting to note that the motivations roughly related to helping others are always ranked above the values of pure self interest, such as career motivations (Malone 2004:45, Nov 2007, Schroer and Hertel 2009).

To summarize, Wikipedia seems to easily fit the Tönnies' definition of community. Its editors form a group. They are governed by their own customs and traditions (policies) and in a period of few years they have created their own community culture. Finally, they are concerned about more than their self-interest, working towards a goal shared by the members of the entire group (building an encyclopedia).

Thus a project to build an encyclopedia in cyberspace evolved somewhere along the way into a lively community. Based on the bazaar model of knowledge creation, one could argue that for Wikipedia to work it was inevitable or even necessary to have—or rather, to become—a community. Yet what if Wikipedia is evolving into something more?

## **Is Wikipedia a social movement?**

Although Wikipedia is now increasingly cited as an example of a virtual community, there have been few attempts so far to analyze it as a social movement. Perhaps this is due to the simple fact that Wikipedia has never framed itself as one. However the lack of self-identification as a social movement has not precluded the analysis and identification of certain phenomena by social movements theorists; the case in point being the Free and Open Source Software Movement (FOSSM). A typical Linux programmer may not think of himself as a social movement activist, yet the Linux software is a flagship of the FOSS Movement. This movement has been the subject of an increasing number of studies from different perspectives, ranging from the technical analysis of the software used and produced by the movement to the sociological analysis of the organizational, socio-economical and political aspects of the movement. In that latter capacity, FOSSM has also been analyzed as a new type of a social movement based on various social movements theories, from resource mobilization (Kling 1995, Ekbja and Gesser 2004), through social constructionism and framing analysis (Ekbja and Gesser 2004), to the new social movements theory (Bergquist and Szczepanska 2002).

Thus the question arises: Where does Wikipedia fit in the structure of the social movements in general and FOSSM in particular—if it does at all? Matei and Dobrescu (2006), who in their paper clearly call Wikipedia a social movement, argue that it is “a descendant of a class of social projects inspired by the ‘meaning revolution’ of the 1960s counterculture”, tracing its roots to movements such as the Xanadu hypertext project (Keep, McLaughlin and Parmar 2002), the techno-reversionary project (Roszak 1999), the hacker culture (Levy 2001), the free software movement (Feller 2005), and the virtual community project (Rheingold 2001). Following their analysis, and using terminology proposed by Zald and McCarthy (1999:1-2), one can argue that Wikipedia can be seen as a formally organized component of a specific social movement (FOSSM), or in other words, a social movement organization (SMO), one of the newest rising stars in a Free and Open Source Software Movement Industry (FOSSMI)—a collection of all SMOs focused on the FOSS field.

FOSSMI is composed of two distinct subindustries: the Free Software Movement (FSM) and the Open Source Software Movement (OSSM). The existence of those two subindustries is crucial in understanding the environment that gave birth to Wikipedia and the debates on what kind of a social movement the FOSSMI really is. FOSSMI began in 1983 when Richard Stallman, motivated by strong convictions that proprietary software is inferior and unethical, announced the formation of the GNU project, giving birth to the concept of “open source software” (Deek and McHugh 2007:297). Although among the best known products of FOSSMI are software packages such as the Linux operating system, Star and Open Office application suites and Netscape, Mozilla and Firefox browsers, the FOSSMI is no longer limited only to software. Stallman noted that “open source is a design methodology, free software is a

social movement" (Bowrey 2005:86). Over the years the GNU project has become more than a source of software, it has become a new social movement, with millions of activists and followers, and carried forth by dedicated organizations such as the Free Software Foundation and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (Hakken 2003:9). The ideology of FOSSMI has been incorporated into fields as diverse as medical research (Tropical Disease Initiative—Maurer, Arti Rai, Andrej Sal (2004)), culture, media and law (Creative Commons - Lessig (2004:282)). Wikipedia, with its open source software (MediaWiki engine), a free license (GNU Free Document Licence and increasingly, Creative Commons) and projects such as the distribution of free printed copies of itself in the Third World countries (Meta 2005), has its roots squarely within the FOSSMI, but it is much more than just a piece of (open) software.

Yet software is still important to FOSSMI. The OSSM, which concentrates on the issue of an open source rather than freedom, creates the impression that FOSSMI is not really a proper social movement. Lehman (2004) argues that FOSSMI should not be of much concern to social scientists, as it is "about creating software, not about social change... Therefore [it] is not a social movement" In their reply to Lehman, Ekbja and Gasser (2004) state that FOSSMI contributes to our understanding of the resource mobilization theory, helping to illustrate the relationship between 'political activities' and 'development projects'. Building on the work of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), they use the examples of the highly innovative FOSSMOs to discuss the importance of the degree of innovation in the collective action. Adapting Kling's (1996:54) notion of computerization movements ("loosely organized collections of groups that promote specific forms of computerization") and seeing FOSSMI as a subtype of those movements, Elliott and Scacchi (2008) stress the innovativeness of the FOSSMOs which attempt "to revolutionize software development practices by advocating that all software be 'free' for access, study, modification, and (re)distribution". They and others (Tapscott and Williams 2006:184) point out the importance of key values within the FOSSMI that spread from the software development to other fields: "informal self-management, immediate acceptance of fellow contributors, and open disclosure of all documentation and work transcripts". Not incidentally, those are the same values that underly the Wikipedia project.

Ekbja and Gasser (2004) shed more light on the differences between FOSSMIs and the more traditional SMIs, pointing out that FOSSMIs have significant features that differentiate them from other forms of social movements, namely reliance on providing social goods instead of addressing grievances. They note that traditional social movements focused on "correcting some situation to which they object or changing the circumstances for a group that suffers some sort of social disadvantage" (Gamson 1975) are mostly grievance-driven, whereas FOSSMI is dominantly promise-driven (Kling 1996:46). This differentiation is very important in understanding Wikipedia as a social movement: Wikipedia is not "just an encyclopedia", but it is an organized effort—a movement—delivering a promise to make humanity's knowledge freely

accessible to every single human being, including distribution of CDs and DVDs in places with little Internet access, such as in Africa (Meta 2005).

The case of Wikipedia—particularly in context of demands for the right to free access to it in the countries like China (Washington Post 2006)—may also be seen as an ongoing case study of how the lack of a social good which had not existed until recently can be transformed into a grievance once people become accustomed to it, and/or are promised it. This process has been identified as an important factor leading to the creation of social movements (Gurr 1970).

Next, we may consider the language—both of Wikipedia's and of works surrounding it. Wikipedia might not frame itself as a social movement, but it uses frames that would not be out of place within a regular social movement. For example, Wikipedia's mission of providing information freely to all humankind seems more fitting to a social movement than to an encyclopedia publisher. Gillmor (2004:148) commented that Wikipedia, with its open community, transparent structure, reliance on voting and elections, and equal treatment of the project participants, is "an example of how the grassroots in today's interconnected world can do extraordinary things". The word "grassroots" in particular strikes an interesting chord—as it is often used in the contexts of social movements.

Tarrow (1998:4) writes that a social movement is "a collective challenge by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities". It is fairly easy to prove that Wikipedia fits that definition. As a community ("people with common purpose and solidarity"), gathered together to create an encyclopedia and ensure its free availability to others ("collective challenge") Wikipedia is also in "sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities". This can be shown by its conflicts with established encyclopedias (most notably, Britannica (Nature 2006)), media (for example, the "Seigenthaler affair", in which a respectable journalist criticized Wikipedia for including false and defamatory information in his biography (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2005)) and even governments (like the case of Wikipedia censorship in China (Washington Post 2006)). As Tarrow notes (1998:3), some movements can be intensely apolitical but they still interact with law-enforcing authorities, and Wikipedia has had its share of legal issues, primarily related to copyright and privacy (Signpost 2008).

Tarrow (1998:44;217) considers discourse a central component of any modern social movement and the major driving force behind modern revolutions. The intensity of the Wikipedia's discourse (Bryant, Forte and Bruckman 2005, Viégas, Wattenberg and McKeon 2007) gives further arguments supporting its classification as a social movement.

It is enlightening to consider how Wikipedia fits the more complex definition advanced by Tilly (2004:3-4), who sees three major elements in a social movement:

1. campaigns: a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities;
2. social movement repertoire: employment of combinations from among the following forms of political action: creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering; and
3. WUNC displays: participants' concerted public representation of **w**orthiness, **u**nity, **n**umbers, and **c**ommitments on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies.

Since Wikipedia has no salaried employees, the burden of all actions, from writing articles to press releases, falls on self-organizing volunteers. Those volunteers for close to a decade have dealt with creating the project's content and developing its internal policies. Zachte (2008) in a rough estimate of the commercial value of the yearly work of unpaid volunteer Wikipedia's contributors arrived at a number of over one hundred million dollars. This should fit the requirement of "sustained, organized public effort".

Let's now consider the "collective claims on target authorities". Here we can point out the difference between grievance-driven and promise-driven movements (Gamson 1975, Kling 1996:46). Wikipedia's claim can be defined as promising and delivering a new social good—the free encyclopedia, a good that the authorities are not providing. While the institutions traditionally responsible for creating and delivering encyclopedias are private businesses and not governments, it has been argued that they constitute an increasingly valid target of modern social movements (Earl 2006).

As to Tilly's second point, the fact that Wikipedians do not use the most spectacular tools from the social movement repertoire should not be taken as proof that Wikipedia is not a social movement. Wikipedia editors may not be picketing the next WTO conference, yet Tarrow (1998:3) noted that collective action can be undramatic and undertaken by groups whose goals "would hardly raise an eyebrow". What's more, on a closer analysis, it does appear that Wikipedia has taken some actions from the social movement repertoire - if only in the virtual world. For example, numerous "special-purpose associations and coalitions" exist, as mentioned previously. As for public meetings, there have been worldwide meetings and conferences of Wikipedia editors (annual Wikimania conferences that began in 2005) and many more regional ones (from conferences organized by a local Wikimedia chapter, such as the Polish Wikimedia Foundation Chapter conferences, to smaller, but much more frequent events such as the Meetups listed on the Wikipedia:Meetup page). All of those form an interesting example of how computer-mediated-communication fostered face-to-face interactions. We should also not forget about the entire community interacting constantly through the Wikipedia site, using communication tools offered by the wiki technology (such as discussion

pages) or other tools adopted by the community (such as the IRC tool, allowing editors to chat with each other in real time).

In terms of WUNC displays one can argue that the majority of actions of Wikipedians are concentrated on building the encyclopedia, not on purposely taking any public actions for some external audience. Yet this criticism may be rebutted as the encyclopedia does not exist only for its editors; in fact studies of motivations of editors stress that they are highly concerned with the end users—the encyclopedia's readers (Nov 2007, Schroer and Hertel 2009). This external audience is the target of the encyclopedia and its editors whose goal is to provide the readers with the free encyclopedic information. Therefore the task of building the encyclopedia can be viewed as a WUNC display, designed to show the world that Wikipedia's primary goal, creating and distributing the free encyclopedia, is entirely feasible. Further, **w**orthiness can be seen in Wikipedians' recognition of most knowledgeable and active contributors; **u**nity is visible in adherence to Wikipedia's customs and netiquette and is shown on talk pages and user pages, where editors often choose to display specific statements or awards; **n**umbers can be found throughout Wikipedia - from various votes and discussions, which attract an increasing amount of voters displaying their opinions, to public meetings and conferences; and finally, **c**ommitment is manifested by an increasing number of editors and their activity (expressed both in time spent on Wikipedia and financial support).

Even if one were to refrain from making a case that Wikipedia is a social movement, Wikipedia can still be considered a part of the FOSSMI's social movement community (SMC). Staggenborg (1998) defined the concept of a social movement community as a group of organizations, sharing a collective identity, that exist to provide services or to educate or entertain participants of the particular SMI community. A related concept was introduced by Tarrow (1998:50) as the "communitiy of print": an association based on face-to-face interactions, building structures among the larger populace, allowing the diffusion of movement ideas to a wider public and aiding the growth of related SMI. Similarly, Rochon (1998) wrote of communities who incubate values that are later diffused to a wider public through more traditional SMOs.

The social movement community within the FOSSMI is well developed. Lovink (2003:266) noted that "networking in and between movements and social groups" is one of the three pillars of online activism.

The size of Wikipedia—millions of editors—makes it central to the FOSSMI community. The project constantly drawing scores of thousands of new volunteers educates them and the wider public about FOSSMI values such as alternative copyrights. A sample illustration of this process can be the December 2009 donation of 100,000 images from the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) to Wikipedia's image repository (known as the Wikimedia Commons). This involved hundreds of editors who organized themselves, reached out to the Bundesarchive, negotiated the use of a free copyright license, ported the images to the Commons, categorized them, improved their descriptions and added them to the related articles. Throughout this process



those editors not only educated themselves about the copyright, but also generated significant media coverage, drawing attention to the issues dear to the FOSSMI (Commons 2009). By educating its editors, fostering a collective identity tying Wikipedia with the FOSSMI and diffusing those values to a wider public, Wikipedia seems to be, at least, an Internet-era 'community of print', or a part of the social movement community (SMC) surrounding the FOSSMI.

## Conclusions

I have no illusions of grandeur that my paper will cause a major reshaping of the Wikipedia community and popularize the framing of Wikipedia as a social movement. I do hope, however, to contribute to the growing discourse in academia about the rise of what we currently see as "borderline" social movements, and which I believe will keep becoming more and more important. And perhaps this paper will cause a few Wikipedians—and activists elsewhere—to pause for a second, and give a rise to a new WikiProject centered around free culture and seeing Wikipedia as a social movement.

As I have pointed out in the preceding sections, the Wikipedia project has evolved beyond "just an encyclopedia". It has given rise to a vibrant online community, certainly justifying the use of the "Wikipedia community" phrase. Whether we can speak of a "Wikipedia social movement" is less obvious. Although Wikipedia seems to be closely related to the Free/Open Source Software Movement Industry and it shows certain qualities commonly associated with SMOs, it is certainly not a typical one. Current definitions of what a social movement is seem to fit Wikipedia; however a degree to which some of them need to be stretched indicates the need for further discussions, and possibly a need for refining and updating those definitions.

There is ample opportunity for future studies of the links between Wikipedia, the FOSSMI, and social movements in general. Many questions await further consideration such as: does being a frequent reader or editor of Wikipedia translate into traditional forms of activism? If so, is this activism limited to FOSSMOs, or does it extend to more traditional SMOs involved for example in the global justice or environmentalism issues? Does the multiethnic base of the English Wikipedia push its editors' attention to transnational or regional movements? To what extent may Wikipedia be contributing to the "[Internet] information should be free" attitude among the Net Generation? These questions form just the tip of the iceberg waiting to be scaled by the social movement scholars; it is my hope that this study will facilitate such future endeavours.

Putnam (1995) notes that the Internet, if used in innovative ways, may be one of the trends that goes against the erosion of civil society. Tilly (2004:158) in turn states that the future social movements may take a form quite different from those known today. Wikipedia, a new and innovative medium, which has made millions participate in the exercise of creating and sharing free information has the potential to become an interesting illustration of their statements. Whether

this will be in fact the case, we cannot be certain today, but the continuing evolution of Wikipedia deserves more attention.

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### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/konieczny.pdf>

## **Why have most Thai NGOs chosen to side with the conservative royalists, against democracy and the poor?**

**Giles Ji Ungpakorn**

In the present political crisis in Thailand, it is shocking that most Thai NGOs have disgraced themselves by siding with the Yellow Shirt elites or remaining silent in the face of the general attack on democracy. It is shocking because NGO activists started out by being on the side of the poor and the oppressed in society. To explain this situation, we must go beyond a simple explanation that relies on personal failings of individuals or suggestions that NGOs have 'underlying bad intentions', or that they are 'agents of imperialism'.

At the start of the anti-Thaksin protests, many NGOs joined the PAD<sup>1</sup> demonstrators. This was understandable because the top leadership of the PAD contained people with NGO connections. At the time it was legitimate to protest against the excesses of the government, although it was questionable whether the NGOs should have joined forces with conservative royalists like Sonti Limtongkul. Soon, however, NGO involvement with the PAD, and then the military junta after the coup of 2006, went far beyond anything that can be classified as genuine support for freedom and democracy. At every twist and turn in the crisis, the majority of NGOs ended up on the side of the elite and the oppressors. There is a real need to re-assess tactics and strategy.

After the 2006 coup, some Thai NGO leaders, such as Rawadee Parsertjaroensuk (NGO-Coordinating Committee), Nimit Tienudom (AIDS network), Banjong Nasa (Southern Fisher Folk network), Witoon Permpongsajaroen (Ecology movement) and Sayamon Kaiyurawong (Thai Volunteer Service) etc. put themselves forward in the hope that the military would select them as appointed senators. Earlier, NGO activists such as Rawadee Parsertjaroensuk and Nimit Tienudom attended PAD rallies. Nimit claimed at a rally on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006, that most Thaksin supporters 'did not know the truth' about his government<sup>2</sup>. This is patronising to the poor. Many NGO leaders such as Nimit, also told their members not to protest against the military junta at the closing ceremony of the Thai Social Forum in October 2006, although the leadership of the NGO-Coordinating Committee supported this protest. Immediately after the coup, even the Thai staff of Focus on Global South supported the coup<sup>3</sup>, although Walden Bello maintained a principled opposition to dictatorship. Some NGO activists became government appointees under the military junta. Most had illusions that the military would clean up

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<sup>1</sup> PAD= misnamed 'Peoples Alliance for Democracy', the Yellow Shirts.

<sup>2</sup> *Prachatai* 23/3/2006 [www.prachatai.com](http://www.prachatai.com).

<sup>3</sup> <http://focusweb.org/the-thai-coup-democracy-and-wearing-yellow-on-mondays.html?Itemid=93> by Chanida Chanyapate and Alec Bamford

Thai politics with their new constitution. During the Thai Social Forum itself, large Thai NGOs like *Raks Thai Foundation* brought yellow-shirted (royalist) villagers to the forum. This NGO receives a large amount of money from the Thai state. This raises the issue of 'GNGOs', i.e. government funded NGOs. A large source of funds for Thai NGOs today comes from the state funded 'Office of the Thai Health Promotion Fund'<sup>4</sup>.

It is interesting to compare a number of statements made by NGO-COD (the NGO national Coordinating Committee) about the violent PAD protests throughout 2008, with the statements made in April 2009 about Red Shirt protests. The substance of the difference is in the emphasis. In May, June and September 2008, Pairot Polpet, as NGO-COD chairperson issued statements calling for the pro-Thaksin government to respect the right of the PAD to 'peaceful protest'. In June 2008, NGO-COD called on the pro-Thaksin government to resign. Elected PAD and NGO senator, Rosana Tositrakul, stated that the government had no right to disperse the PAD protestors who had seized Government House. It is important to note that the pro-Thaksin government did not use the army or live ammunition on the PAD. Police use of tear-gas, may however, have cause one death.

Later, in April 2009, after the Democrats had been manoeuvred into power by the army and PAD, NGO-COD called on the Red Shirts to stop 'violent protests' and later praised the voluntary ending of Red Shirt protests as a way to build peace. They called on the government to 'only use legal means to disperse protestors'. One day later, the army and the government used live ammunition to disperse the Red Shirts, killing and injuring many. An NGO-COD statement a week later *did not* call on the government to resign<sup>5</sup>. The Consumers' Association, AIDS networks and Slum Dwellers group, under the leadership of Nimit Tienudom and Saree Ongsomwang, went further and denounced the Red Shirt protests on 13<sup>th</sup> April, but not the actions of the government.

How did the Thai NGOs become so reactionary, siding with the conservative elites against the poor in the suppression of democracy? There is an urgent need to analyse this problem because NGO activists started out as the champions of the rural poor. Could it happen elsewhere? Is there a general lesson to be learnt here?

In the 1980s Thai NGOs worked under the slogan 'the answer is in the villages', reflecting a respect for ordinary villagers. Despite being well-meaning, the lack of politics in the NGO movement, and also a lack of democracy and accountability has let them down and they have been increasingly drawn to reactionary right-wing politics.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.thaihealth.or.th](http://www.thaihealth.or.th)

<sup>5</sup> *Prachatai* May, June, September 2008, 13, 15 & 23 April 2009. [www.prachatai.com](http://www.prachatai.com).

After the 'collapse of communism' the NGO movement turned its back on 'politics' and the primacy of mass movements and political parties in the 1980s. Instead they embraced 'lobby politics' and community anarchism. The two go together because they reject any confrontation or competition with the state. They reject building a big picture political analysis. Instead of building mass movements or political parties, the NGOs concentrated on single-issue campaigns as part of their attempt to avoid confrontation with the state. This way of working also dove-tails with grant applications from international funding bodies and leads to a de-politicisation of the movement. The NGOs also oppose representative democracy because they believe it only leads to dirty money politics. But the direct democracy in village communities, which they advocate, is powerless in the face of the all-powerful state. It also glorifies traditional and conservative village leaders.

Initially the NGOs loved-up to Thaksin's *Thai Rak Thai* government. They believed that it was open to NGO lobbying, which it was. *Thai Rak Thai* took on board the idea of a universal health care system from progressive doctors and health-related NGOs. But then, when they were wrong-footed by the government's raft of pro-poor policies that seemed to prove to villagers that the NGOs had only been 'playing' at development, they rushed over to love-up to the conservative royalists. Such an about-face was only possible by ignoring politics, international lessons and any theory. NGO leaders argue proudly that they are the 'true activists', not bookworms or theoreticians. This explains why they can justify to themselves the support for the 2006 coup and why they have failed to defend democracy since. Instead of bothering to analyse the political situation, they beat a path to lobby generals, governments of every shade and anyone who has power.

Granted, the political situation was extremely messy and difficult. In 2006 you had *Thai Rak Thai*, a big business party with a record of Human Rights abuses and corruption. On the other hand you had the army and the conservative royalists, with a history of human rights abuses and corruption. There was not much to choose from between the two. But *Thai Rak Thai* had power through the electoral process. In this situation the NGOs should have remained neutral and with the poor and they should have opposed the coup. But they were angry that *Thai Rak Thai* had won over their supporters and were distrustful of *Thai Rak Thai's* use of the state to build welfare programmes and stimulate the economy. This distrust came from an anarchistic distrust of the state. For many NGOs, welfare should be organised by communities. But this anti-state position opened the door to accepting a neo-liberal concept of a small state, a view shared by the conservative royalists. Their anarchistic rejection of representative politics, also allowed them to see 'no difference' between a parliament controlled by *Thai Rak Thai* and a military coup.

Since the poor voted on mass for *Thai Rak Thai*, the NGOs have become viciously patronising towards villagers, claiming that they 'lack the right information' to make political decisions. In fact, there was always a patronising

element to their work. Many Thai NGO leaders are self-appointed middle class activists who shun elections and believe that NGOs should 'nanny' peasants and workers. They are now fearful and contemptuous of the Red Shirt movement, which is starting a process of self-empowerment of the poor. Of course, the Red Shirts are not angels, but in today's crisis, they represent the poor and the thirst for freedom and democracy.

The NGO movement's relationship with NGO and trade union leaders in the PAD was also a factor. The top PAD leadership was made up of a coalition between (1) Sondhi Limtongkul: conservative royalist media tycoon and owner of the *Manager Group*; (2) Chamlong Simuang: leading light in the reactionary and anti-abortion Buddhist *Santi Asoke* movement; (3) Somsak Kosaisuk: retired leader of the railway workers union; (4) Pipop Tongchai: advisor to the *Campaign for Popular Democracy* and 'NGO elder'; (5) Somkiat Pongpaiboon: activist working with teachers' groups and farmers; and (6) Suriyasai Takasila: ex-student movement bureaucrat.

What the NGO, student and trade union activists in the PAD leadership had in common was a lack of any genuine mass base. People like Pipop did not lead NGO-COD. Somsak never managed to get a strike going on the railways to protect working conditions or oppose privatisation. They were people who had become bureaucratised and distant from ordinary activists. Instead they looked to other forces which could mobilise people and resources, including the conservative royalists. Nevertheless, they were able to call on personal support from many NGO networks and state enterprise unions 'for old times sake'.

In general terms, what we can say about the Thai experience is that the NGO movement is now lined up with the elite against the mass of the population<sup>7</sup>. It is no longer possible for progressive people to work with them<sup>8</sup>. Unless serious splits and changes occur, they cannot be regarded as part of any civil society movement for Thai democracy.

What are the international lessons for NGO activists? What we can generalise from Thailand is that NGOs run the risk of taking the wrong side in any serious social conflict. Actually, everyone can make mistakes, including left-wing parties! But for NGOs, there are three major reasons which might cause mistakes:

1. Funding pressures. NGOs increasingly receive money from local governments and imperialist organisations like the World Bank. They are 'GNGOs' and can become reluctant to oppose the elites.

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<sup>6</sup> In Thai they refer to themselves as *Pi Liang*.

<sup>7</sup> One honourable exception is the Thai Labour Campaign, which has consistently opposed the coup and any destruction of democracy. <http://www.thailabour.org>

<sup>8</sup> As I used to believe when I wrote: 'NGOs: Enemies or Allies?' *International Socialism* Journal 104, Autumn 2004, U.K.

2. Lobby politics mean there is always a tendency to be opportunistic, being prepared to work with authoritarian governments.
3. Rejection of politics, especially class politics. This lack of politics means that in difficult and messy situations NGOs do not have the necessary theory to be able to choose the side of the poor or democracy. What is needed is more political theorising and more open debate. NGOs also need to be committed to building mass movements, rather than relying only on lobby politics.

27 April 2009

### **About the author**

Giles (Ji) Ungpakorn is a Thai socialist and academic, currently in exile in Britain because he was charged with *lèse majesté* (insulting the King, punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment) for writing the book "A Coup for the Rich", which criticised the 2006 military coup. Ji previously taught politics at Chulalongkorn University. His blog address is: <http://wdpress.blog.co.uk/>

### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/ungpakorn.pdf>

## **O engajamento da sociedade civil angolana na discussão da constituição**

**Carlos Figueiredo**

### **Summary**

In this article, Angolan activist Carlos Figueiredo argues that ideological heterogeneity within the party(ies) in government may constitute an advantage for social movements, as it means that some government and parliamentary representatives, as well as top bureaucrats, may be willing to become allies of social movements even if certain factions of the party(ies) aren't. It also may happen that distinct party factions may be willing to engage with representatives of different tendencies within ideologically and strategically diverse movements, which reduce the pressure for fragmentation.

However, in circumstances such as those of post-war Angola, in which there is a low record of significant non-armed oppositional social movement activity and in which the rule of law is weak, politics are highly personalized and there is a very high degree of clientelism and corruption in the recognition of rights and allocation of public goods, attempts at popular mobilization in ways that directly engage the state may lead to very little response and further alienate the population from the political process. This is because, in these circumstances, the law has little to no impact on the everyday lives of the people. The way in which they organize their lives tends to be very distant from what is legislated by the state and the judiciary. The practices that effectively regulate interactions between public institutions and citizens also tend to be very different from the norms defined in legal texts and official bureaucratic codes of conduct. That, added to a generalized lack of knowledge regarding the law, social and political rights and the functioning of the state breeds a general distrust of the population regarding politics, as well as resignation in what concerns structural inequalities and power relations between different groups in society.

Therefore, attempts at popular mobilization, from the part of NGOs and social movements, around issues that directly engage the state, in circumstances in which the conditions for the development of an autonomous public sphere are not yet set up may be regarded by the people as yet another manipulative attempt by "the powers that be" to further tighten their grip, leading to further alienation. However, the lack of pre-existing conditions for the development of an autonomous public sphere is not a given, nor does it mean that civil society organizations should refrain from involving the population in fundamental processes such as the discussion of a new constitution. The author argues that, in this process "it is not only the constitution itself that is at stake, but a whole process of construction of the capacity of a society to fight for the rule of law, for social justice and therefore for the right of the population to influence the formulation and application of the law".

## **O ponto de partida e os antecedentes**

Angola está no que se espera ser o estágio final de um longo processo de revisão constitucional. Desde os anos 90 que Angola tem vivido uma transição de um regime monopartidário e de economia amplamente estatizada para um outro de democracia multipartidária e de economia de mercado. Uma tal transição de regime político tem, obrigatoriamente, de reflectir-se na constituição. Por razões várias, que não serão aqui tratadas, a revisão da constituição, embora reconhecida como necessária por todos, arrastou-se e acabou mesmo por parar. Da legislatura anterior (1992 a 2008) ficou um anteprojecto de constituição que nunca chegou a ser levado ao debate público. Com a renovação do mandato da Assembleia Nacional, como resultado das eleições legislativas em Setembro de 2008, e com a criação de uma comissão com um mandato específico, este processo ganhou novo alento. Daí resultou que várias forças da sociedade angolana começaram a posicionar-se em torno de diferentes aspectos da futura constituição.

Face a esta nova situação há uma pergunta que ganha cada vez mais pertinência: será que os cidadãos angolanos, e as suas organizações, deverão investir tempo e energia na revisão da constituição? Ou será que um tal investimento será um desperdício? Não devemos ignorar os argumentos a favor de poupar/ canalizar energia para outras áreas. Tais argumentos raramente são completamente explicitados, mas na realidade estão presentes na mente de muitos e acabam por condicionar a atitude de um grande número de angolanos.

Com este artigo, pretende-se explicitar e explorar alguns desses argumentos que resultam em (e explicam) uma certa apatia face ao debate constitucional e à lei no geral. Pretende-se com este artigo demonstrar que a par de uma atitude realista, e de expectativas moderadas sobre o que é possível alcançar, é necessária uma perspectiva de longo prazo, de reforço do papel da lei e de conquista pela sociedade dos espaços onde a lei é definida e utilizada.

## **Razões para desmobilizar?**

Várias forças da sociedade angolana têm estado a empreender esforços no sentido de levar o debate sobre a revisão constitucional a toda a população. Programas de rádio, cópias de documentação vária, encontros e debates, preparativos para inquéritos, etc., têm sido organizados por algumas organizações e indivíduos. Mas, parece indiscutível, vivemos ainda um ambiente de alguma apatia... ou, no melhor dos casos, de uma participação limitada a apenas algumas pessoas de zonas urbanas. Três linhas de argumentação poderão estar na base desta atitude. Reconhecer, explicitar e analisar esses argumentos é algo importante para preparar a actuação dos activistas que defendem um alargamento da participação cidadã neste processo, e para a busca de eficácia – traduzindo a participação em influência real. Os argumentos



que serão analisados abaixo são (1) o da *pouca relevância da lei* na regulação da nossa vida e na resolução dos enormes desafios que o angolano médio enfrenta diariamente, (2) o do *carácter demasiado genérico da constituição*, de certa forma uma variante do argumento anterior, desvalorizando a importância, para o cidadão comum, desta lei específica e (3) o da *impotência dos cidadãos angolanos* no que diz respeito ao poder de influência sobre o processo político, especialmente na conjuntura que surge das recentes eleições legislativas.

Para além de cada um dos argumentos em favor de um desengajamento do processo de debate sobre a constituição, tentam-se analisar os diferentes contra-argumentos. Defende-se abaixo que (1) o desengajamento dos cidadãos em relação à definição e à defesa da lei, só pode agravar a situação de enfraquecimento desta, o que acarreta custos acrescidos para os mais desfavorecidos; (2) a mobilização em torno da constituição é também importante como forma de preparar processos futuros e de desenvolver a capacidade da sociedade para influenciar processos legislativos e; (3) a heterogeneidade ideológica do MPLA faz prever que muitos dos seus deputados poderão ser aliados na construção de uma constituição moderna e que garanta os direitos básicos dos cidadãos. Para isso é necessário estabelecer pontes que atravessem as linhas partidárias. Nas linhas abaixo é feita com um pouco mais de detalhe a apresentação de cada um dos argumentos, e respectivos contra-argumentos, esboçados acima.

### **Será o campo da produção da constituição onde os nossos interesses se definem?**

A grande maioria dos cidadãos angolanos vive o dia-a-dia e resolve as situações que vai enfrentando num quadro que está geralmente extremamente distante do que a lei define. Por vezes, mais do que distante, esse quadro está em completa contradição com o que está legislado. A forma como se transaccionam terrenos e se constroem casas, o acesso a serviços básicos, os conflitos com vizinhos ou com as autoridades, etc, obedece a regras que vão sendo construídas e transformadas pela sociedade, completamente à margem do que está legislado. Até a forma como funciona o trânsito rodoviário em Luanda exprime fortemente esta situação: as regras são construídas e aplicadas na base do mais forte ou do mais ousado, num constante enfraquecimento da lei e do sentido de justiça. Uma das dimensões deste problema, a do cumprimento da lei pelas autoridades e agentes do Estado, foi bem capturada na frase de um activista do Bairro Hoji-Ya-Henda, na periferia de Luanda: "Eles que ditam as leis, também não as cumprem...".

Este pouco peso da lei na vida concreta alimenta, e é alimentado, por um desconhecimento generalizado do que está legislado. Alimenta, porque é lógico que poucos se preocupem em conhecer a lei se existe a percepção de que ela é apenas uma definição teórica sem implicações práticas. É alimentado, porque o desconhecimento da lei facilita a sua não utilização para resolver situações concretas. Este ciclo vicioso tem como resultado um enfraquecimento

generalizado da força da lei, passando em seu lugar a funcionar a “lei do mais forte”, ou a variante “lei do mais atrevido”, com um custo enorme para toda a sociedade, mas especialmente para os mais fracos e desfavorecidos. Por isso, romper com este ciclo vicioso, lutando-se pela lei, é essencialmente do interesse dos mais pobres, fracos ou desprotegidos. A luta pela aplicação das leis existentes é um campo de luta fundamental, sendo para isso importante conhecê-la. Mas, conhecer o processo da sua definição, e nele tomar parte, é igualmente importante para a reapropriação pelos cidadãos dos mecanismos de gestão dos seus interesses.

### **Será esta a lei que garantirá os nossos direitos?**

A constituição define princípios gerais, essencialmente relativos ao regime político. Ninguém está realmente à espera de grandes surpresas que alterem profundamente o quadro de direitos (pouco respeitado, aliás, como já vimos acima) dos cidadãos angolanos. Daí que alguns considerem que a verdadeira mobilização da sociedade deveria ser feita em torno das leis materiais como a Lei de Imprensa, a Lei da Habitação, a Lei do Trabalho, Orçamento Geral do Estado, etc.

Para além de ser fundamental olhar para a constituição como a lei que cria os alicerces das leis materiais, o mais importante é reconhecer que a capacidade de influenciar aquelas outras leis só surge de um processo de organização e mobilização que leva tempo a desenvolver. A discussão da constituição é uma oportunidade, importante, para construir as redes, os mecanismos e a experiência que vai ser necessária tanto agora como no futuro. Ou seja, parece fundamental o engajamento da sociedade civil no processo constituinte actual mas numa perspectiva de longo prazo, que ultrapassa portanto a discussão desta constituição.

### **Não estará a sociedade civil impotente e sem capacidade para influenciar o processo constituinte actual?**

Das eleições legislativas de Setembro de 2008, surgiu um parlamento amplamente dominado pelo MPLA. Para além deste controlo sobre o parlamento é também evidente a influência, quase hegemónica, sobre os media públicos – e também vários dos privados -, sobre a economia, sobre muitos dos profissionais liberais, enfim, praticamente sobre toda a sociedade. Se associarmos ao panorama acima o facto da sociedade civil angolana ser ainda relativamente fraccionada e sem experiência de mobilização nacional para influenciar processos políticos, parece não ser de prever uma grande eficácia em termos de se conseguir influenciar profundamente o que será a futura constituição.

Na verdade é importante relativizar os argumentos acima. Em primeiro lugar o MPLA não é uma força ideologicamente homogénea e é de esperar que muitos dos seus deputados sejam activos defensores de uma constituição moderna e

que garanta os direitos dos cidadãos. Em segundo lugar, está em curso um processo de mobilização e estruturação da sociedade civil, em busca de uma melhor coordenação, abrangência geográfica e inclusividade, que resultará seguramente num aumento de eficácia em termos de influência pública. Uma coisa parece clara para todos, o não engajamento neste processo de debate sobre a constituição só contribuirá para enfraquecer a sociedade civil.

### ***Participar e mobilizar para uma participação estruturada***

Pela exploração acima fica evidente que é importante que a sociedade civil angolana participe na discussão da constituição. Uma tal participação deve ter em mente que:

- O que está em jogo não é apenas esta constituição mas todo um processo de construção da capacidade da sociedade lutar pela lei, pela justiça social e assim influenciar a formulação e aplicação das leis;
- A não participação neste processo de definição da lei – a constituição, no caso concreto – apenas contribui para enfraquecer a tanto a sociedade civil como o papel e importância da lei na sociedade;
- Uma participação eficaz passa pela capacidade de se estabelecerem alianças e canais de comunicação que atravessem as tradicionais fronteiras partidárias.

Em todos os três eixos acima evidencia-se uma necessidade de adopção de uma perspectiva de longo prazo e de construção de cidadania. Esta é a perspectiva que está presentemente a unir várias organizações, indivíduos e iniciativas da sociedade civil angolana.

### **About the author**

Carlos Figueiredo, nascido em 1960 na Gabela, Angola, estudou Agronomia tendo feito estudos de post-graduação em sistemas de agricultura de baixo investimento e em planificação do desenvolvimento rural. Desde a década de 90 que tem estado envolvido em movimentos da sociedade civil angolana. É presentemente membro de vários conselhos directivos, de organizações da sociedade civil Centro para o Desenvolvimento e Parcerias de Angola (CDPA), Acção para o Desenvolvimento Rural e Ambiente (ADRA) e Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA).

Colabora regularmente com o "Angolense" (jornal semanário), tendo colaborado no passado com o "Cruzeiro do Sul" e pontualmente escreveu para o "Novo Jornal" (um outro semanário).

Esteve estreitamente envolvido com os processos de organização das Conferências Nacionais da Sociedade Civil, e de criação do Observatório Político Social de Angola (OPSA).

É funcionário do Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento.

Carlos Figueiredo was born in 1960 in Gabela, Angola. He studied Agronomy and did post-graduate studies in low input farming systems and in rural development planning. Since the 90s he has been involved in the Angolan civil society movement. He is presently a board member in several civil society organizations such as the Centre for Development and Partnership in Angola (CDPA), Action for Rural Development and Environment (ADRA, from the Portuguese acronym), and Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA). He works for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

He regularly publishes in the "Angolense" (a weekly newspaper). In the past he published in "Cruzeiro do Sul" and sporadically in "Novo Jornal".

He was directly involved in the processes to organize the two National Civil Society Conferences, and took part in the creation of the Angolan Socio Politic Observatory (OPSA, from the Portuguese acronym).

#### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/figueiredo.pdf>

## **AETA, paragraph 278 and conspiracy to... Conspiracy laws and the repression of animal liberation activism**

**Christof Mackinger**

### **Abstract**

*In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the criminalisation of organisation per se, under the guise of anti-terrorist legislation, has been increasingly used against social movements. Such legislation often carries higher penalties for membership in an organisation than for the acts which such organisations are accused of, and justifies the generalised surveillance of movement organisations. The animal rights / animal liberation movement, as a small but widespread movement, has been a testing ground for this legislation, but it is already being used against other and larger movements. The action note discusses the experience of activists in the USA, UK and Austria. There is a call for support at the end of the note.*

„Conspiracy to Commit Blackmail“, „Forming a Criminal Organisation“ or other similar sounding criminal proceedings have increasingly proven to be the downfall of many political activists in recent times. Not only in Austria, but in many other countries as well, racketeering laws have been used more and more against political initiatives in the past several years. Unfortunately the animal rights/liberation movement has been the foremost target of these developments.

### **Racketeering and Anti-Terror Laws**

At the very latest after the murderous attacks on September 11 2001, most western countries have enacted anti-terror laws. In many cases these are a special form of the laws against organised crime, which were standardised across Europe by 2004<sup>1</sup>.

Racketeering laws do not punish crimes in the typical sense. Rather, they enable the penalisation of crimes of preparation. These include activities that are not illegal in and of themselves, but in connection with organised crime are regarded as a part of and in support of criminal actions, thereby catching the supposed “men behind the scenes, who do not get their hands dirty.” Thus according to an Austrian legal expert, the crime of organisation must be viewed as a “link in a chain of events, which ends in a completed felony” (Velten 2009).

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[http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/justice\\_freedom\\_security/fight\\_against\\_organised\\_crime/133084\\_de.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/fight_against_organised_crime/133084_de.htm) (October 17<sup>th</sup> 2009)

The penalisation of crimes of preparation represents a type of shift to pre-emptive criminal prosecution. Not only crimes that have actually been committed are prosecuted, but instead the attempt is made to prevent the committing of these crimes in advance and thus to penalise preparatory actions as well.

Racketeering laws are not only used by law enforcement to criminalise political activists and their supporters. With racketeering laws, and especially with anti-terror laws, the penalties carry a disproportionately high sentence in comparison to the crimes that have actually been committed. Furthermore, by using anti-terror or racketeering laws, law enforcement officials gain sweeping legitimisation for the surveillance of suspects. A fact, which will become clearer through the following examples.

## **I. USA**

Racketeering laws were already utilised against opponents of the war in Vietnam during the 1960s. Up until recently, they were rarely used against political activists and thus were mostly forgotten in this context. They became a topic of public debate again in May 2004 when SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty), an animal rights campaign, along with six activists, who supposedly coordinated anti-vivisection protests, were charged with "Conspiracy to Violate the Animal Enterprise Protection Act (AEPA)". The AEPA, later renamed Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA)<sup>2</sup>, was enacted in 1992 and aims to criminalise animal rights activists: the law places the "damaging or interfering with the operations of an animal enterprise" under penalty<sup>3</sup>. The six activists in connection with others were supposedly involved since 1999 in an incredibly successful campaign to shut down one of the biggest companies in the world conducting animal experiments, Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS). HLS is a contract-laboratory; in their four locations, HLS conducts experiments on animals requested (and paid for) by pharmaceuticals and the chemical industry, among others, in order to test the toxicity of substances. Every year about 70,000 animals are killed in experiments by HLS. The campaign is based primarily on legal activism such as protests, rallies and information stands, but also includes acts of civil disobedience such as run-ins, lock-on actions or occupations of roofs. On the outskirts of this campaign, which has been active for years all over the world, politically motivated property damage was applied to put pressure on HLS. The activists were charged with several counts of stalking<sup>4</sup> in addition to the charges of Conspiracy to Violate the AEPA. The

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<sup>2</sup> The AEPA was changed in 2006 to the AETA. The major difference lies in the broader definition of what an "animal enterprise" is, the expansion of the maximum penalty, as well as the accommodation of the law to the new strategies of animal rights campaigns through the criminalisation of protests against the business partners of animal enterprises when their intent is to increase the pressure on the original target of the campaign.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s109-3880>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://shac7.com/case.htm>

countless witnesses who testified against the accused in court could not link any of the individual activists to felonies at all. In the end, they were merely accused of running the campaign's website and publishing possible targets for protest, among them home addresses of HLS employees, as well as speaking out favourably about illegal actions against animal exploiters.

All six of the accused activists were convicted and sentenced to up to six years in prison.

## **II. UK**

In May, 2007 30 activists were arrested and house searches were conducted throughout Europe by over 700 police officers in connection with the same animal rights campaign. The investigations entailed not only the observation of activists, but also the bugging of living spaces and cooperation with spies, who worked their way into the movement. Many of the activists were charged with "Conspiracy to Blackmail" and seven of them were sentenced in January 2009 to up to 11 years in prison. In addition some of them received lifetime ASBOs (Anti Social Behaviour Orders), which penalise any engagement against vivisection, including legal activities. Running a website, organising a meeting on the topic of vivisection and gathering signatures for a petition against animal experiments would mean a return to prison for the activists in question.

## **III. Austria**

While various animal rights initiatives called out for a determined nationwide anti-fur campaign against the biggest Austrian clothing chain, Kleider Bauer, and the first protest actions took place, officials of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior made their first plans for crushing the campaign. In a meeting<sup>5</sup> with the management of the fur-selling company Kleider Bauer the decision was made to prohibit the regular protests in front of the shops. The reasoning that the police could no longer guarantee the safety after an incident of night-time property damage sufficed to ban the protests. The animal rights activists continued to make use of their right to assemble and the officials could not find a connection between the incidences of property damage and the legal protests, a fact that can now be read in the official police files<sup>6</sup>. Therefore section 278a of the Austrian Penal Code was brought into play to criminalise the coordinated protests. This law penalises the "Forming of and Membership in a Criminal

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<sup>5</sup> See (in German) <http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht2.pdf>,  
<http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht3.pdf> and  
<http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht4.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See „Resümeeprotokoll vom 05. April 2007“  
<http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht2.pdf> (in German)

Organisation" and has up till now been used above all in connection with allegations of human or drug trafficking.

Since Autumn 2006 animal welfare and animal rights/liberation activists have been under investigation according to the racketeering law 278a. From the very beginning the investigations were accompanied by an extensive application of surveillance measures, as was made known from the files: wiretapped mobile phones, localisation of mobile phones, homing devices on cars and personal observation over the course of months. As all of this did not lead to the desired success, the investigators continually expanded the investigatory measures. Thus not only were financial investigations launched into individuals and groups, but also at least one apartment was secretly bugged and hidden surveillance cameras were installed in front of apartment buildings in order to record discussions in private spaces and profile the movements of individual activists. At least 40 known activists and an unknown number of others were caught in the cross-hairs of the police task force, which was formed specifically for this case.

In May 2008, special forces of the Austrian police searched 23 apartments and offices throughout Austria and arrested ten people. After three and a half months of pre-trial detention and an unparalleled worldwide solidarity campaign, the accused were released from jail. The chief prosecutors ordered the surprising release of the activists, claiming the length of the pre-trial detention was disproportionate to the expected sentences.

Nevertheless over a year later, in Autumn 2009, the charges were made official. Although most of the original allegations were dropped, the accusation of "Membership in a Criminal Organisation" still remained. The accused are supposedly members of a criminal structure which has allegedly been in existence since 1996 and - according to the prosecutors - is responsible for all legal as well as illegal activities involving animal welfare/rights. Thus every activity related to animal welfare/rights is regarded as evidence of membership in "the Organisation". Even legal activities such as registering a protest or organising lectures only serve to fulfil the goals of the "Criminal Organisation".

In 2010, for the first time in post-war Austria, political activists will be tried in court for organised crime. The prosecutor in charge has subpoenaed over 100 incriminating witnesses for the upcoming trial. This fact alone ensures that the trial will end in financial ruin for the accused. Even in the case of an acquittal, they have to pay the majority of their legal defence expenses, which in a case of these proportions are expected to amount to several tens of thousands of Euros. Furthermore, in the case of a conviction the maximum sentences could reach up to five years in prison.

### **Abolish All Racketeering/Anti-Terror Laws**

The increase in repression against the global animal rights/liberation movement is no coincidence as can easily be seen by examining the references made by the Austrian investigators to similar cases in the UK. Not only in the UK and



Austria, law enforcement agencies are showing increasing interest in the animal rights movement - even Europol, the European network of such agencies, formed to fight international organised crime and terrorism, treats the movement for animal liberation as growing threat to European security<sup>7</sup>.

Other social movements are also struggling with enormous repression launched by the state. In many countries, political activists are arrested and penalised for their opinions or political activities. Since the animal rights/liberation movement is relatively small and somewhat marginalised, yet extremely active, it seems to present an ideal testing ground for new surveillance technologies and novel methods of criminalisation employed by law enforcement agencies. It would not be surprising if these new tools were soon used against other political movements or even large parts of the general population.

In those countries where the application of racketeering laws has already proven of value, they are already used against a broad spectrum of political initiatives in court, such as anti-militarism activists in Germany, anarcho-syndicalists in Serbia or ecological-autonomous activists in France.

The increasing utilisation of such laws should not be underestimated as they can sooner or later threaten more and more political initiatives and constrain political activism as a whole. Therefore it is necessary to show solidarity with those targeted by these developments and to defend the opportunities and potential offered by organised political activism.

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## About the author

*Christof Mackinger is a student of social sciences working on social movements and different aspects of social criticism. He is one of the accused in the Austrian §278a case. Website for the supporters' group:*

[www.antirep2008.tk](http://www.antirep2008.tk)

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<sup>7</sup> See

[http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU\\_Terrorism\\_Situation\\_and\\_Trend\\_Report\\_TE-SAT/TESAT2009.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU_Terrorism_Situation_and_Trend_Report_TE-SAT/TESAT2009.pdf)

### **Call for support**

#### **We are all 278a: solidarity with the animal rights activists targeted by repression in Austria**

In May 2008, ten animal rights activists were accused of having formed a "Criminal Organisation" under section 278a of the Austrian penal code. The trial will probably begin soon. According to preliminary estimates, the legal defence costs will amount to tens of thousands of Euros per person. Therefore we have opened a bank account for donations:

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## **AETA, 278a und Verschwörung zur...**

### **Organisationsparagrafen zur Zerschlagung tierbefreierischen Aktivismus**

**Christof Mackinger**

#### **Abstract**

*In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the criminalisation of organisation per se, under the guise of anti-terrorist legislation, has been increasingly used against social movements. Such legislation often carries higher penalties for organisation than for the acts which such organisations are accused of, and justifies the generalised surveillance of movement organisations. The animal rights / animal liberation movement, as a small but widespread movement, has been a testing ground for this legislation, but it is already being used against other and larger movements. The action note discusses the experience of activists in the USA, UK and Austria. There is a call for support at the end of the note.*

„Vereinigung zu Erpressung“, „Bildung einer Kriminellen Organisation“ oder so ähnlich klingen Strafverfolgungsmaßnahmen, die in jüngster Zeit immer mehr politischen Aktivist\_innen zum Verhängnis wurden. Nicht nur in Österreich, in vielen anderen Ländern auch, werden seit einigen Jahren Organisationsparagrafen zunehmend gegen politische Initiativen eingesetzt. Die Tierrechts-/Tierbefreiungsbewegung steht dabei leider an vorderster Stelle.

#### **Organisationsparagrafen**

Spätestens nach den mörderischen Anschlägen vom 11. September 2001 haben die meisten westlichen Länder Anti-Terror-Gesetzgebungen erlassen. Diese stellen oft eine Sonderform der auf innereuropäischer Ebene spätestens 2004 vereinheitlichten Gesetzestexte gegen die Organisierte Kriminalität dar<sup>1</sup>.

Organisationsparagrafen ahnden keine Gesetzesverstöße im herkömmlichen Sinne. Sie kennzeichnen vielmehr die Möglichkeit sogenannte Vorfelddelikte unter Strafe zu stellen. Darunter werden Aktivitäten zusammengefasst, die zwar an sich nicht strafbar sind, aber in Zusammenhang mit Organisierter Kriminalität an strafbaren Handlungen teilhaben und diese fördern. Damit sollten die vermeintlichen „Hintermänner, die sich nicht die Finger schmutzig machen“ dingfest gemacht werden. So ist, wie dies eine österreichische

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[http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/justice\\_freedom\\_security/fight\\_against\\_organised\\_crime/l33084\\_de.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/fight_against_organised_crime/l33084_de.htm) (Zugriff: 17.10.2009)

Strafrechtlerin darstellte, das Organisationsdelikt als ein „Glied einer Verlaufsreihe [zu] betrachten, an deren Ende das vollendete Delikt steht.“ (Velten 2009)

Die Abstrafung von Vorfelddelikten stellt gewissermaßen eine Vorverlagerung der Strafverfolgung dar. Es werden nicht nur begangene Verstöße gegen das Strafgesetzbuch verfolgt, stattdessen wird versucht die Begehung dieser im Vorfeld zu unterbinden und vorbereitende Handlungen ebenso zu ahnden.

Organisationsdelikte werden nicht nur genutzt, um ein für Strafverfolgungsbehörden unüberschaubares Feld von politischen Aktivist\_innen und Sympathisant\_innen zu kriminalisieren. Auf Organisationsparagrafen, ebenso wie auf Terrorparagrafen im speziellen, stehen im Vergleich zu den tatsächlich vollendeten Straftaten ungleich höhere Strafen. Ein weiterer Aspekt betrifft die umfassende Legitimierung der Strafverfolgsbehörden zur Überwachung vermeintlich Verdächtiger durch die Anwendung von Paragraphen gegen Terrorismus oder Organisierte Kriminalität. Eine Tatsache, die bei den folgenden Beispielen noch deutlich werden wird.

## **I. USA**

Bereits in den 1960er Jahren wurden Vereinigungsdelikte in den USA gegen Gegner\_innen des Vietnam-Kriegs in Anschlag gebracht. In jüngster Zeit gerieten sie in Vergessenheit, da sie kaum gegen politische Aktivist\_innen Anwendung fanden. Erst im Mai 2004 wurden sie wieder Gegenstand öffentlicher Diskussion, als SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty), eine Tierrechtskampagne sowie sechs Tierrechtsaktivist\_innen, die Anti-Tierversuchsproteste koordiniert haben sollen, wegen „Verschwörung zum Verstoß gegen den Animal Enterprise Protection Act (AEPA)“ angeklagt wurden. Der AEPA oder später Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA)<sup>2</sup> trat 1992 in Kraft und zielt auf die Kriminalisierung von Tierrechtsaktivist\_innen ab: Der Gesetzestext stellt die „Störung oder Einmischung in Handlungen eines tiernutzenden Unternehmens“<sup>3</sup> unter Strafe. Die sechs Aktivist\_innen hätten zusammen mit anderen seit dem Jahr 1999 eine überaus erfolgreiche Kampagne zur Schließung eines der größten Tierversuchsunternehmen weltweit, Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), mitgetragen. HLS ist ein sogenanntes Auftragslabor. In den vier Niederlassungen von HLS werden Versuche an Tieren u.a. im Auftrag der Pharma- und Chemieindustrie durchgeführt, um die

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2 Der AEPA wurde 2006 zum AETA abgeändert. Die wesentlichen Unterschiede liegen in der breiteren Definition, was ein „Animal Enterprise“ sei, in der Anpassung des Gesetzes an neue Strategien von Tierrechtskampagnen durch die Kriminalisierung von Protesten bei Geschäftspartner\_innen von tiernutzenden Unternehmen, welche auf die Ausübung von Druck auf die ursprünglichen Protestziele abzielen würden und schließlich in der Ausweitung des maximalen Strafraumens.

3 (meine Übersetzung, C.M.) Der original Gesetzestext:  
<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s109-3880> (Zugriff 17.10.1009)

Giftigkeit von Substanzen zu testen. Jedes Jahr werden von HLS rund 70.000 Tiere in Tierversuchen getötet. Die Kampagne stützt sich vor allem auf legale Protestaktionen, wie Demonstrationen, Kundgebungen und Infotische, doch auch ziviler Ungehorsam, wie Run-Ins, Ankettaktionen oder Dachbesetzungen kamen zum Einsatz. Am Rande der seit Jahren weltweit agierenden Kampagne wurden auch politisch motivierte Sachbeschädigungen als Mittel eingesetzt, um das Unternehmen HLS unter Druck zu setzen. Den angeklagten Aktivist\_innen wurde neben der Verschwörung zum Verstoß gegen den AEPA auch Stalking in mehreren Fällen vorgeworfen<sup>4</sup>. Die unzähligen Zeug\_innen, die vor Gericht gegen die Beschuldigten aussagen sollten, konnten in keiner Weise einzelne der Aktivist\_innen mit Straftaten in Verbindung bringen. Einzig wurde ihnen angelastet, eine Kampagnen-Website mit möglichen Protestzielen, darunter auch Privatadressen von bei HLS Beschäftigten online gestellt zu haben und Straftaten gegen Tieraussbeuter\_innen gut zu heißen.

Alle sechs angeklagten Aktivist\_innen wurden zu Haftstrafen bis zu 6 Jahren verurteilt.

## II. England

Im Zusammenhang mit derselben Tierrechts-Kampagne wurden im Mai 2007 unter Einsatz von 700 Polizist\_innen europaweit Hausdurchsuchungen durchgeführt und 30 Aktivist\_innen verhaftet. Die Ermittlungen der Behörden umfassten neben Observationen auch das Abhören von Wohnräumen und die Zusammenarbeit mit einem in die Bewegung eingeschleusten Spitzel. Mehrere der Aktivist\_innen wurden wegen der Verschwörung zur Erpressung angeklagt und sieben davon im Januar 2009 zu Haftstrafen bis zu elf Jahren verurteilt. Zusätzlich bekamen einzelne von ihnen sogenannte ASBOs (Anti Social Behaviour Orders) für die Dauer ihres restlichen Lebens auferlegt, die ein weiteres Engagement gegen Tierversuche, auch auf legaler Ebene, unter Strafe stellen. Jedes Betreiben einer Website, jede Organisation eines Treffens zum Thema Tierversuche und jede Unterschriftensammlung gegen Experimente an Tieren würde für die Betroffenen die Rückkehr in das Gefängnis bedeuten.

## III. Österreich

Als im Herbst 2006 verschiedene Tierrechtsinitiativen geschlossen zu einer österreichweiten Anti-Pelz-Kampagne gegen das größte Modeunternehmen Kleider Bauer aufriefen und die ersten Protestaktionen abgehalten wurden, schmiedeten Beamt\_innen des österreichischen Innenministeriums erste Pläne zur Niederschlagung der Kampagne. In einem Treffen<sup>5</sup> mit dem Management

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4 Siehe <http://shac7.com/case.htm> (Zugriff 17.10., 2009)

5 Siehe dazu <http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht2.pdf>,  
<http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht3.pdf> und  
<http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht4.pdf>

des pelzverkaufenden Modekonzerns Kleider Bauer wurde beschlossen, die regelmäßigen Kundgebungen vor den Geschäften behördlich zu untersagen. Als Begründung reichte aus, dass die Polizei die Sicherheit nicht aufrecht erhalten könne, nachdem in einem Fall nachts Eigentum von Kleider Bauer beschädigt wurde. Da die Tierrechtler\_innen aber weiterhin von ihrem Recht auf Versammlungsfreiheit Gebrauch machten und die Behörden, wie es mittlerweile als belegt gilt<sup>6</sup>, keinen Zusammenhang zwischen den Sachbeschädigungen und den legalen Protesten herzustellen vermochten, wurde der Paragraph 278a zur Kriminalisierung der koordinierten Proteste ins Feld geführt. Der Paragraph 278a stellt die Bildung und Mitgliedschaft einer Kriminellen Organisation unter Strafe und wurde in Österreich bisher vor allem im Zusammenhang mit Vorwürfen der Schlepperei, des Drogenhandels und des Menschenhandels in Verbindung gebracht.

Seit Herbst 2006 wird nun gegen Aktivist\_innen der Tierschutz- und der Tierrechts-/Tierbefreiungsbewegung nach dem Vereinigungsparagraphen 278a ermittelt. Die Ermittlungen waren, wie mittlerweile aus der Aktenlage ersichtlich ist, von Anfang an von einem großzügigen Einsatz von Überwachung begleitet: Abgehörte Mobiltelefone, Funkzellenauswertung, Peilsender auf Autos und Observationen über Monate hinweg. Da dies offenbar nicht zu den gewünschten Erfolgen führte, weiteten die Ermittler\_innen die Maßnahmen sukzessive aus. So wurden nicht nur Finanzermittlungen gegen einzelne Personen und Initiativen eingeleitet, sondern auch mindestens eine Wohnung heimlich verwandt und Kameras an Wohnhäusern angebracht um Gespräche in Privaträumen überwachen zu können bzw. um Bewegungsprofile von Aktivist\_innen zu erstellen. Im Fadenkreuz der extra dafür gebildeten polizeilichen Sonderkommission standen mindestens 40 bekannte Aktivist\_innen und eine unbekannte Anzahl weiterer Personen.

Im Mai 2008 stürmten Sondereinheiten der Polizei österreichweit 23 Wohnungen und Büros, durchsuchten diese und nahmen zehn Menschen fest. Nach dreieinhalb Monaten Untersuchungshaft und einer beispiellosen weltweiten Solidaritätskampagne wurden die Beschuldigten aus dem Gefängnis entlassen. Die andauernde Untersuchungshaft stehe nicht mehr im Verhältnis zu der erwartenden Strafe, begründete die Oberstaatsanwaltschaft die überraschende Freilassung der Aktivist\_innen.

Nichtsdestotrotz folgte ein Jahr später, im Herbst 2009, eine Anklage. Obwohl ein Großteil der ursprünglichen Anschuldigungen fielen, bleibt der Vorwurf der Mitgliedschaft in einer Kriminellen Organisation bestehen. Den Angeklagten wird vorgeworfen, Mitglied in einer seit 1996 existierenden kriminellen Struktur zu sein, die sich sowohl für alle legalen als auch illegalen Aktivitäten im Tierschutz- und Tierrechtsbereich verantwortlich zeichnet. Dabei soll schlicht jede Aktivität im Bereich Tierschutz/Tierrechte ein Beleg zur Mitgliedschaft darstellen. Selbst legale Aktivitäten wie Kundgebungen polizeilich anmelden

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6 Siehe dazu Resümeeprotokoll vom 05. April 2007  
<http://www.peterpilz.at/html/tagup/Bericht2.pdf> (Zugriff 17.10. 2009)

und Vorträge organisieren, diene einzig und allein den Zielen der Kriminellen Organisation.

Erstmals also werden in Österreich 2010 politische Aktivist\_innen wegen eines Vereinigungsdeliktes vor Gericht stehen. Die ermittelnde Staatsanwaltschaft hat für den bevorstehenden Prozess über hundert Belastungszeug\_innen geladen. Allein schon dadurch ist dafür gesorgt, dass der Prozess für die Angeklagten finanziell ruinös enden wird. Sie müssen auch im Fall eines Freispruchs für mindestens einen Teil der Anwaltskosten aufkommen. Bei dem zu erwartenden Umfang des Prozesses wird dies pro Person mehrere 10.000 € ausmachen. Darüber hinaus drohen Haftstrafen von bis zu fünf Jahren im Falle einer Verurteilung.

### **Organisationsparagrafen abschaffen!**

Dass die verstärkte Repression gegen die globale Tierrechts-/Tierbefreiungsbewegung kein Zufall ist, zeigt allein schon der Bezug der österreichischen Ermittler\_innen auf sehr ähnlich geartete Fälle in England. Nicht nur in Großbritannien und Österreich wird die Tierrechtsbewegung mit zunehmendem Interesse der Strafverfolgungsbehörden bedacht. Selbst Europol, die Vernetzung der Europäischen Behörden zur Bekämpfung international organisierter Kriminalität und Terrorismus, meint eine zunehmende Bedrohung der europäischen Sicherheit durch die Bewegung für die Befreiung der Tiere wahrnehmen zu können.<sup>7</sup>

Doch auch andere soziale Bewegungen haben mit erheblichen staatlichen Repressalien zu kämpfen. In vielen Ländern werden politische Aktivist\_innen verhaftet und für ihre Meinung oder ihr politisches Engagement bestraft. Da die Tierrechts-/Tierbefreiungsbewegung verhältnismäßig klein und zum Teil marginalisiert, aber überaus aktiv ist, stellt sie offenbar ein passendes Testfeld für neue Technologien der Überwachung und neuartige Methoden der Kriminalisierung durch die Strafverfolgungsbehörden dar. Es wäre nicht überraschend, wenn diese in weiterer Folge auf andere politische Bewegungen oder breite Teile der Bevölkerung ausgeweitet werden.

In Ländern, in denen sich die Anwendung von Organisationsparagrafen schon bewährt hat, stehen ohnehin bereits vielfältige politische Initiativen vor Gericht, seien es Antimilitaristische Aktivist\_innen in Deutschland, Anarchosyndikalist\_innen in Serbien oder Öko-Autonome in Frankreich.

Die zunehmende Anwendung von Vereinigungsparagrafen ist eine nicht zu unterschätzende Entwicklung, die über kurz oder lang immer mehr politische Initiativen betreffen wird und politisches Engagement insgesamt einzuschränken vermag. Daher gilt es sich mit den Betroffenen zu solidarisieren

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[http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU\\_Terrorism\\_Situation\\_and\\_Trend\\_Report\\_TE-SAT/TESAT2009.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/publications/EU_Terrorism_Situation_and_Trend_Report_TE-SAT/TESAT2009.pdf) (Zugriff 17.10.1009)

und die Möglichkeiten zum organisierten politischen Engagement zu verteidigen!

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## Über den Autor

*Studierender der Sozialwissenschaften, Christof Mackinger beschäftigt sich mit Sozialen Bewegungen und verschiedenen Facetten der Gesellschaftskritik. Er ist einer der Beschuldigten im gegenwärtigen § 278a-Verfahren.*

*Soli-Webseite für den Prozeß: [www.antirep2008.tk](http://www.antirep2008.tk) (wird gerade übersetzt und sollte demnächst auch englischsprachig zur Verfügung stehen).*

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### Call for support

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## **"Coalitioning" for quality education in Brazil: diversity as virtue?**

**Anja Eickelberg**

### **Abstract**

Theory on civil society networks suggests that the development and maintenance of consensus and a collective identity between sometimes highly heterogeneous actors is a challenging but fundamental aspect of successful mobilization. Based on this consideration, I have explored the internal functioning and political impact of the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education, a civil society network that unites non-governmental and semi-governmental organizations, social movements, teacher's unions and corporate foundations around the common goal to improve the quality of public education in Brazil. The case study confirms the significance of internal cohesion for political impact, and presents the CBDE as an example for a social network in which diversity, despite causing frequent tensions, is a virtue rather than a weakness.

### **Introduction**

The Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education (*Campania Nacional pelo Direito à Educação*, CBDE) has been created in 1999 as one of the first of currently more than 100 national coalitions of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE). The CBDE is the most plural and broad articulation in the area of basic education in Brazil today. Its political demands are based on the belief that the nation-state is the only entity capable of delivering free public education of high quality. It is noteworthy that enrolment numbers for public primary school in Brazil are almost universal since the year 2000. However, lack of educational quality leads to distressing indicators when it comes to grade repetition, drop-outs and learning achievements. From an economic viewpoint, Brazil could easily reform its public school system, however, the government continues to spend a mere 4,3% of the GDP on education – less than many Latin American countries.

Although the CBDE has not been successful in pressuring President Lula da Silva to increase the education budget, there are a number of concrete achievements of the campaign which did or will contribute to the improvement of public education in Brazil<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the campaign has become the principal nongovernmental source on education funding for journalists and

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. the implementation of a federal fund for basic education (FUNDEB), the definition of a student cost quality which is currently being discussed to become the principal reference for the federal education budget; a national conference of education held in April 2008 with broad civil society participation; the hosting of the global GCE assembly 2008 in Sao Paulo.

policymakers and managed to build up a significant support structure in the Ministry of Education and the National Congress. In terms of membership, the CBDE grew from initially 50 to more than 200 organizations which are today coordinated by a national executive committee headquartered in Sao Paulo, a board of 10 member organizations, and 19 regional committees.

## **Theoretical Background and Methodology**

In recent years, the construction of networks between civil society groups in search of participatory forms of collective struggle for equality and social justice has exited much academic attention. Scholars agree that successful networking depends on the ability of these coalitions to establish and maintain consensus and a collective identity among its members. However there is a lack of detailed analyses of factors that foster and hinder the development of this internal cohesion.

In response to this gap, I have explored the opportunities and challenges of cohesion and interaction among the members of the CBDE in a theoretically informed and empirically driven case study<sup>2</sup>. I have taken a critical constructivist approach with a focus on explanatory interviews in which I have explored the internal functioning of the CBDE and its implications for the campaign's political impact. The study comprises a total of 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews with members and affiliates of the CBDE, as well as politicians and journalists. In addition, I have reviewed various key government, campaign and media publications.

## **Results: How history and flexibility matters**

The political impact of the campaign is, to an important extent, based on the campaign's ability to construct and alimnet a collective identity between its board members. The CBDE board is representative for the campaign's diversity: it comprises four national NGOs<sup>3</sup>, the Brazilian Landless Movement (MST) and the Brazilian Movement for Infantile Education (Mieib), the National Confederation of Educational Workers (CNTE), the corporate Foundation Fundacao Abrinq, as well as the National Union of Municipal Education Secretaries (UNDIME) and the National Union of Municipal Education Councils (Uncme). Together these entities are responsible for the planning, evaluation, strategic decisions and direction of the campaign. Although conflicts do occur, there is agreement that this diversity is crucial for the political strength of the CBDE. According to a Brazilian government representative "the campaign has a virtue. She unites very diverse movements from the area of education that rarely

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<sup>2</sup> The case study is the base of my 120-pages Master thesis (MSc International Development, University of Amsterdam, February 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Action Aid Brasil; Ação Educativa; Centro de Cultura Luiz Freire; Centro de Defesa dos Direitos da criança e do Adolescente

dialogued before. It is difficult to reach consent, but whenever the board closes a deal and presents a proposal to the government, she has impact."<sup>4</sup>

A look into Brazil's recent history helps to understand why social movements, NGOs and teacher's unions – entities that oppose each other in many Latin America countries – manage to dialog constructively in Brazil. As one campaign member explains, "the dictatorship collapsed due to a strong street movement that involved people with very different ideologies. It was a moment of seemingly impossible union. Many entities of the CBDE board took part in this process, and we all understand education as a right. This progressive view is the base on which a minimum consent is built."<sup>5</sup> Opposition to the military dictatorship that had ruled Brazil since 1964 and was finally overthrown in 1985 was led by the Catholic Church and civil society groups, rather than the political class. The education movement played an important role in the democratization process, particularly through the Forum in Defense of the Public School<sup>6</sup>. The forum was initiated and dominated by the teacher's unions<sup>7</sup>, supported by NGOs, education councils and social movements<sup>8</sup>, and had significant influence on the elaboration of the 1988 Democratic Constitution and the 1996 National Education Law<sup>9</sup>. It dispersed when the unions got in crisis in the end of the decade; some member organizations would later join the CBDE.

Besides the progressive view on education, the fight against military rule and, later neoliberal politics have generated the belief that flexibility and openness to dialog are crucial to built strength as a network. According to a former CBDE coordinator "the guideline is to recognize differences without suppressing identities, but working the concept of alliance."<sup>10</sup> The campaign is designed to facilitate collective decision-making and participatory, critical, and non-hierarchical processes of reflection and learning. Over the years, its members have learned to combine different views and negotiate interests between entities. With escalating political impact, however, tensions between the leading entities have been increasing.

While the relationship between NGOs and teacher's unions within the CBDE had been cooperative initially, it has been erupted with the election of President Lula. A founding member explains: "With (former Presidents) Collor, Franco and Cardoso we had the same enemy. When Lula assumed many union leaders went straight into government. So parts of the CNTE are less critical with the government and prefer to present themselves as interlocutor."<sup>11</sup> As a result, the

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<sup>4</sup> Interview parliamentary assessor, Brasília, September 2008

<sup>5</sup> Interview coordinator regional committee Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, August 2008

<sup>6</sup> Fórum em Defesa da Escola Pública, FNDEP

<sup>7</sup> ANPED, ANDES-SN, CNTE, UNE, UBES

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Acao Educativa, UNDIME, MST

<sup>9</sup> Lei de Diretrizes e Bases, LDB

<sup>10</sup> Interview ex-coordinator CBDE, August 2008, Sao Paulo

<sup>11</sup> Interview director Ação Educativa, Sao Paulo, August 2008

unions are today internally fragmented and CNTE's participation in the campaign highly depends on the political situation. However, the importance of the unions remains unchallenged, since "they have a lot of legitimacy, a huge social base, and many contacts in congress. The campaign cannot exist without the unions."<sup>12</sup>

Another trouble spot is the landless worker's movement MST, South America's biggest and most influential social movement. The participation of the MST in the CBDE is as unstable as that of the unions, and their future in the board is subject to intense debate. The MST has been criminalized by parts of the Brazilian media and government, and is perceived as extremely radical within the conservative sectors of Brazilian society. As a consequence, the MST's membership in the board of the CBDE hinders, to some extent, the campaign's ability to receive financial support from national business foundations. The later refuse to support the MST, while the MST refuses to receive money from private businesses. The CBDE coordination deploys a very critical discourse towards the MST, but most board members remain supportive of the movement: "If there exists an organization in Brazil that knows how to make politics, it is the MST. They exactly know the political conjuncture, how to radicalize, and how to comport themselves within this conjuncture. They have an excellent feeling for politics."<sup>13</sup>

The instable participation of MST and CNTE does not only impede successful advocacy actions, but has a major impact on the campaigns reach into the states. Both organizations have a large social base whose support is a crucial for the social mobilization of the CBDE. As a consequence, the campaign currently suffers from a demobilized base and little political strength.

A look at the trajectory of the campaign over the years reveals that the level of cohesion between CBDE members on national and local scales has always been highly related to its political impact. Three main phases can be distinguished: From 1999–2002 board and regional committees were still under construction, and the CBDE was directed almost exclusively by the general coordinator, impeding any significant political impact. A further obstacle to political impact was the lack of a clear goal. With the formulation of concrete objectives<sup>14</sup> cohesion between state and national levels increased, with peaks in key moments of the elaboration process of the Fund for Basic Education (FUNDEB), which, consequently, have been strongest in terms of political impact. Since the approval of the FUNDEB in June 2007, regional participation has slowed down extremely, due to increasing disagreements about the campaign's relation to the Lula government and concrete conflicts of interest between the key member organizations.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview general coordinator BCRE, Sao Paulo, August 2008

<sup>13</sup> Interview president CNTE, Sao Paulo, September 2008

<sup>14</sup> E.g. the definition of the Student-Quality-Cost beginning in 2002, the elaboration of the fund for basic education FUNDEB and advocacy for the national education conference CONEB beginning 2004

The conflicting parties are willing to solve the recently accumulating problems in collective reflection and negotiation processes which might lead to certain restructuration measures. All in all, members are optimistic about the campaign's future, as mirrored in the following statement: "The Brazilian campaign is quite demobilized right now, but that's the typical reflux all social movements suffer from. I believe that she will soon walk again, as a powerful accumulation of very different individuals and groups which are bound by the belief that only educated citizens are strong citizens."<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

#### **The significance of internal cohesion for political impact**

The experiences of the CBDE prove that cooperation and trust between traditionally antagonistic civil society groups such as social movements, NGOs and teachers unions is, to a certain extent, possible. Brazil has a long history of civic engagement for social justice out of which emerged the belief that groups with differing priorities and practices, but a common goal are capable to bring about significant social and political change when joining forces. However, the CBDE also shows that a too heterogeneous leadership bears the danger of internal conflicts that can significantly hamper successful advocacy and mobilization. The conviction of all members that conflicts can and have to be solved mirrors, however, that diversity within the CBDE is overall a virtue rather than a weakness.

### **About the author**

Anja Eickelberg is a researcher for the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt) of the University of Amsterdam. She is currently involved in a comparative research project on the role of civil society advocacy in the defense of public education which explores the history and development of the Global Campaign for Education.

### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/eickelberg.pdf>

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<sup>15</sup> Interview secretary of basic education, Brasilia, September 2008  
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## Needed: a global labour charter movement

Peter Waterman

*This Charter was first floated in 2005. It has been published in labour publications in South Africa and Colombia as well as on websites in Europe and the US. The present version has been updated and provided with an extensive list of references and resources.*

### Preamble

The idea of a Global Labour Charter Movement comes out of both desperation and hope. The desperation is due to seeing the labour movement, in North, South, East or West, *still* on the defensive due to (despite?) the severe, multiple and continuing attacks delivered by contemporary capitalism. Not only has the union movement largely forgotten its early emancipatory inspiration and utopian hopes. Even the old adage that 'the best means of defence is attack' seems unfamiliar to labour's international leadership.

The desperation is due – more specifically - to the international unions' continued attempt to *get back* to a mythologised utopia of social harmony (the reality of which is surely responsible for labour's current predicament). This *backward-looking* utopianism is represented in the current 'Decent Work' campaign<sup>1</sup>. DW promotes the archaic West-European paradise of 'social partnership' between Labour, Capital and State. It has simply hoisted this to the global level. DW is no sense a *union* or *labour movement* project: it has been adopted, lock, stock and two smoking barrels, from the Geneva-based International Labour Organisation. And this is an *inter-state* body - castigated by a former insider (Standing 2008) for *its* multiple incapacities in the face of globalisation!. DW, finally, reproduces a traditional imperial relationship, since it is being promoted by the West to the Rest. Its sponsors and funders are West European social-reformist unions and NGOs... plus the *neo-liberal* European Union!

Hope comes from seeing new energy and vision within the global justice and solidarity movement (GJ&SM), for example in the international rural labour movement, Via Campesina. Despite all the imaginable difficulties confronting the self-organisation of rural labour, this body has developed a holistic vision of its social position, of its enemies, of an alternative future. It has demonstrated assertive global strategies and sophisticated relational practices (internal and external) that have made it a leading actor in the GJ&SM and led to widespread public recognition and support (Desmarais 2007, Waterman forthcoming). Hope also comes from signs of assertion and innovation closer to the traditional labour movement, and from new thinking within and about such (Fletcher Jr

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<sup>1</sup> [www.decentwork.org](http://www.decentwork.org)

and Gapasin 2008, Gallin 2003, Huws 2008, Ince 2007, Research Committee 44 2008, Bieler, Lindberg and Pillay 2008). As well as from efforts to specify a necessary and desirable post-capitalist utopia – and how it might be reached. (Networked Politics 2008, Adamovsky 2005, 2007, Dwyer-Wittheford 2007, Sousa Santos 2006-7, Spannos 2008).

## Propositions

1. The **idea** of a GLCM is to develop a charter, declaration or manifesto on labour, relevant to *all* working people, under the conditions of a radically transformed and highly aggressive capitalism, neo-liberalised, networked and globalised.
2. The proposing of such a charter has, however, been **provoked** by a couple of other international labour declarations (Bamako Appeal 2006, Labour Platform for the Americas 2006). A common limitation of these otherwise very different documents is that they were initially produced and issued for acceptance or endorsement, by union leaderships or intellectual elites, without previous discussion by union members, shopfloor or community activists themselves. The GLC project is, however, also inspired by a women's one, the Women's Global Charter for Humanity (2004), produced after worldwide discussion by one of the newest mobilising social movements. (Verdière 2006, Conway 2007).
3. In so far as the GLC project is addressed to **the emancipation of life from work** (work here meaning labour for capital and state, empire and patriarchy), it implies *articulating* (both joining and expressing) labour struggles with those of other oppressed and exploited social categories, people and peoples – particularly those previously unrecognised workers, women and peasants/farmers. The existence of the Global Justice and Solidarity Movement (GJ&SM), best known through the World Social Forum (WSF) process, makes such articulation increasingly possible.
4. Its title could be the '**Global Labour Charter Movement**' (or GLCM21). 'Charter' reminds us of one of the earliest radical-democratic labour-popular movements of industrial capitalism, the British Chartists (Thompson 1984). 'Movement' reminds us that the development of such a declaration is a process and requires the self-mobilisation of workers.
5. Such a process needs to reveal its **origins and debts**. These are not only to early labour history. They are also to the new forms of labour self-

organisation (by, within and beyond unions), to the shopfloor, urban and rural labour networks (local, national, international), to the pro-labour NGOs (labour service organisations), and to a growing wave of labour education, to (electronic) communication and to research responding to the global crisis of the labour movement.

6. The novel principle of such a charter should be its conception as a **virtuous spiral** - that it be thought of not as a single, correct, final declaration, which workers, peoples and other people simply *endorse* (though endorsement could be part of the process), as for its processal, dialogical and developing nature. This notion would allow for it to be begun, paused and joined at any point. Such a process would require at least the following elements: information/communication, education, dialogue, (re-) formulation, action, evaluation, information.
7. It is the existence of **cyberspace** (the internet, the web, online audio-visuals) that makes such a Global Labour Charter for the first time conceivable. We have here not simply a new communications technology but the possibility for developing non-hierarchical, dialogical, equal relations worldwide. The process will be computer-based because of the web's built-in characteristics of feedback, its worldwide reach, its low and decreasing cost. An increasing number of workers and activists are in computerised work, are familiar with information and communication technology and have web skills. Given, however, uneven worker computer access, such a process must also be intensely local, imply and empower outreach, using the communication methods appropriate to particular kinds of labour and each specific locale. (See: Networked Politics).
8. **Networking** can and must ensure that any initiators or coordinators do not become permanent leaders or controllers. There is a growing international body of fulltime organisers and volunteer activists, both within and beyond the traditional inter/national unions, experienced in the GJ&SM, who could provide the initial nodes in such a network. Networking also, however, allows for there to be various such labour charters, in dialogue with each other. Such dialogue should be considered a normal and even necessary part of the process and avoid the authority, dependency or passivity associated with traditional manifestos. (See, again, Networked Politics).
9. If this proposal assumes the **crisis** of the traditional trade unions, it should be clear that it simultaneously represents an **opportunity** for them. This is for a reinvention of the *form* of labour 'self-articulation', as



has occurred more than once in the history of capitalism (from guilds to craft unions, from craft to inter/national industrial unions). By abandoning what is an increasingly imaginary power, centrality or privilege, unions could simultaneously reinvent themselves and become a necessary and significant part of a movement for social emancipation worldwide. The form or forms of such a reinvention will emerge precisely out of a continuing dialogue, the dialectic between organisational and networking activities.

10. Starting with the first edition(s) of any GLC, there could develop globally-agreed demands and campaigns, with these having **emancipatory implications** (arguably subversive, empowering, socially transformatory) for those involved. Rather than increasing their dependence on capital, state, patriarchy, empire, any GLC must increase their solidarity with other popular and radically-democratic sectors/movements.
11. Any such campaigns must, however, be seen as not carved in stone but as collective experiments, to be collectively evaluated. They should therefore be dependent on collective self-activity, implying global solidarity, as with the international 19th century campaign (never universally implemented) for the eight-hour day<sup>2</sup>. There is a wide range of **imaginable issues** (of which the following are hypothetical examples, in no necessary order of priority):
  - A Six-Hour Day, A Five-Day Week, A 48-Week Year, thus distributing available work more widely, reducing overwork<sup>3</sup>.
  - Global Labour Rights, including the right to strike and inter/national solidarity action, but first *consulting* workers - including migrants, precarious workers, unpaid carers ('housewives'), the self-employed, the unemployed - on their priorities; and secondly by prioritising collective struggles and creative activity over leadership lobbying<sup>4</sup>.
  - A Global Basic Income Grant, independent of any obligation to work, and asserting the right to life over the obligation to work<sup>5</sup>.
  - A Centennial Reinvention of the ILO in 2019, raising labour

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight-hour\\_day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight-hour_day)

<sup>3</sup> See [www.swt.org](http://www.swt.org)

<sup>4</sup> [http://laborrightsblog.typepad.com/international\\_labor\\_right/2006/11/about\\_this\\_blog.html](http://laborrightsblog.typepad.com/international_labor_right/2006/11/about_this_blog.html)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.basicincome.org/bien/aboutbasicincome.html>

representation from 25 to 50 percent, and simultaneously sharing the raised percentage with non-unionised workers (Standing 2008);

- A Global Campaign for Useful Work, reaching beyond conditions of, or at work ('Decent Work') to deal with useful production, socially-responsible consumption, environmental sustainability/restoration (Morris 2008)<sup>6</sup>.
- All in Common, a campaign for the defence and extension of forms of common ownership and control (thus challenging both the privatisation process and capitalist ownership in general)<sup>7</sup>.
- A reinvention of Mayday as a Global Labour and Social Movements Solidarity Day (consider the innovations introduced by precarious workers in Europe and by immigrant labour in the USA)<sup>8</sup>.
- Support to the principle of Solidarity Economics and the practice of the Solidarity Economy, i.e. production, distribution, exchange that surpasses the competitive, divisory, hierarchical, growth-fixated, wasteful, polluting, destructive principles of capitalism. (Miller 2006, Mance 2007)
- A Global Emancipation of Labour Forum, as part of, or complementing, the World Social Forum, an assembly open to all working people, organizations, intellectuals/artists and movements, organised autonomously from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the Global Unions. If not in a geographical place then in cyberspace. (Reese and Chase-Dunn 2008).
- A website/portal coordinating information and ideas oriented toward the emancipation of labour, covering research, education, audio-visuals, and other resources; to have such a title as 'The Global Labour Charter', 'The Global Emancipation of Labour', 'Moving Labour Globally'; to be open to sponsorship but autonomous of all organisations and ideologies; open on equal footing to all; to have a preferential option for globally marginalised workers and regions; to have a transformatory purpose and be open in governance and operation. (Compare here: Choike, Global Labour Strategies, New Unionism, Union Ideas Network, E-Library for Social Transformation, Union Renewal, Rebelión, etc).
- [Fill at will]

12. This proposal is clearly marked by its origin, in terms of its author's 'subject position', place of birth/residence, age, language, etc. It is, however, issued under the principle of CopyLeft. It can therefore be

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<sup>6</sup> <http://libcom.org/history/1976-the-fight-for-useful-work-at-lucas-aerospace>

<sup>7</sup> <http://turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-1/commonism/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.euromayday.org/about.php>, <http://www.mayday2007.org/>

adapted, replaced, challenged, rejected and, obviously, ignored. Its only requirement (or hope) is that it be discussed.

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### **About the author**

Peter Waterman (London 1936), worked for the international Communist movement in the 1950s and '60s. Through the 1970s-90s, he was a left academic-activist on labour and social movements. In the late-1980s he initiated the international debate on 'social movement unionism'. Now retired, he writes on international labour, the WSF and the global justice and solidarity movement. He is published widely, in English and other languages, in print and on the web.

### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/waterman.pdf>

## **Civil society, citizenship and the politics of the (im)possible: rethinking militancy in Africa today**

**Michael Neocosmos**

*This report was originally written for CODESRIA, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, and is due to be published by CODESRIA as a monograph in the near future. Interface is very grateful to Prof Neocosmos and to CODESRIA for the opportunity to present a preliminary version of this report. We hope that this enables social movements elsewhere in the world to learn from some of the most systematic reflection yet on the current shape of popular struggles in Africa.*

### **Preface and acknowledgements**

This work was originally written as a report for the Codesria Multinational Working Group on Citizenship and submitted in 2007. It has been revised since then. The argument is deployed along the following lines:

The contemporary critique of neo-liberalism has concentrated overwhelmingly on its economic theory and socio-economic effects. Very little has been written so far on its political conceptions, particularly of the limited thinking which it imposes on political thought and practice. This work makes a contribution to the latter endeavour by making a case for thinking an emancipatory politics in contemporary Africa. It shows that civil society - the expression of the freedom of the citizen in neo-liberal discourse - must be understood, not as organised society, but as a domain of politics where the hegemony of a liberal, state mode of politics prevails. Politics also exists beyond, or at the margin of civil society. Neo-liberal politics predominantly produces passivity or rarely a politics of petitioning the state. This political passivity must be countered by an active citizenship which often exists beyond the domain of state politics including civil society itself. But this active citizenship - political agency - is not necessarily conducive to a politics of emancipation; it merely enables the possibility of the envisaging of alternative modes of thought and political 'possibles'. To initiate a discussion of the theorisation of emancipatory politics in Africa, this work briefly outlines the philosophy of change of Alain Badiou, and the anthropology of Sylvain Lazarus. In particular it concentrates on the latter's understanding of subjective 'modes of politics' and political 'prescriptions'.

Using this perspective, it becomes possible to identify a *National Liberation Struggle* (NLS) mode of politics as a sequential political subjectivity which dominated on the continent from the 1940s to the 1970s. The main characteristics of this NLS mode of politics are outlined. However, this manner of thinking emancipatory politics has now come to an end, so that emancipation has to be thought differently today in Africa. I then argue in some detail that the period 1984-86 in South Africa (re-) discovered the beginnings of a new mode of

politics, which in several important ways contradicted the core features of the NLS mode. In particular this was a politics which did not see its object as the seizure of power, but as the transformation of the lived experience of power. The monograph ends by comparing the politics of two current post-apartheid South African social movements - the *Treatment Action Campaign* and the *Abahlali baseMjondolo*. It shows that, despite appearances, it is the former which has operated within the domain of the state politics of civil society, and the latter which operates beyond those subjective limits. Hence it is the latter which shows the closest fidelity to the event of 1984-86, and which is thus the closest thing today, at least in South Africa, to being the bearer of a thought of emancipatory politics.

I am deeply grateful to Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, Jacques Depelchin and Richard Pithouse for extremely helpful conversations and insights around many of the issues discussed in this work. I would also like to thank Codesria for funding the research on which this work was based and the *Centre for Civil Society* at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in Durban for housing me for two weeks in October 2006 while material was gathered. I also need to thank Phyllis Naidoo who put me up in her flat during my visit to Durban. I would like to dedicate this piece to her. Of course I am solely responsible for all errors and inaccuracies contained herein.

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## 7. Concluding Remarks

*Today the great majority of people do not have a name; the only name available is 'excluded', which is the name of those who do not have a name. Today the great majority of humanity counts for nothing. And philosophy has no other legitimate aim than to help find the new names that will bring into existence the unknown world that is only waiting for us because we are waiting for it (Alain Badiou).*

*The possibility of the impossible is the foundation of politics (Alain Badiou).*

*To say that politics is of the order of thought is an attempt to conceive of politics after the end of classism and within another space than that of the state; but first and foremost, it is to say that politics is not given in the space of an object, be it that of the 'state' or that of 'revolution' ... The enterprise of conceiving politics from elsewhere than from the state or from the economy is an enterprise of freedom and of a domain proper to decision (Sylvain Lazarus).*

*We think. People must understand that we think (Abahlali baseMjondolo activist).*

## 1. Introduction

Critical approaches to neo-liberalism in Africa have overwhelmingly concentrated on analysing the problems, both theoretical and empirical, of its economic arguments and policies. There are numerous texts and scholarly works criticising Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the ideology, practices and perspectives of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the disastrous effects of neo-liberal economic policies on Africa, and the inability of states to control their national economies and rethink development. Much less has been written about the neo-liberal politics which necessarily accompany the economics of neo-liberalism, apart from a few rare critical commentaries on the notion of 'civil society' and the state. This relative lack of attention to neo-liberal politics has had the unfortunate effect of restricting the development of an alternative popular-democratic discourse. Liberal conceptions of human rights, 'political' parties, civil society, the equating of politics with the state, the unproblematic notion of 'the rule of law' and especially formalistic political practices have regularly been taken over uncritically in radical-Left discourse,



which is simultaneously attempting to develop alternatives to economic neo-liberalism.

For example, one often hears the view expressed that economic neo-liberalism may be a disaster for most of humanity, but fortunately human rights enable the mobilisation of alternative popular forces around 'third generation' rights such as the 'right to development'. The unfortunate tendency has been to proliferate the number of human rights to be included in international conventions as if somehow this will legitimise people's struggles for an emancipatory future. An accompanying tendency has been a failure to subject state politics to a thoroughgoing critique, and hence to revert to proposing statist politics of a social democratic type as an alternative to neo-liberalism, simply because of the latter's familiarity, despite the obvious failure of social democracy to create the conditions for human emancipation in Europe and elsewhere.

Moreover, a critique is not enough; appropriate categories for the thinking of an emancipatory politics need to be developed as a matter of urgency. In the absence of the ability to think an emancipatory politics independently of state subjectivity, we necessarily revert to thinking through the prism of the state which is, to use a computer analogy, the 'default position' of any un-theorised politics. Much more work needs to be done on thinking emancipatory politics if a serious alternative to current hegemonic neo-liberalism (what Francophones refer to as 'la pensée unique') is to gradually be constructed both in theory and in practice.

In order to contribute to this project, this work attempts to help us think politics beyond the state. It begins from the axiom that politics is always plural and that different politics concern fundamentally different prescriptions. In so doing it attempts to do two things: first to think citizenship as an active citizenship, and in particular to contribute to the thinking of political agency on the African continent under conditions where the old emancipatory modes of politics - those associated with Socialist Revolutions, National Liberation Struggles, and Developmentalism - are defunct; second to think the 'politics of the possible', i.e. the idea that - in addition to an analysis of the existing, of the world as it is, it is also possible, indeed imperative, to develop an understanding of the possibility, of understanding the thought of a different future in this existing present - of the 'what could be' in the 'what is'. As we shall see, it is this activity which must be understood as a prescriptive subjectivity (Lazarus 1996, 2001).

The collapse of the modes of politics associated with socialism and national liberation into state politics, and thereby the loss of their emancipatory content, is well known. Today salvation is sometimes sought in social movements of an undifferentiated 'multitude' (e.g. Hardt and Negri 2001, Amin and Sridhar 2002, Bond 2004), hence in the exercise of citizenship rights by disparate sectors of the population making claims on the state for economic, social or political resources and entitlements. I have debated human rights discourse at length elsewhere and have argued that it cannot form the basis of an emancipatory politics (Neocosmos 2006b, 2009a); here I am more concerned to address issues surrounding the notions of 'civil society', 'social movement' and

'emancipatory politics' and to suggest alternatives to existing forms of conceptualising political agency. The purpose of this work is thus to open up conceptual space. I propose to do this by showing how currently hegemonic ways of thinking alternative politics within these terms remain limited to state conceptions, and how removing oneself from state subjectivity requires a re-conceptualisation of citizenship as active citizenship, as well as an understanding of emancipatory politics as prescriptive politics.

I shall first elucidate the kind of politics which the ideas of 'civil society' and 'social movement' tend to assume. I will then attempt a brief outline of some of the views of Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus in particular, who provide an alternative way of conceiving emancipatory politics, and will sketch how their ideas can be applied to an understanding of a National Liberation Struggle (NLS) mode of politics and its contestation in South Africa in the 1980s. I will argue here that the period 1984-86 witnessed an 'event' in Badiou's terms, with the consequence that fidelity to that event means that it is impossible, after its occurrence, to think emancipation in a statist manner on the continent.

I will end with two short case studies, assessing the existence of different modes of politics in two different social movements in South Africa during the post-apartheid period: one operating within the realm of civil society, and another maintaining itself firmly on the margins of civil society. I will suggest that it is with respect to the latter, that a fidelity to the event of 1984-86 is clearly apparent. Throughout the argument, the examples of the struggle for liberation and post-apartheid politics in South Africa are considered within an African context, as illustrative of and not exceptional to the African experience. South Africa is, after all, probably the most consistently politically neo-liberal of African countries, at least it is so in the eyes of Empire, as the latter regularly sets it up as a model for the continent. The contradictions of political neo-liberalism in that case therefore probably appear more clearly there than they do elsewhere.

## **2. State = political society + civil society<sup>1</sup>**

Perhaps the best way to initiate a critical assessment of 'civil society' and what it names, is not so much through a return to a discussion of liberal theory, but rather to examine the way in which the term is conceived today in Africa. What is 'civil society' in Africa today? The answer is that although the term today names a list of organised interests organising beyond the boundaries of the state and the family and is usually reduced to NGO's, it is in fact best understood as a domain of politics, and more specifically a domain of state politics within society, and not simply as interest groups themselves. One of the fundamental features of democracy for neo-liberal theory has been its stress on a 'vibrant' civil society which can help keep democracy afloat (Gibbon 1996). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it had been trade unions which organised

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<sup>1</sup> See Gramsci 1971: 263.

workers at the point of production, which constituted the typical organisation of civil society which could create and maintain democratic norms (Rueshemeyer et al.1992). Today it is doubtful that trade unions can continue to play this role given the different forms of capital accumulation which, particularly, but not exclusively in the South, assume large numbers of unemployed, subcontracting, casualisation, increased insecurity and so on.

In this sense, political organisation at the point of production and particularly its expression by productivist theories gradually lose much of their earlier centrality and power. In South Africa (with a 43-45% unemployment rate), one recent argument (Buhlungu 2004) has been the suggestion that the trade union movement - which in the 1980s was at the vanguard of popular struggles against the apartheid state, and which was instrumental in the winning of liberal democratic rights - has today lost much of its 'vibrancy' with the de-politicization consequent on liberal-democratization. Moreover its location within state politics within various corporatist arrangements has made it unable to be the vehicle for an emancipatory alternative. Consequently its language is simply 'workerist' with little political content. In the post-apartheid period it is 'new social movements' or more broadly civil society organisations which are now seen by many as the bearers of an emancipatory future. How have these organisations fared in the post-apartheid period?

This question is analysed by Habib (2004). We are told that relations between state and civil society have taken three distinct forms in post-apartheid South Africa - marginalisation, engagement and adversarialism - and that this plurality of relations is good for liberal democracy and governance (2004: 239). Here the liberal notion of pluralism is extended by Habib from its usual meaning referring to a plurality of organisations, to a plurality of relations with the state. Yet this argument fails to go beyond its neo-liberal assumptions to show the possibility of alternatives. Political liberalism is the best form of democracy for Habib precisely because of its plurality of state civil society relations. His concern is thus to 'celebrate(s)' (2004: 228) pluralism, and he concentrates on this rather than on analysing it.

Let me briefly subject this celebration to critical scrutiny. The problems begin with the manner Habib understands civil society. This he sees as 'the organized expression of various interests and values operating in the triangular space between the family state and market' (2004: 228). It should be noted, despite attempts to anchor this in classical writings, that this is not a definition which corresponds to that of Hegel (or indeed to that of any of his predecessors), to which it only bears a superficial resemblance, although it is fully in tune with current neo-liberal thinking. For Hegel and the classics of political philosophy the term 'civil society' referred to the 'triangular space' itself, to a *realm of activity* (hence the term 'society') in which such organisations operate, rather than to those organised interests themselves. Of course, to provide a definition which does not conform to that of the classics is not a sin, yet there is an important theoretical reason for referring to civil society as a realm of social and political activity. This is simply because many organisations in society are

regularly excluded or exclude themselves from it. To visualise civil society as a realm of activity enables an understanding of inclusion and exclusion, which an equating of civil society with organised interests themselves cannot. In our current context, those outside civil society are not seen as legitimate state interlocutors, those within are.

The neo-liberal position espoused by Habib fails to recognise this, as it understands civil society as the organisations themselves, organisations which are simply legally defined as outside the state and business ('non-profit' in the case of South Africa, see Swilling and Russell 2002). This makes it difficult if not impossible to understand the relations between organisations of society and the state. Was the Boeremag - an illegal Afrikaner organisation intent on overthrowing the post-apartheid state - part of civil society? Obviously not, because it was not a recognised organisation whose politics were legitimate in the eyes of the state.

A more recent example concerns the events which have shaken popular politics in South Africa. From end September to early October 2009, the organisation of shack dwellers known as Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM, see below) was systematically attacked by thugs (some advertising themselves as Zulu ethnics, others as ANC members) and the police under the direction of local and regional politicians in part of the Durban city area known as 'Kennedy Road'<sup>2</sup>. In what was quite an Orwellian statement, the regional ANC qualified the organisation which has mass support in the settlement as 'illegitimate' and the organisations which were imposed on the people in this violent manner as 'legitimate' (Abahlali Press Release Thursday Oct 15<sup>th</sup> 2009). Evidently this referred to legitimacy in the eyes of the state which was thereby excluding AbM from civil society in this violent manner, in other words from the category of those organisations which it considers legitimate. These are known in the country, and elsewhere, as 'stakeholders' (see Neocosmos 2009b).

In sum, the sphere of activity known as 'civil' society must be understood as limited by what the state sees as legitimate political activity and legitimate organising. This is why for neo-liberal theory there can be no civil society outside liberal democracy (e.g. under authoritarian state systems such as colonialism or indeed apartheid). Of course no 'revolutionary' organisation (however understood) could possibly form part of civil society as it would have as its political goal the overthrow of the state. Civil society therefore regularly excludes many popular organisations from its sphere of activity. Thus if the state does not legally recognise the existence of an organisation it cannot possibly form part of civil society. In South Africa, the state party itself, the ANC, distinguished clearly as soon as it captured power between 'genuinely representative organisations' and those which are not (ANC 1996). The latter were obviously not legitimate in its eyes. In the 1980s, the ANC aligned United Democratic Front (UDF) and other organisations fighting for liberation did so outside what was then civil society, and only became part of civil society after

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<sup>2</sup> See eg. [www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/59322/](http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/59322/).

1990 when their legitimacy among the people was recognised by the state. Civil society today is then it seems, simply society as viewed from the perspective of the state, the organised interests of society it sees fit to deal with. Any organisation challenging the monopoly of state politics - state universality - is therefore bound to be excluded. This becomes apparent in Habib's classification.

Habib's classification of civil society types is governed by their relationship to the state, from 'accommodationist' to 'adversarial'. The first group, as he accurately observes, is 'sub-contracted' by the state to fulfil a number of its functions wfrom which the latter has withdrawn. However he is not sensitive to the irony of referring to such organisations as NGOs when they are not only funded by government, but operate on the basis of the same subjectivity and technicism, and in fact precisely undertake state functions (Swilling and Russell 2002). These so-called NGOs are more aptly termed 'parastatals'. Of course one is entitled to question the whole idea of an independent civil society in this instance, as the distinction between such NGOs and state institutions is simply a legal one, a state distinction.

The second group referred to as 'adversarialist', is also conceived in relation to the state, as its defining feature is its antagonism to the latter. This group includes particularly the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). We are told little regarding the politics of such organisations and no comment is made as to why the only two alternatives vis-à-vis the state should be either adversarial or accommodation. If indeed this is so, it may tell us something regarding the character of the public sphere in South Africa, where creeping authoritarianism and the intolerance of disagreement seem more and more to have become the order of the day so that one is forced either into total subservience or into opposition to the state. Nevertheless, Habib points to an important feature of the state by noting that there exists a third group which consists of 'survivalist responses of poor and marginalised people who have no alternative but to organise in the face of a retreating state that refuses to meet its socio-economic obligations to its citizenry' (2004: 236-7). Yet one wonders about the extent to which these groups are not systematically excluded from civil society altogether by their very political marginalisation (and also by Habib's own definitions as many engage in economic activities) let alone by their 'informal' character.

More important however is the foreclosure in Habib's work of any possible alternative classification of civil society organisations, for example one which would not use the state as its reference point. If we admit that liberal democracy is not the only form of democracy, and that many popular organisations practice alternative popular forms of democracy, then why not classify such organisations in terms of the extent to which their vision of society, forms of operation and concrete demands may be democratic in ways which go beyond the limits of neo-liberalism? A much more useful typology could have been based on a distinction between statist/managerialist organisations on the one hand and popular-democratic ones on the other, as it would have enabled

the recognition and analysis of popular-democratic sites of politics beyond the state.

Perhaps the ruling ANC is right in maintaining, as it has on many occasions, that 'confrontational' organisations and social movements are indeed often unrepresentative and 'ultra-leftist', then again maybe their politics are indeed authoritarian, but maybe they are not. If a genuine left-democratic alternative is to be developed, it is surely here in sites of popular politics that it is likely to be found, whether in civil society or indeed outside of it. These sites need to be investigated critically, but Habib's typology disables such a possibility. Moreover, Ashwin Desai's and others' enthusiasm for so-called social movements of 'the poors' should not be taken at face value, without a critical investigation into the extent and character of the political alternatives proposed (see Desai 2002). After all just because an organisation or movement is opposed to the state, does not make it either democratic or 'progressive' (despite the possible justice of its demands). Its politics may simply be concerned with incorporation into the existing system, and/or with providing a simple mirror image of state politics, and not with transformation in a popular-democratic direction. Unfortunately however, Habib's liberalism forecloses the asking of such questions; his ends up being a highly conservative perspective.

Civil society must be understood as a realm of socio-political activity - of political subjectivity - in which contestation takes place between different political positions, but which ultimately constitutes the limits, structured by the state, of a consensual state domain of politics. Civil society is in fact the state in society. Politics can and does exist beyond the limits of civil society, beyond the confines of the state consensus. Broadly speaking, civil society has been introduced into our post-socialist world and emphasised by the Washington Consensus on political neo-liberalism as a way of increasing inclusiveness in response to rebellions against state authoritarianism in the 1980s and early 1990s in Africa, the period of the so-called 'Second Liberation' of the continent. The idea was to ensure that popular participation in politics would be broadened beyond activity in parties, to include within the ambit of power, organised interests.

Civil society is said to be made up of organised interests themselves, but it is more accurately understood as the *political domain* where citizenship rights are apparently realised through the forming of such interest groups. The popular movements in Eastern Europe and in the Third World of the 1980s lie at the root of this redirection which has had as one of its effects on the African continent, an insistence on a 'vibrant' civil society in order to ensure pluralism. Another effect has been the re-configuration of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU), the latter making provision for 'good governance' - usually equated with administrative efficiency combined with adherence to law and rights - and for civil society participation in the continental body. Civil society can thus be understood as naming political agency and subjectivity in society as visualised from the vantage point of the neo-liberal state (Beckman 1992; Gibbon 1996). It is in civil society that

citizenship rights are said to be realised; however these are to be realised in a manner which keeps them firmly away from any (emancipatory) politics which question the neo-liberal state itself as they take place at best within the framework of human rights discourse (Neocosmos 2006b). However, it is important to stress the fact that civil society is not the only realm of politics outside the confines of the state, and moreover it is possible to suggest that civil society in Africa today forms a realm of politics which is dominated by the state itself. To put the point simply, the politics of civil society are predominantly state politics, for it is the state which ultimately pronounces on the legitimacy of the organisations of civil society, which itself can only be in accord with state political subjectivities.

From the perspective of a democratic emancipatory project, the state should not be allowed to dictate whether popular organisations are legitimate or not, and neither can intellectual inquiry allow itself to narrow the concept to adhere to state prescriptions; only people themselves should be entitled to bestow such legitimacy. In this sense South Africa for example, can be said to have had an extremely powerful and 'vibrant', as well as politicised, set of popular organisations in the 1980s. But these never formed a civil society, and were not described as such in South Africa at the time, because of their quasi-illegal nature and their illegitimacy in the eyes of the apartheid state<sup>3</sup>.

In fact, it was precisely the political distance of these organisations from the state, the fact that they had exited the state domain of politics and operated beyond the (obviously restricted) civil society of the time, which accounted for the 'vibrancy' of such popular organisations in the South African townships of the 1980s (Neocosmos 1998, 1999). Conversely, it can also be pointed out that the neo-liberal conception of civil society also implies recognition by civil society organisations of the legitimacy of the state and of the hegemony of its mode of politics. Popular organisations which reject this mode cannot be said to be part of civil society. For such a viewpoint therefore, these same opposition organisations in South Africa in the 1980s (UDF, Civics, Youth and Women's organisations etc), which were fighting the apartheid state as such and which were thereby constantly testing the limits of legality (their activities were often wholly illegal), could not be rigorously said to form a 'civil society'. Indeed they only were described in such terms in the 1990s, when the state had no option but to recognise their legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

For neo-liberalism therefore civil society exists solely under conditions of mutual recognition between it and the state, only under liberal democracy where the liberal mode of politics is consensual. Thus it is this mutual recognition which defines the parameters of the state consensus and is itself the result of struggle. Moreover it is the state which retains the monopoly of national universality. Civil society organisations can be tolerated but only if they represent particularistic interests. Any claims to such universality, in other

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<sup>3</sup> Of course they were considered as part of 'civil society' in the discourse of international liberalism.

words if a popular organisation is said to represent 'the people's interests' or 'the national interest', would mean that it is liable to be seen by the state as a threat to the latter's monopoly of universality.

A state 'national consensus' is structured within a state domain of politics comprising the political relations between the state and its institutions on the one hand, and the 'official' or 'formal' civil society of citizens on the other. A state political subjectivity is thus usually hegemonic within civil society. Other forms of politics are excluded because visualised as beyond the political consensus (e.g. they are said to be 'ultra-leftist', 'criminal', 'terrorist', do not 'follow channels', etc.) and are thus usually de-legitimised in state discourse. These organisations and politics therefore exist outside or beyond the limits (at best at the margins) of civil society. Because of such partiality therefore, civil society cannot be conflated with 'organised society' as the term necessarily implies some form of exclusion. The distinction between liberal democracy and say colonial/apartheid forms of authoritarianism can be said to concern *inter alia* the extent and forms taken by such exclusion, not the absence of exclusion as such.

Civil society has achieved popularity – and has come to be reduced to organisations themselves - in a context in which it is apparent that parties have distanced themselves from society and have become frankly state institutions. A worldwide trend, which has not excluded Africa, has been apparent now at least since the 1980s in which parties have become more and more bereft of politics, and rather simple vehicles for circulating elites around state positions (Neocosmos 2009a). In Europe in particular, this trend has been associated with the rise of the so-called 'post-political', whereby government has become purely managerial and emptied of politics. Arundhati Roy has argued cogently that the rise of NGOs has accompanied the spread of neo-liberal policies and has had a systematically depoliticising effect:

*They defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right. They alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance...It's almost as though the greater the devastation caused by neo-liberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs" (Roy 2004).*

At the same time, research shows overwhelmingly that NGOs in Africa are sociologically staffed by middle-class professionals for whom they provide vehicles for employment and social entrepreneurship; they substitute (sub-contract) for state functions; they are overwhelmingly funded by the state or by (foreign) donors and also regularly provide vehicles for the formation of a clientele by political patrons (e.g. Swilling and Russell 2002; Kanyinga and Katumanga 2003). Insofar as civil society is reduced to NGOs in particular (which it usually is), the evidence suggests that it contributes to the formation and extension of a state domain of politics structured around technico-legal practices and not politically emancipatory ones.



As we shall see below, this comment also applies to social movements such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa which is said to be one of the most 'successful' (and 'vibrant') of such movements in that it has been able to force the government to rethink its policy on HIV-AIDS. Recent research (e.g. Vandormael 2007a, 2007b) shows that in actual fact this success has been such as to de-politicise the debate on AIDS by forcing it squarely within the hegemonic bio-medical paradigm of science which expects people to passively be the recipients of medical technology. In fact it could be suggested that this apparent success of the TAC, has resulted precisely from the congruence of its ideology with the perspective of the world medical establishment supported by the media.

The thrust of the TAC's perspective has thus resulted in the incorporation of HIV-AIDS sufferers as passive citizens within an existing set of power relations (state, scientific, mass media, transnational corporations, etc) fundamental to the interests of capital and not in a questioning of such relations, which the Gay Movement in California in the 1980s for example had succeeded in doing to some extent, through its confronting of the medical establishment (Epstein 1996). It can be argued then that one effect of the TAC success has been, paradoxically, its disempowerment and de-politicisation of popular struggles through the incorporation of sections of the population into liberal power-relations and technical bio-medical discourse. The overall effect then has been a 'liberalisation' of struggle, a contribution to the reproduction of a passive citizenry rather than a contribution to the thinking of an emancipatory subjectivity.

Other less fashionable social movements in South Africa have had to struggle against dominant discursive power, not along with it as the TAC has, and have thus not been so obviously successful, thus remaining at the margins of civil society (Barchiesi 2004). We shall see below however, that success as measured by the ability to modify state policy in its particular interests is not the best indicator of a movement's politics. A variety of social movements sometimes attempt to re-introduce agency but often simply provide a mirror image of state politics. For a politics to provide the basis for emancipation, it has to be situated at a subjective distance from the state.

Citizenship exists at the interface of state and sociality, i.e. in that fluid realm structured by the active or passive relationship between state and society. An assessment of the politics of social movements would have to ascertain the extent of democratic universality and prescriptive politics which characterises them. In general however, it is apparent that they operate within the confines of a state political subjectivity. In sum then, civil society understood as a realm of political activity, constitutes, as Gramsci makes clear in the citation above, one of the subjective domains of state politics.

At this stage however we still need to assess a recent argument which recognises the existence of a realm of politics outside civil society and the state. The argument that politics actually exists in countries of the South outside the domain of civil society, has been made by Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee (2004),

following on his work with the *Subaltern Studies* collective has recently argued that, in the postcolony, there is a truly 'political society' beyond the state and civil society which is distinguished by its exclusion from the state domain and where activity is irreducibly political. He extends Foucault's conception of 'governmentality' to argue for the existence of another domain of politics beyond the limits of liberal rights and legal discourse.

Chatterjee argues that in the post-colonial context, there are two sets of connections to power: the relations connecting a civil society of citizens to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty, and those linking 'populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare' (2004: 37). Each of these, he argues, points to a distinct domain of politics. There is no need to go into details here other than to note that he makes the point that it is not in civil society that politics is to be found because here claims follow legal and administrative (i.e. technical) procedures whose access is limited to middle-class professionals; rather politics are to be found in what he calls a 'political society' of the poor where 'claims are irreducibly political' (2004: 60). It is therefore outside civil society that a politics of agency, an active citizenship is often to be found, at least in the countries of the South.

Chatterjee draws on Foucault's distinction between sovereignty and governmentality to specify two distinct modes of rule. Under sovereignty, the legitimacy of state rule takes place through a certain amount of participation by citizens in the affairs of state. Indeed classical liberal theorists of the state (in particular J.J. Rousseau and J.S. Mill) stressed the importance of active citizenship, as did the French Revolution of course. Under governmentality on the other hand, it is the provision of resources to the population which becomes the dominant mode of securing state legitimacy. This form becomes dominant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for Chatterjee, although Foucault (2000) stresses its appearance much earlier. The provision of resources to sections of the population is what ultimately gives rise to the disciplines of demography and statistics (stat(e)-istics) as the population needs to be classified, categorised and measured in different ways.

This latter mode of rule it could be said, becomes central under colonialism in Africa (late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> c) which was as Cowen and Shenton (1996) show, dominated/ justified by a notion of 'trusteeship'. The state became a trustee of the welfare of its colonial (as well as of its metropolitan) charges. It is from within this political tradition that T.H. Marshall's (1964) three forms of citizenship rights (especially his notion of social citizenship), which provided the main theorisation for British social democracy, emanated. The social democratic (or 'Keynesian-classist') state secured its rule through the provision of social services, the 'delivery' (to use contemporary parlance) of particular social rights to the working people, on top of the civic and political rights central to all liberal-democratic states. In conditions of post-colonial Africa, this is

clearly reflected in the 'developmental state' whereby the latter secures its rule through the provision of development rights<sup>4</sup>.

This argument reinforces that of the centrality of the technicisation of politics by the state, as governmentality exerts pressures for such technicisation, so that ultimately politics becomes submerged under the sophistication of managerial calculations and 'delivery', the provisioning of rights, the formation of passive citizens. It also shows how politics is expelled from the state by technique, especially managerial technique. Civil society becomes part of a domain of state politics (as Chatterjee in fact argues) and the mutual relations between state and civil society become managerialist/ technicist/legalistic as they mutually condition each other so that a technicist (and thus apolitical) subjectivity becomes hegemonic. Yet although this understanding of a realm beyond civil society in which politics may exist is absolutely crucial for understanding Africa today, Chatterjee's claim that it constitutes a 'political society' is problematic, not only because the term is usually used to refer to the state, but more importantly because it gives the mistaken impression that politics is always in existence within that realm, something which cannot be shown. Rather it makes more sense to suggest that politics may or may not exist within various sites as we shall see below (Lazarus 1996). Finally, for Chatterjee, it is different modes of state rule which determine different connections to power; popular subjectivities have it seems, little choice in the matter.

### **3. Active citizenship: the formation of a "possible"**

Citizenship, from an emancipatory perspective, is not about subjects bearing rights conferred by the state, as in human rights discourse, but rather about people who think becoming agents through their engagement in politics as militants/activists and not politicians (Neocosmos 2006b). In fact it is important to understand how these features were central to popular struggles (especially those for independence) and are still prevalent among many popular movements today. For example, both one of the first and one of the last national liberation struggles in Africa (Algeria and South Africa) exhibited such characteristics. Fanon's *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*<sup>5</sup> is a detailed study of different changes in social relations brought about by popular struggle. These include changes in the position of women in society, the effect of independent radio station and changes in the family. All three of the above characteristics are eminently illustrated in Fanon's account, but I merely wish to mention one of his comments on citizenship which contrasts radically with his later account of the same issue under postcolonial conditions. Written in 1959, i.e. during the

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<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the subjectivities of the developmental and post-developmental states, see Neocosmos (2009b).

<sup>5</sup> A more apt title would have been: *The Sociology of the Algerian Revolution*, the original French title is *L'an V de la Revolution Algerienne*.

Algerian liberation struggle and before his work on *The Wretched of the Earth*, he states:

*... in the new society that is being built, there are only Algerians. From the outset, therefore, every individual living in Algeria is an Algerian. In tomorrow's independent Algeria it will be up to every Algerian to assume Algerian citizenship or to reject it in favour of another (Fanon 1989: 152).*

In other words, the point is that during the period of popular national upsurge, citizenship is a unifying, inclusive conception. No distinction is made between people on the basis of indigeneity but only on the basis of their devotion to the struggle. By the time he writes *The Wretched* we have the following well known account of xenophobia under the post-colonial state:

*On the morrow of independence [the] native bourgeoisie ... violently attacks colonial personalities...It will fight to the bitter end against these people 'who insult our dignity as a nation'. It waves aloft the notion of the nationalization and Africanization of the ruling classes. The fact is that such actions will become more and more tinged by racism, until the bourgeoisie bluntly puts the problem to the government by saying 'We must have these posts'... The working class of the towns, the masses of the unemployed, the small artisans and craftsmen for their part line up behind this nationalist attitude; but in all justice let it be said, they only follow in the steps of their bourgeoisie. If the national bourgeoisie goes into competition with the Europeans, the artisans and craftsmen start a fight against non-national Africans ... From nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism. These foreigners are called on to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked, and in fact the government ... commands them to go, thus giving their nationals satisfaction (1989: 125).*

We have here an account of a clear transition between the two forms of citizenship I have referred to: the popular inclusive conception founded on active citizenship and the state conception founded on indigeneity. It is also important to note the similarity with work on the South African struggle of the 1980s which makes similar points regarding the character of popular struggle in this period (Neocosmos 1998, Van Kessel 2000). The point is not to idealise popular struggle but to note that, despite all its contradictions, it enables the development of a different conception of citizenship. Van Kessel in fact notes explicitly in one of her case studies the centrality of a notion of moral community equated with political community of active citizens, an observation which pervades Fanon's account.

Incidentally such notions are also prevalent in accounts of popular movements and community democratic political practices, they are present in Wamba-dia-Wamba's (1985) account of the Mbongi, in Ifi Amadiume's study of women's struggles over citizenship in Nigeria (1997) and in Sibanda's (2002) account of a peasant organisation in Zimbabwe *inter alia*. The point then is that in popular-democratic struggles, this alternative conception of citizenship and hence the

possibility of emancipatory politics also exists (although this is not all that exists) as a counter to the statist equating of citizenship with indigeneity. There is then conceivably, a politics beyond Human Rights Discourse, a politics of prescriptions on the state. Such a prescriptions include, in the manner of the *Freedom Charter*: 'South Africa Belongs to All Who Live in it', 'The People Shall Govern' and so on. These prescriptions are assertions of rights to be fought for, not pleas for human rights to be conferred by the state.

Active citizenship arguably enables the second most important right after the right to life, namely the right to think, by suggesting the possibility of something different to one way thought (*la pensée unique*). As a community activist recently stated in South Africa:

*The leaders [of the country] are saying that it is them who know everything and that the majority of the people can't think. We are saying that everyone can think (Activist, Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign, 2003, cited in Desai and Pithouse 2003: 17).*

One of the important dimensions of struggles for national liberation, had always been that, although they did contain for many an economic dimension, this demand for access to economic resources (e.g. land) was intertwined with its symbolic political value (of land, e.g. 'our land must be re-taken from the colonialists') which included an emancipatory component. Economics was always subordinated to politics in the struggle for freedom. In the process of struggle for political emancipation, citizenship as agency was paramount, so that political agency was the manner in which economic power was to be acquired.

After independence, it was access to economic resources which became central as Fanon (1990) notes, with access to state power (not agency as such) becoming the instrument through which such resources were to be secured at the expense of the most vulnerable (generally the excluded such as the poor or 'foreigners'). In other words the grabbing of resources from foreigners was founded on claims of indigeneity - rights secured by the state - after independence, and it illustrates an instance of state politics and passive citizenship replacing active citizenship; of economics replacing politics. It was therefore a direct result of a process of de-politicization whereby the state took over for itself the political agency of people. This process could thereby easily lead to xenophobia among state institutions and society as a whole (Neocosmos 2006a). In sum we can note that this example illustrates a transition common to the continent in which citizenship was transformed from an active and inclusive conception (in which citizens were those who fought colonialism, hence the dominance of pan-Africanist discourse in the struggle) to a passive and exclusive one; from a conception of citizenship founded on popular politics to one founded on indigeneity and national essentialism underpinned by state power.

Contrary to an understanding of citizenship as a bounded yes or no affair, anthropologists have stressed the importance of adhering to a concept of

'flexible citizenship' (Nyamnjoh 2006). Although valid, this idea assumes that these two conceptions are mutually exclusive. Of course, both occur simultaneously at least in popular discourses as well as in experience. The more flexible variety is more readily experienced in practice as different categories of people experience different ranges of rights depending on their power or lack thereof in society. The poor of course would not be able to claim as many rights or entitlements as the rich, women as men, children as adults, etc, while foreigners would be close to being able to claim only few, precisely because of their lack of possession of the state papers which express the bonded variety of citizenship. The two versions are then connected, and while it is important to note the existence of flexible citizenship, the reality is one which combines both. Given the various types as well as degrees of exclusion which are produced both by the neo-liberal economic world and by its political counterpart in an imported democracy, citizenship is bound to be a complex and indeed contradictory relationship

What both the 'bounded' and 'flexible' conceptions tend to forget however, is the notion of citizenship as agency, the idea that citizenship does not simply refer to a relationship which is given (bounded or fluid), but to one which can also be passive, active or any shade in between, depending on circumstances. In fact the idea of active citizenship (or its possibility) is usually occluded when this is the case, as it is assumed that the state or society are structured in such a way as to automatically (so to speak) allow for the access to (a range of) particular entitlements or rights. In fact without some form of agency, these rights are rarely forthcoming to the poor, and even then there is no guarantee that they will be. This is why I have insisted elsewhere (Neocosmos 2006b) that this distinction is a necessary one to make, and that (neo-) liberal politics tend to produce a passive citizenship (which thus restricts access to rights to a few only), while an active citizenship is usually produced beyond the hegemonic state of affairs<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast to state politics, popularly founded conceptions of citizenship, although they may also show similar characteristics to state conceptions (e.g. as in essentialist 'ethnic politics'), also often exhibit different understandings. This is of course particularly the case in periods of popular political upsurge and regularly includes the important dimension of the formation of *a moral community of active citizens* in opposition to crude conceptions of arbitrary and violent state oppression. Such alternative perspectives may exhibit:

1. an inclusive (as opposed to exclusive) understanding of citizenship and the nation, i.e. the nation is the people and the people are those who work and struggle here, and
2. an active conception of citizenship, i.e. citizenship is seen as concerning political agency, it is bounded by the exercise of political agency not by

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<sup>6</sup> This is the case even though for example these rights may be perfectly legitimate in law, such as the right to housing or the right to work, or the right to land, or the right to safety, or even the right to life, etc.

physical borders. In Africa this active citizenship has taken the form of popular-democratic pan-Africanism (Fanon) and I have argued elsewhere that it must still take this form today although adapted to current post-colonial conditions (Neocosmos 2003).

3. the creation of a moral community of active citizens where one's duty to the community is connected directly to actively engaging in political activity for the common good (i.e. a universalistic conception and not just a reflection of interests economic or otherwise).

This active citizenship can in no way guarantee the development of an emancipatory politics, yet it can be seen as enabling a number of 'possibles', of alternatives to the existing situation. This alternative conception of citizenship can be traced throughout all popular emancipatory projects of the modern period from the French Revolution to the Paris Commune, to the various Socialist Revolutions, to the National Liberation Struggles against colonialism with the case of South Africa being one of the most recent; it arguably constitutes one of the possible conditions for an emancipatory politics. Popular-democratic political trends have thus regularly stressed alternative conceptions of citizenship which have laid emphasis on inclusiveness and agency. The political sequences of socialist revolutions and of national liberation struggles are historically over.

A new alternative emancipatory political sequence may be one which, in the words of Holloway (2002), is not about achieving state power but about transforming power, it is arguably about democratising power, not about replacing some politicians by others. In the formulation of Lazarus (1996), its concern is with prescriptions on the state. Does this amount to a new political sequence at world level? What are its manifestations on the continent? How can popular Pan-Africanism be rethought under these new conditions? To what extent are new and not so new popular movements able to move beyond arguing for their incorporation into the world of capital and that of the liberal state, and to what extent are they expressing prescriptive demands for freedom, justice and equality in new ways? In other words, in what sites can a new mode of democratic politics be found in contemporary Africa? In order to begin to answer such questions, we need to contribute to a rethinking of citizenship along the lines I have suggested above, but we also need to rethink the basis of political agency itself.

#### **4. Theorizing emancipatory politics: an outline**

Here the most important writers today are definitely Alain Badiou and Sylvain Lazarus<sup>7</sup>. Badiou is currently being translated into English as he has been discovered by American audiences; the work of Lazarus on the other hand still remains largely untranslated into English. These authors have also had an

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<sup>7</sup> The most important references here are Badiou, 2001, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, Lazarus, 1996, 2001, Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1994.

important influence on the thought of Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba. While Badiou's work remains at the highest level of abstraction as it concerns ontology, Lazarus' work is more approachable by social scientists.

#### **4.1 Alain Badiou: "event", "fidelity", "truth"**

Perhaps the best place to start is the idea of agency which is so central to philosophical and social science discourse today. Feltham and Clemens (2003: 6) explain that for Badiou, the question of agency 'is not so much a question of how a subject can *initiate* an action in an autonomous manner, but rather how a subject *emerges* through an autonomous chain of actions within a changing situation'. Thus it is not everyday actions and decisions that provide evidence of agency for Badiou, these are simply part of being and existence, they are unavoidable as are social interests, opinions and conversations. Rather, it is 'those extraordinary decisions and actions which *isolate* an actor from their context, those actions which show that a human can actually be a free agent that supports *new* chains of actions and reactions.' As a result: 'not every human being is always a subject, yet some human beings *become* subjects; those who act in *fidelity* to a chance encounter with an *event* which disrupts the *situation* they find themselves in'.

Gone here is any notion of a universal human subject; Man is dead as God was proclaimed dead by the Enlightenment. As a result for Badiou there can be no Ethics founded on a universal human subject, and the whole idea of 'human rights' is undercut. In this sense Badiou follows very much in the different steps of Althusser, Foucault and Lacan who in their different ways, had proclaimed the death of Man. Of course such a conception has radical implications for conceiving ethics and (so-called human) rights not to mention democracy and the state. It is these dimensions that interest me here rather than the many aspects of Badiou's ontology. This is simply because the conception of politics and democracy which constitutes '*la pensée unique*' and which is hegemonic today, is one which is founded on precisely a universalistic conception of Man linked within political liberalism with a reduction of politics to the state and to state practices. I have argued elsewhere at length (within the context of South Africa in particular) how human rights discourse and political liberalism more generally, have as a necessary effect the 'technicisation' (hence the 'de-politicisation') of popular politics, and how as a result, human emancipation is thought to be realisable only by the state (Neocosmos 2006b). This conception is now becoming clearly apparent as a major contradiction, after the failure of the emancipatory projects of the twentieth century which were all, at their core, state projects.

It is mainly for this reason, because of the importance of thinking about politics as subjectivities beyond the realm of state subjectivity, of detaching politics from the state, that Badiou's philosophy of 'subjective militancy' is of interest to Africa. On the continent, our manner of thinking about politics has been overwhelmingly dominated by a liberalism for which the state is the sole



legitimate domain of politics<sup>8</sup>. Central to liberal discourse, has been a conception revolving around the idea that politics is reducible to the state or that the state is the sole legitimate domain of politics. For liberalism, 'political society' simply *is* the state<sup>9</sup>. This idea has permeated so much into African political thinking for example, that it has become difficult to conceive of an opposition political practice that is not reduced to capturing state posts or the state itself. In South Africa in particular, state fetishism is so pervasive within the hegemonic political discourse that debate is structured by the apparently evident 'common sense' notion that the post-apartheid state can 'deliver' everything from jobs to empowerment, from development to human rights, from peace in Africa to a cure for HIV-AIDS. As a result not only is the state deified, but social debate is foreclosed *ab initio*; the idea simply becomes one of assessing policy or capacity, in other words the focus is on management not on politics. Badiou, I suggest, enables us to begin to think a way around this problem. His categories of 'Event', 'Fidelity' and 'Truth' are the three important categories here, all are dimensions of what he calls a 'truth-process' or 'truth-procedure'.

## Event

This is what 'brings to pass 'something other' than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledges; the event is a hazardous, unpredictable supplement, which vanishes as soon as it appears' (Badiou 2001: 67).

*The event is both situated - it is the event of this or that situation - and supplementary; thus absolutely detached from , or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation ... You may then ask what it is that makes the connection between the event and that 'for which' it is an event. This connection is the void of the earlier situation. What does this mean? It means that at the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void, around which is organised the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question ... We may say that since a situation is composed of the knowledges circulating within it, the event names the void inasmuch as it names the not-known of the situation. To take a well-known example: Marx is an event for political thought because he designates, under the name 'proletariat', the central void of*

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<sup>8</sup> See Mamdani 1990. The entrance of names such as 'governance', 'civil society' and 'human rights' unquestioningly into our daily discourse is only a small example of such ideological dominance today.

<sup>9</sup> Wallerstein (1995) for example, shows that both conservative and socialist strategies in nineteenth century Europe gradually came close, from different starting points, 'to the liberal notion of ongoing, [state-] managed, rational normal change' (1995: 96). He also notes that between 1848 and 1914, 'the practitioners of all three ideologies turned from a theoretical anti-state position to one of seeking to strengthen and reinforce in practice the state structures in multiple ways'. Later, conservatives were transformed into liberal-conservatives, while Leninists were transformed into liberal-socialists; he argues that the first break in the liberal consensus at the global level occurred in 1968 (pp 97, 103).

*early bourgeois societies. For the proletariat - being entirely dispossessed, and absent from the political stage - is that around which is organized the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital. To sum up: the fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event. (2001: 69).*

An event then names the void, the absence, what is considered simply 'impossible', that which is not conceivable from within the knowledges of the situation. An emancipatory politics or a truly popular-democratic politics is difficult if not impossible to conceive from within the parameters of liberalism, a politics of saving and helping the ethnically oppressed is inconceivable within a politics of ethnic genocide and so on. The event is something which points to alternatives to what is, to the possibility of something different. In politics today, and in Africa in particular, which is what concerns me here, an event would be expected to point us towards a different way of engaging in and thinking about politics, beyond the one-way thinking of liberalism and its liberal 'democracy', 'the best possible shell for capitalism' as Lenin used to say. For outside of hegemonic political liberalism today all there is, is a void.

When events happen, they force us, for a while at least, to think of the situation differently. Popular upsurges, however brief, if they are powerful enough, force new issues on the agenda for example, they enable changes in thinking in the public sphere. In France for example, commentators and policy suddenly re-discovered their '*banlieues*' after the events of November 2005; the extent to which this was a real event for politics in that country is however a moot point. The popular struggles in different parts of Africa in the 1980s and 90s, what was optimistically referred to as the 'second liberation' of the continent, forced new issues on the agenda for a while, before these were again pushed into the background as state politics re-established itself (Ake 1996).

## **Fidelity**

This 'is the name of the process: it amounts to a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself; it is an immanent and continuing break' (Badiou 2001: 67). Fidelity to the event is an attempt to sustain the consequences of the event in thought. It is a refusal to return to the 'status quo ante', to return to the idea that what happened was impossible. Fidelity can be sustained by an individual, groups, organisations etc. There is no guarantee that this fidelity will be sustained, this requires a 'disinterested-interest' on behalf of the participants. It follows that the perseverance of the 'being-subject' remains uncertain. For, in order to be transformed into a subject, a being has to remain true to disinterest. It is on the basis of this uncertainty that Badiou is able to construct an 'ethic of truths' (2001: ch. 4).

## **Truth**

For Badiou a truth is 'constructed' as a result of this process of fidelity to the event, not 'discovered'. It is 'the multiple, internal to the situation, that the fidelity constructs, bit by bit; it is what the fidelity gathers together and produces'. (2001: 68). 'Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*. This is something we have always known, even if sophists of every age have always attempted to obscure its certainty: a truth is *the same for all*.' (2001: 27). 'A truth punches a 'hole' in knowledges, it is heterogeneous to them, but it is also the sole known source of new knowledges. We shall say that the truth *forces* knowledges. The verb *to force* indicates that since the power of a truth is that of a break it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation, or reworks the sort of portable encyclopaedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning' (2001: 70).

The 'indifference to differences' simply means that an emancipatory politics is universal and not linked to any specific interest, it is 'for all' never 'for some'. It follows that we can say that for Badiou emancipatory politics does not 'represent' anyone:

*Politics begins when one decides not to represent victims ... but to be faithful to those events during which victims politically assert themselves ... Politics in no way represents the proletariat, class or nation ... it is not a question of whether something which exists may be represented. Rather it concerns that through which something comes to exist which nothing represents, and which purely and simply presents its own existence (Badiou 1985: 75, 87).*

An emancipatory politics therefore cannot be deduced from a social category (class, nation, state) it can only be understood in terms of itself. Moreover, the state itself is 'indifferent to' truths and thus also to (emancipatory) politics; the democratic state in particular is merely concerned with knowledges and opinions which it organises into a consensus.

*Historically speaking, there have been some political orientations that have had or will have a connection with a truth, a truth of the collective as such. They are rare attempts and they are often brief ... These political sequences are singularities: they do not trace a destiny, nor do they construct a monumental history ... from the people they engage these orientations require nothing but their strict generic humanity (Badiou 2003: 70).*

Therefore, (emancipatory) politics may or may not exist at any time and must be understood as pertaining to the realm of thought: 'any politics of emancipation, or any politics which imposes an egalitarian maxim, is a thought in act' (2003: 71). In order to develop these points in some detail, we must now shift to the work of Lazarus.

## **4.2 Politics as subjectivity, modes of politics, political prescriptions, the extant and the possible in the work of Sylvain Lazarus.**

I cannot at this juncture outline in detail what is an incredibly original and complex theory; this will have to wait for another time. For the present, it must suffice to provide a sketch of some of the main ideas put forward in Lazarus' work. In order to make sense of his work, we need to begin with an understanding of the fact that Lazarus is interested in making intelligible, not just the existing configuration or structure of social situations of various types, but the existence of possible alternatives to the manner in which these situations are configured. In other words he is interested in theorising the subjective and the objective, not only as distinct, but as at a distance from each other. Not only is there no 'correspondence' between the two, but there is in many cases a distinct distance between them. In such cases the possibility exists that people's subjectivities - thought - can assert something different from what is, an alternative to the existing. In fact he argues that the 'extant' is identified via the possible:

*In people's thought, the real is identified via the possible. The investigation of what exists takes place but is subordinated to the investigation of what could be. The methods of investigation differ according to whether they are linked to the category of the 'possible' or to that of the 'extant'. (Lazarus 2001: 8; unless otherwise indicated all translations from the French are mine - MN).*

### **Politics is of the order of thought**

If politics as doing, (he rejects the term 'practice'), politics as 'prescription' as he puts it, is what denotes the distance between what is and what could be, then what this means is that what is required is an understanding of politics as concerning thought exclusively, as remaining purely within the domain of the subjective. Like Badiou, who relies on him heavily (see Badiou 2005, ch. 2), Lazarus is interested in theorising politics as a militant 'practice' while remaining consistent with rationalism, i.e. materialism. What he attempts is no less than a materialist theory of the subjective. This theory he calls an anthropology (after all anthropology has generally been precisely the study of the subjective, culture, belief etc), more specifically an 'Anthropology of the Name'. It is this anthropology he argues, which makes politics thinkable as thought. But in order to think thought purely within thought, all scientific assumptions must be dropped as these assume some correspondence between thought and object, between subjective and objective; the 'concept' then becoming a more or less accurate expression/representation of the real. This axiom is then pursued to its logical conclusion building a system of names and categories which help to identify the real. If the relation between the real and the subjective is not the issue, how are we sure that we are indeed investigating the real? This requires a rigorous consistency to two foundational

statements/axioms which Lazarus sees as the core of his theoretical system, these are: 1. People think (*les gens pensent*); and 2. Thought is a relation of the real (*la pensée est rapport du réel*).

To maintain that politics is subjective, is simply to say that it is of 'of the order of thought' as Lazarus (op.cit.) puts it. 'To say 'people think' is to say that they are capable [...] of prescribing a possible that is irreducible to the repetition or the continuation of what exists' (Badiou 2005: 32). Anyone is able to think politically, and such thought is not the preserve of experts. At the same time, such thought is itself a real relation because that prescriptive thought is indeed material as we shall see below. In this manner politics can be comprehended in terms of itself and not in terms of some other entity (or 'invariant') external to it (Badiou 1985). Politics is thus irreducible to the economy, to the state, to ethnicity, to society, to history or to any entity outside itself:

*As soon as the conceptual categories in operation are those of consciousness ... there can no longer be an expressive dialectic between relations of production and forms of consciousness, otherwise this dialectic remains that of history, that of the state or of the economy and no longer possesses a prescriptive character (Lazarus 1996: 57).*

In actual fact, for Lazarus, it is not all politics which is capable of fulfilling the criterion of irreducibility, only (various modes of) emancipatory politics do so. As a result such politics do not always exist. Lazarus (1996: 53) refers to the example of Lenin's thought for which the existence of a working class as a social class is distinguished from its existence as a political class. The existence of the latter cannot be deduced from the former in Lenin's thought.

In fact in Lenin, 'class' is no longer a historico-political category as in Marx - after the failure of the Paris Commune, the historical certainty of the Communist Manifesto is no longer sustainable - but is rather replaced by a category of 'organised political consciousness' (Lazarus 1993: 25). With Lenin, 'politics must possess its own specific terms ... as it passes from the certain to the possible' (1993:26). Thus, in Lenin's terms, the proletariat must 'demarcate itself' politically from other classes by its party acquiring a unique set of ideological positions on the issues of the day. This means that politics is not an 'expression' of social conditions or of history, but that the relations between politics and history are much more complex and mediated by a party (Neocosmos 1993 part 1, Lazarus 2007). This perspective is clearly apparent, for example, in Lenin's analyses of the 'national question', where he argues, against Luxemburg in particular, and 'imperialist economism' in general, that the national question is not reducible to class (the right of nations to self-determination is not a bourgeois demand) but is a 'democratic' issue – i.e. a political issue - of concern to the people as a whole (see eg. Lenin 1986).

In Marx's thought, the issue is treated differently. For him, 'scientific notions are also notions of political consciousness, they are realisable [...] from this perspective, human emancipation is not a utopia but a real possibility'. For Marx the science of history and the politically prescriptive are fused into one

unique conception (ibid.: 55). It should be noted in passing that when we study politics as 'practice', there is no such thing as a unified 'Marxism'; the politics expressed and practised by Marx, Lenin, Mao, Stalin, Gramsci, Lukačs, Cabral, Che Guevara, etc are crucially all distinct, they (may) formulate different modes of politics.

### **Modes of Politics and their Sites**

For Lazarus, 'there is no politics in general, only specific political sequences. Politics is not a permanent instance of society' (1993: 89). Different kinds of politics are distinguished by their historicity, in other words they have a history, they arise and then they wane. Lazarus refers to these as historical modes of politics or 'the relation of a politics to its thought' (loc. cit.). They are identified by different sites (*lieux*) and have their own activists (*militants*). The former refer to the sites in the concrete situation where that particular mode exists, the latter to those who most clearly embody, express and represent that mode in thought. Politics does not always exist, it is rare and is always sequential. Lazarus outlines different historical modes of politics with their own sequences, some of which have been emancipatory due to the fact that they conceive of politics 'internally' and others which reduce politics to an 'external invariant'. Clearly, these are not the only modes of politics which have developed historically, and others remain to be elucidated and analysed; however a brief recapitulation of these different modes serves to illuminate his form of reasoning<sup>10</sup>.

Lazarus includes four examples of emancipatory modes of politics which he has identified. The first of these is what he calls the 'revolutionary mode of politics' associated with the experience of the French revolution between the Summer of 1792 and July 1794. Its main site was the Jacobin Convention and its main militants and theoreticians were Robespierre and Saint-Just, the co-authors of the 1793 constitution. Its conception of politics was one which proclaimed that 'a people has only one dangerous enemy: its government' (Saint-Just 2004: 630) and which understood politics as a form of moral consciousness or 'virtue,' to be combined with 'terror' against the revolution's enemies (Zizek 2007). For Saint-Just, 'it is leaders who must be disciplined because all evil results from the abuse of power' (2004: 758). Thus, 'Saint-Just regularly proposes analyses and policies which, although they concern the state and the government, are thought outside of and are explicitly directed against a statist logic' (Lazarus 1993: 225ff).

The second he terms the 'classist mode of politics' whose sequence is opened up in 1848 by working-class revolutionary movements throughout Europe, and which closes with the failure of the Paris Commune of 1871. Clearly the main figures here were Marx and Engels and its sites were the working class

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<sup>10</sup> As far as I am aware, these different modes of politics were first briefly outlined in English in an appendix to Wamba-dia-Wamba 1993. They can also be found in chapter 2 of Badiou 2005.

movements of the nineteenth century. It is not here a question of politics within a party, but of politics within a mass movement, as modern parties only develop in the period following 1871. For Marx as noted above, history and politics are fused into one unique conception mediated by class.

The third is termed the 'Bolshevik mode'. Its sites were the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party) and the Soviets (People's Councils), and Lenin was its militant figure and theoretician. 'Proletarian political capacity is seen here not as spontaneous, neither is it historically or socially determined but it is obliged to specify its own conditions of existence' (1993: 90). The party mediates between consciousness and history. This political sequence opens up in 1902 (year of the publication of Lenin's *What is to be Done?*), reaches a peak in 1905 and closes in 1917. After that date the party becomes 'statified' as no solution is found to Lenin's contradictory conception that the party must be both the state as well as the defender of the masses against the state; and the soviets which disappear, cease to be the sites of an emancipatory politics (1993: 91).

The fourth mode Lazarus terms the 'dialectical mode of politics'. Its main theoretician is Mao Zedong and history is here subordinated to the masses, as the influence of the former disappears behind subjective notions such as an 'enthusiasm for socialism'. Political consciousness develops in leaps and bounds and 'there exists an exclusively political knowledge because such knowledge is dialectical without being historical. Even if the party exists it does not identify the mode of politics.' The sites of this mode are those of the revolutionary war: the party, the army, the United Front; its limits extend from 1928 to 1958 (1993: 91).

The above modes of politics conceive of politics internally, in terms of its own specificity, without reference to what Lazarus calls 'external invariants'. In fact it was only in the Bolshevik mode that the party had a central role. In all cases there was a multiplicity of sites, and there is maintained a political distance from the state. In Wamba-dia-Wamba's (1993: 98) terms: 'it is the existence of an independent (emancipative) politics which makes the destructive transformation of the state possible'. This emancipative consciousness is purely political and exists under conditions of a subjective break with spontaneous forms of consciousness.

In addition, two modes of politics are identified by Lazarus which each make reference to an 'external invariant'. These are the Parliamentary mode of politics and the Stalinist mode of politics; both of these have been dominant in twentieth century world history. For both these modes, political consciousness is subordinated to a consciousness of the state. The principle of parliamentary politics is not that 'people think' but rather that people have opinions regarding government (Lazarus 1993: 93). 'The so-called 'political' parties of the parliamentary mode, far from representing the diversity of opinions, are the subjective organisers of the fact that the only thought deemed possible is an opinion regarding the government'.

It follows that parties are not so much political organisations, but rather state organisations which distribute state positions. Thus for the parliamentary mode there is only one recognised site of politics and that is the state (loc. cit.). Similar functions are fulfilled in this mode by trade unions, which are also very much state organisations. Voting, as the institutional articulation between the subjective side of opinion and the objective character of government, is the essential political act of parliamentarianism. Voting does not so much serve to represent opinions but to produce a majority of professional politicians who are provided by parties; 'it transforms the plural subjectivity of opinions on government into a functioning unity' founded on consensus. The act of 'voting transforms vague 'programmes' or promises of parties into the authority of a consensus' (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1993: 117; 1994: 249). In other words, voting amounts to a legitimising principle of the state consensus, and 'politics' is ultimately reduced to a question of numbers.

The Stalinist mode of politics refers to a political subjectivity which existed not just in the Soviet Union, but also throughout parties linked to the 'Third International'. 'The party is viewed as the condition of revolutionary political consciousness. Politics, in this mode, is thus referred to the party; the party is finally revolutionary politics and revolutionary politics is the party' (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994: 250). Politics is confined to the party and the party is understood to be the very embodiment of that consciousness. 'As the party is presented as the source of all political truth', the Stalinist mode 'requires the credibility of the party' (ibid.). The party-state is the only political datum provided to subjectivity and the only practical domain of that subjectivity. The only site of politics is the state-party. The sequence of this mode begins during the early 1930s and ends with Gorbachov's accession to power (Lazarus 1993: 94).

Where does all this leave the conceptualisation of contemporary politics on the African continent? The answer provided by Wamba-dia-Wamba is that one must identify modes of politics historically present in Africa which he attempts in the case of Zaire/DR Congo (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1993), and also, more importantly, specify the basic characteristics of an emancipatory mode of politics on the continent (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994). The latter project is, in his writings, highly informed by the analysis of Lazarus so I shall continue to briefly outline them together.

*Politics (political capacity, political consciousness), the active prescriptive relationship to reality, exists under the condition of people who believe that politics must exist ... Generally in Africa, the tendency has been to assign it [this political capacity] to the state (including the party and liberation movements functioning really as state structures) per se. Unfortunately, the state cannot transform or redress itself: it kills this prescriptive relationship to reality by imposing consensual unanimity ... the thrust of progressive politics is to be separated from the state. It is not possible to achieve a democratic state, ie. a state that is transparent to, rather than destructive of, people's viewpoints, if people only 'think'*



*state, internalize state and thus self-censor themselves (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994: 258).*

In post-colonial Africa therefore, it is noted that one form or other of state-fetishism has been the dominant way of conceiving the political capacity to transform reality, however I do attempt to specify below some of the features of a 'national liberation struggle' mode which can be said to have existed prior to independence to various extents. If the problem in Africa has been the state, then a new way of conceiving politics must be developed. For Lazarus, three fundamental conceptions have to be put forward here: first it has to be understood that there are or can be multiple sites of politics including especially sites outside and beyond the state, and second that emancipatory politics concerns democratic prescriptions on the state; finally, of course an organisation of activists is required, but this cannot be a state organisation as the state is not concerned with (popular) politics, and rather suffocates all political prescriptions. Rather, this must be an emancipatory political organisation, which is consistently democratic in its practices and which thereby enables the development of democratic political prescriptions on the state.

Sites of emancipatory politics in Africa are varied and they *may* include the factory (which is not just a place for producing commodities), 'traditional' and popular institutions such the palaver, village assemblies, the sovereign national conferences in several Francophone African countries in the early nineties (all mentioned in Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994) as well as social institutions such as educational institutions, neighbourhood groups, social movements and so on, in sum all organisations in which the possibility of democratic politics exists. Clearly, such sites do not always exist, as emancipatory politics is not always present in them. For example, street committees, area committees and trade union 'locals' were all sites of emancipatory politics in the townships of South Africa of the 1980s, but this is no longer the case. They have either disappeared as political structures completely or have been incorporated into the state domain of politics (Neocosmos 1998). Parties on the other hand incarnate a state project of one form or another as they propose the state as the exclusive reference of political consciousness. Currently these are not sites of emancipatory politics in Africa, which means that extending the number of parties in existence (from single to multi-partyism) will not, of itself, enable the development of democratic-emancipatory politics on the continent (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1994: 258-9).

While possible sites of politics can be found anywhere where state and society relate, emancipatory politics only exists when democratic prescriptions on the state emanate from such sites. Democratic political prescriptions are possible only when distancing oneself politically from the state. This idea corresponds, in essence, to the possibility of a domain of politics beyond the state and civil society, which I have detailed above; but this domain must now not be understood spatially or institutionally as defined by the form of state rule as in Chatterjee (2004), but fundamentally as distinctly political-subjective. It must be stressed that: 'one can prescribe to the state only on condition of being

independent of it, by placing oneself precisely in a political position clearly distinct and separate from it' (*LDP*, no 14, July 1995, p. 9). Thus 'distance' here refers to political distance rather than to structural occupational distance for example, although clearly these are by no means unconnected. This signifies in particular that a democratic political practice must be clearly distinct from a state practice. Democracy here no longer refers to a set of state institutions.

## Political Prescriptions

What does prescribing to the state actually mean for Lazarus? It is easiest to outline this with reference to one specific example. To argue publicly and consistently that everyone must be treated equally by state laws and practices under conditions where this is evidently not the case, is to make a democratic prescription on the state, according to this perspective. This is particularly of relevance to the modern state in both Europe and Africa, because this state systematically practices various forms of discrimination against a number of people living within its boundaries on the basis of gender, ethnicity and nationality as well as social class. 'Any state which is founded on ethnic or communitarian distinctions, is a state producing civil tensions and war' (*LDP*, 14: 9). It is thus imperative to uphold the view politically that the country is made up of 'people from all walks of life' (*'les gens de partout'*), and that no single individual or group should count for any more or less than any other. This would be in Badiou's terms an indication of fidelity to the axiom of equality. New categories and terms should be thought up to transcend such differences<sup>11</sup>. If this view is not consistently upheld, then the door is left open to various forms of state discrimination with disastrous results (*LDP* 14: 9-10)<sup>12</sup>. To make democratic prescriptions on the state is precisely to assert such a position for example, from a multitude of sites where it is of relevance; in addition 'to make democratic prescriptions on the state ... is to view the latter not only as a juridical and formal structure but also as being the object of prescriptions' (*ibid.*). In other words that the state can be prescribed to with important results for politics:

*[In politics] there always exists an ensemble of possibles more or less open depending on the issues, but rarely completely closed. It is here that what we call "prescriptions on the state" can take root. To prescribe to the state is to assert as possible a different thing from what is said and done by the state ... our idea of democracy is to sustain point by point democratic prescriptions in relation to the state (*LDP* 14: 10-11, emphasis in original).*

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<sup>11</sup> In the past, such categories have, in different contexts, included 'citizen', 'comrade', 'ndugu'. These terms no longer have the equalising quality in today's context which they once had. See *LDP* (op.cit.), Wamba-dia-Wamba (1994).

<sup>12</sup> I have argued this point at length in *Neocosmos* (2006a) with respect to xenophobia in South Africa.

Clearly the argument here is that alternatives and choices are always possible and that it is imperative to force the state, from sites within society, to treat all people living within its boundaries equally and not to discriminate against some for whatever reason. Today in Africa, the main bases for such discrimination are gender, nationality and ethnicity, although other social divisions based on class, age, rural-urban differences and so on are also transformed into discriminatory distinctions by state practices and ideologies.

For Hallward (2005: 770) following Badiou, prescription is 'first and foremost an anticipation of its subsequent power, a commitment to its consequences, a wager on its eventual strength'. It is fundamentally the divisive application of a universal axiom or principle which serves to demarcate a partisan position with the result that 'politics is the aspect of public life that falls under the consequences of a prescription' (2005: 773). Politics is thus not reducible to 'the art of the possible' in the usual sense. It is indifferent to interests and to their compromises, as a prescription is of a universal character. Prescription implies freedom to make political choices, 'without such freedom we cannot say that people make their own history; we can merely contemplate the forms of their constraint' (2005: 781), which has been precisely what a politics deduced from political economy has done in the second half of the twentieth century in Africa. However, we still remain here at a relatively high level of abstraction. It is important to descend to what this means in more concrete terms.

### **The Extant and the Possible**

In his most recent work, Lazarus (2001) uses the notion of prescription to distinguish the understanding resulting from the thought of people, from that developed by a scientific approach. All social science comes down in one way or another to a matter of definition in order to resolve the 'polysemic' contradictions between meanings attributed to words in life. Contrary to this, Lazarus insists that this discursive polysemy is a reflection of different prescriptions attached to the word in question, some of which may contest what exists (the extant) in terms of possible alternatives. 'It is through prescriptions - for there is not only one - that the word is submitted to something other than a definition' (Lazarus 2001: 7).

*An approach via the objective evaluation of things can end up with predictions, scenarios, tendencies or determinations. It is not in this way that the possible must be understood. For the first approach, the objective of thought is to isolate the logic of the real. For the second, the objective is not to articulate theses on what exists. The field of intellectuality presents itself differently: the question regarding what exists is only given in relation to what could be (Lazarus 2001).*

A definition is scientific and only proposes a unique conception of the real. On the other hand, because a number of prescriptions may exist on the meaning of words, the possibility exists of conflicts between prescriptions, each one sustaining a distinct order of the real. Because of this confrontation between

prescriptions amounting to conflicts between different theses on the real, 'knowledge is confronted by a choice which is not that between the true and the false, the imaginary and the rational, but that between different orders of the real' (2001). For example if an interlocutor says: 'at the factory they call me a worker, outside they call me an immigrant because they have forgotten that I am a worker', the figure of the worker is maintained in the context of the factory and denied in society. There are here two orders of the real founded on two prescriptions, one for which the figure of the worker is asserted and another for which it has disappeared. It can thus be seen how prescriptions resolve the polysemic multiplicity in a manner which is in no way definitional (2001). As a result a number of possibles are apparent. It is thus the question of the possible which specifies people's thought.

*That a situation can be apprehended by "possibles" is an overturning of historicist and scientific thought, for which it is a precise investigation of what exists, in terms of determinations, causes and laws, which may then permit an answer to the question of what may come. The possible here is totally subordinated to the extant. In people's thought [on the other hand], the real is identified through the possible. The investigation of what exists is also involved, but is subordinated to the investigation of what could be. The investigation differs according to whether it relates to the category of the 'possible' or to that of the "extant" ... We are confronted with two different modes of thought: the first is analytical and descriptive, it asks questions regarding what exists; irrespective of the eventual complexity of its research protocols and discoveries, it proposes the scientific character of sites (lieux). The second is prescriptive and has as its principal point of entry the question of the possible (2001: 8).*

While the former perspective proposes to apprehend reality as extant, the latter maintains that in order to access what exists now, the 'now' can only be grasped as a conjunction of different 'possibles'. 'Knowledge of a situation is grasped by people in terms of the identification of its possibles. The possible is not of the order of what is to come but of the order of the now'. (2001: 9). The investigation utilising categories such as 'present' and 'possible' 'works through words ... on the thought of people which is outlined in singular intellectualities, to which one can accede from the words used and the singular theses which they constitute' (2001: 11).

Lazarus develops a new theory and detailed methodology for understanding the possible in the extant, the 'what could be' in the 'what is'. There is no space to develop all the details here, but enough has been said to suggest the originality and inventiveness of the whole perspective, which opens up a whole new manner of investigating politics precisely because this is about conceiving a situation other than what exists. It has the advantage, vis-à-vis Badiou's work, of moving beyond the extremely abstract ontological statements which characterise that discourse, to enable the thinking of precise concrete investigations of the possible in the extant, in other words of people's political thought. I want now to attempt to utilise some of the ideas and categories

outlined above to sketch the character of what may be termed a 'National Liberation Struggle Mode' (NLS) of politics at least in Africa and to ask the question of the extent to which the resistance struggle in South Africa of the 1980s broke with this mode. I will suggest that it did indeed do so in significant respects.

## **5. The "National Liberation Struggle mode of politics" and the popular struggle against apartheid**

The standard reading of the liberation struggle in South Africa, is that this struggle - seen as a continuous process from the formation of the ANC in 1912 to the achievement of liberation marked by the first elections by universal suffrage in 1994 - operated very much within the theoretical confines of the NLS mode. Even when the importance of the popular struggle of the 1980s is acknowledged as a specific process independent of the organisational requisites of the ANC in exile, this popular struggle tends to be seen as a 'radicalised' variant of the NLS mode. One of the better arguments developed along these lines is made by Yunis (2000) who suggests that the national liberation struggle in South Africa in the 1980s was radicalised as its class composition became more democratic and popular. For Yunis (2000: 33-5), the struggle for national liberation in South Africa (as that in Palestine) was 'radicalised' along with the historically gradual dominance of more popular classes: 1910s - 1940s dominance of elites, 1940s - 1970s dominance of a middle-class leadership, mid-1970s - 1980s dominance of popular classes. In this conception, the 1980s simply mark the 'radicalisation' of an ongoing NLS, unfolding on the basis of the class composition of the movement. For me, this kind of perspective disables an understanding of the truly inventive nature of the popular politics of the 1980s, which I believe constituted an event, in Badiou's sense, probably for the African continent as a whole. It does so, not only because of its historicism (incidentally a curtailed and thus unrealised historical trajectory as the popular classes did not achieve their imputed radical aims), but also because of its insistence on articulating politics to an external social invariant, namely class. In this manner, it does away with the singularity and specificity of these politics and makes them unthinkable outside a pre-given NLS mode.

Contrary to this view, I would suggest that there was a clear distinction, as well as a struggle, between different conceptions of politics within the anti-apartheid movements of the 1980s - politics that cannot be understood simply in class terms - particularly between the democratic politics made possible by the popular movement inside the country and the party-bureaucratic politics of the NLS mode attached to the proto-state institutions outside the country, despite their similarities in discourse. However this contrast should not suggest uncontradictory politics in either of these sites. Rather the United Democratic Front (UDF) and its affiliates, as well as the trade unions in particular, constituted sites which enabled the development of a political subjectivity which was centrally located in popular control of conditions of life, something which

could not be prevalent in sites such as military camps and exile, simply because the latter were evidently cut off from popular concerns. In neither of these cases was politics reducible to sociological class categories. After all the politics of exile were conducted within a Marxist discourse which, as numerous official documents of the ANC/SACP attest to, privileged (the working-) class in the construction of the nation, as did the politics inside the country. Reference to class was then not what distinguished them. Rather, it can be argued that, during the years 1984 -1986 at least, a quite new political sequence develops in South Africa itself which identifies elements of a distinctly new (although incompletely developed) mode of politics which breaks in *some* crucially important respects with the fundamental tenets of the NLS mode, while reproducing it in some other respects.

### **5.1 The National Liberation Struggle Mode of Politics in Africa**

To think purely subjectively about a National Liberation Struggle mode at Third World and even at an African level in the twentieth century is extremely difficult without collapsing into model building, i.e. into objectivism. Moreover, there is no one major single individual who expressed such a politics intellectually. A situated analysis of say the work of Cabral, for example, as one of the major thinkers in this regard, is well beyond the scope of this work. Yet there is an important sense in which such a mode provided the parameters of political thought in the colonial and neo-colonial social formations of the immediate post-World War II period up to the 1970s. Its main figures included such disparate thinkers as Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Mohandas Gandhi as well as Fanon, Cabral and Nyerere closer to home, each of whom expressed a (more or less) different variant of the NLS mode. During this period, it was impossible to think politics in Africa in the absence of some form or other of anti-imperialism, even if only in rhetorical form. This contrasts with the position today when all states (if not all peoples) clamour to be part of the new empire. As Chatterjee (2004:100) has so accurately observed, today the new 'empire expands because more and more people, and even governments, looking for peace and the lure of economic prosperity, want to come under its sheltering umbrella'. In other words the underlying conception of state politics today, in what is commonly referred to as 'the South', is to be part and parcel of the new 'democratic empire'.

We should start first by stressing the irreducibility of the politics of national liberation from colonialism. Not many European thinkers understood this point. One exception was Jean-Paul Sartre who was able to show that as colonisation was centrally a political endeavour, so was the struggle for freedom (Sartre 2006: 36ff). The solution to the problem of colonial oppression was thus not fundamentally economic (reducing poverty), social (providing health or educational systems) or indeed cultural or psychological, however much these factors may have played a role in oppression and resistance. Poverty, for the majority, was clearly insoluble under colonialism, as it was a necessary outcome of the colonial system. The demand for freedom is thus purely and irreducibly

political and was to be found at the core of nationalist politics, especially of the mass politics which were in most cases necessarily unleashed in the struggles against colonialism. As Issa Shivji never tires of repeating, it should be stressed that nationalism grew out of pan-Africanism and not the other way around. Pan-Africanism was founded on the demand for universal freedom, justice and equality for all African peoples and was perforce irreducible to narrow national interest. It was only a state nationalism which could eventually abandon pan-Africanism for a state interest.

Politics was therefore the core issue of the struggle for independence, and politics gradually 'withered away' as the state took over nationalist concerns with independence, as popular nationalism was transformed into state nationalism and democracy was overcome by the need to solve the 'social question' (Arendt 1963) known in the post-colonial period as 'development'. The absence of politics in the post-colonial period has been accurately expressed by Shivji (1985) *inter alia* on the continent. Yet he was arguably not able to expand this observation to fully think the disappearance of politics as being occasioned by the rise of the state and its replacing of popular self-activity, thus arrogating all politics to itself. The difficulty faced by the national liberation struggle mode was its inability to sustain an irreducibly political conception of politics. Through the medium of the state party, an irreducible conception of politics with a universal emancipatory content, was gradually replaced by a politics founded on interests (economic, power, cultural, rights and entitlements) to be managed by the state. *Inter alia*, this became more and more an obvious intellectual problem after independence as it was clearly a particular (state) politics which created the social in the form of (a 'bureaucratic bourgeois') class rather than the expected opposite of politics 'reflecting' the social category of class (Shivji 1976).

Thus the reasons for the difficulty in thinking the emancipatory character of mid-twentieth century anti-imperialist politics are arguably related to the fact that, while ostensibly concerned with emancipating colonial populations, the national liberation struggle mode equated such emancipation with the construction of a nation, thus unavoidably referring politics to an external (social) invariant such as nation, state and/or class. Only in a small number of cases was a politics inspired by this mode not thought exclusively via external referents. These rare instances - the writings of Fanon and Cabral come particularly to mind here (although there may also be others) - were brief and would have to be analysed as thinking the political singularities of Algeria and Guinea Bissau during short historical periods, a fact which lies well beyond the scope of this work. What is however interesting to note, is that both these figures were spared the dubious status of becoming 'state revolutionaries'. Fanon in particular, was excluded by his foreignness from holding high office in Algeria and died at a young age, while Cabral was assassinated before assuming state power.

In general then, the NLS mode was a mode 'in exteriority' in Africa, lasting probably between 1958 (the date of the All-African People's Conference in Accra

5-13 December 1958) and 1973 the assassination of Cabral (Hallward, 2005)<sup>13</sup>. The NLS mode is a truly twentieth century mode<sup>14</sup> and its language was often borrowed from Marxism, particularly from the Stalinist mode. However the term 'class' as the referent of the latter's politics was usually displaced by that of 'nation', with Cabral, for instance even speaking in terms of a 'nation-class' to reconcile Marxist and nationalist conceptions (de Bragança and Wallerstein vol. 1 1982: 69). Its two main external invariants were 'state' and 'nation' although 'class' clearly also featured in this capacity. By 1975, the last vestiges of popular-democratic struggles had ended with the independence of the Portuguese colonies of Africa (and Vietnam at a world level), followed in 1980 by that of Zimbabwe which was, in most instances, only a pale reflection of the experience of its predecessors. Even though the language of this mode was dominant within the South African ANC (African National Congress) in exile, whose perspective on the liberation struggle was largely congruent with that mode, I shall suggest that during the 1980s in South Africa, a new sequence of politics was inaugurated, and during the period 1984-1986 in particular, evidence exists for the beginnings of a new singular (internal) mode of politics for the continent, although such a mode was never fully developed as evidenced *inter alia* by the absence of any figure to systematise it theoretically.

In general, it can be suggested that in the same way that a demarcation of a 'proletarian politics' was central to the Bolshevik mode, the demarcation of a 'national politics', of the nation itself constituted by such politics, was central to the NLS mode. The questions of this politics were thus: who is the nation? (and *not* what is the nation?) and what are its politics? The answer provided - at last by the most emancipatory versions of that mode - was that the nation is those who fight consistently against colonialism/neo-colonialism. To the extent that this was adhered to then, this politics could be said to be partly structured 'in interiority'. The nation is not race, it is not colour, it is not class, it is not gender (see Fanon on the struggle of Algerian women), it is not tradition, it is not even state, but it is open to all Africans, irrespective of ethnic, racial or national origins; it is a purely political subjectivity (Neocosmos 2003). Hence the question of who was a member of the nation acquired a purely political answer. For Fanon the nation during the liberation struggle is a purely political construct undetermined by any social category other than those who simply live there (e.g. Fanon 1989: 152). As a result this politics was coloured by pan-Africanism, which only gave rise to a contradiction once nation was equated with state. In the meantime, national consciousness was mediated by the popular movement. In Cabral's words:

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<sup>13</sup> The dates of this sequence can be obviously debated. At the level of the Third World as a whole, the mode probably began as early as 1910 with the publication of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* which was a systematic critique of colonial values accepted uncritically by the Indian middle class. See Hardiman 2003: 66-93. The following very important remark which illustrates the emancipatory character of Gandhi's thought is taken from this text (p.40): 'to believe that what has not occurred in history will not occur at all is to argue disbelief in the dignity of man'.

<sup>14</sup> Although again, its origins can be stretched as far back as the Haitian revolution of 1791 -1804; see the very important work by Fick, 1992.



*if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture ... The liberation movement must ... embody the mass character, the popular character of the culture - which is not and never could be the privilege of one or of some sectors of the society (Cabral 1973:43-4).*

Thus, insofar as the nation has a social base, it is the poorest, the most excluded (the 'wretched of the earth') and particularly the rural peasantry who form it. The nation has a bias towards the rural; not only are rural people a numerical majority, but they are the most excluded; they have nothing to gain from the continuation of colonialism; only they can be truly universal and consistent in their demand for national freedom and democracy. The (petty-) bourgeoisie and workers as well as the inhabitants of the towns more generally, acquire some benefits from colonialism, they vacillate and are not consistently anti-colonial; their political and cultural references are to the metropole. There is, among the bourgeoisie in particular, a tendency to 'compradorisation' evidently realised during the post-colonial period (Shivji 1985). However, in the final analysis, the nation is composed of those who fight consistently for national freedom irrespective of social origins. This is what national politics amounted to for this mode, at least in its popular-emancipatory version, insofar as the latter existed.

It is the national movement (made up of a 'Front' or 'Congress' of a number of organisations) which usually (but not always) embodies the organisational subjectivity of the nation, not usually a party as such. Although there are differences here, parties are for some (eg Fanon) Western imports with few roots among the people. The dominant tendency, however, was for political movements to become state parties more or less rapidly (arguably a necessary outcome of seeing politics as representing the social in the form of the nation), evidently so at independence, and in many instances long before that, in which case the emancipatory character of politics collapsed. In all cases, the first step to freedom was said to be the attainment of state power for the emancipation of the nation. The aphorism attributed to Kwame N'krumah - 'seek ye first the political kingdom and all shall be given unto thee' - accurately expresses this collapse into a disastrous politics - often a simulacrum of national emancipation and culture as in Mobutu's '*authenticité*' - as the instrumentalist notion of the state which it implied, meant that the latter was left largely untransformed from its colonial origins.

It was this dominant tendency which assured the ephemeral nature of any genuinely emancipatory content to the national liberation mode, and the continuation of a colonial set of institutions and practices from which the continent has been suffering ever since. The neo-colonialism which ensued was thus *primarily* a political phenomenon; the submission to economic dependency on the West was a result of such politics and not its cause. In addition, the deployment of this mode during the international geo-political context of the 'cold war' and its fetishism of state power meant its frequent ideological dependence on either the Stalinist or the parliamentary modes, a

fact which ensured its final disintegration and collapse into statism. One can see therefore how easily a politics with an emancipatory content could tip over into relying on external invariants, when consciousness became derived from the state itself, as the movement became nation, became party, became state<sup>15</sup>. This movement from internal to external mode was most evident at independence, but for many national liberation movements, the transition to proto-states or 'states in waiting' was effected long before independence (e.g. PAIGC, SWAPO, ANC etc, see de Bragança and Wallerstein, vols 2&3) many being recognised by the United Nations as 'the sole and authentic representatives' of their nations long before taking power.

The nationalist form of struggle had violence at its core. For Fanon, violence 'purifies' (i.e. distinguishes) the nation from colonial violence. The combination of the exercise of violence as a counter to colonial violence, with the democratic aspirations of the people is to be found in the people's army, people's war and the practice of guerrilla warfare. The guerrillas were supposed to be the people in arms, the armed militants; the guerrilla army was the people at war. 'We are armed militants, not militarists' (Cabral, cit. Davidson 1981: v). The various sites of a genuinely emancipatory mode of politics when that existed varied, but were likely to include the mass movement and its constituent organisations, the guerrilla army, peasant communities. Militarism was a statist deviation from this conception (easily fallen into given the centrality of 'armed struggle'), when military solutions became dominant over political ones. In sum, the general trend was for national liberation movements to end up providing a mere mirror image of colonial politics in their practice. The sequence of this mode in Africa, with all its contradictory attempts to resist colonialism is today clearly over, and has been so for about thirty years. Yet as Hallward (2005) asks, can we begin to speak today of the end of this end? I shall suggest that there is evidence from South Africa to suggest that we can.

## **5.2 The popular struggle against apartheid: a new political sequence and mode?**

Today we are in a situation when an emancipatory politics must be thought as fundamentally distinct from state politics, as the state is incapable of emancipating anybody (Neocosmos 2009a). In this context, it could be suggested that the national-liberation movement in the urban areas of South Africa during the period 1984-86 constitutes an event for politics on the continent. This is fundamentally because the urban popular masses of the oppressed black population took an independent role in the politics of transformation and managed, for a time, to provide an inventively different

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<sup>15</sup> Wamba-dia-Wamba has recently suggested that while it is the popular masses which enable 'events', the masses possess a blind faith in the state or in those individuals whom they associate with change. It is the breaking of this blind faith which constitutes fidelity to the event and it is those activists who militate for such a break who today engage in emancipatory politics on the continent (personal communication, 22/01/2007).

content to the slogans of the NLS mode. Moreover, the organisational expression of this movement, the United Democratic Front in the South Africa of the 1980s, was not a party organisation but a loose confederation of local political affiliates, which all adhered to some common principles. These retained their organisational autonomy meaning that organisationally, the UDF constitutes a useful recent non-party form of political organisation from which it is important to learn, although serious detailed research on this question has yet to be undertaken (but see Neocosmos 1998; Van Kessel 2000). Moreover, beyond this organisational form, the fact that the authority of the party in exile (the ANC) was recognised by most of these internal anti-apartheid formations had a number of crucially important effects including the need to engage in a 'revolutionary' politics the object of which was not the attainment of state power, but deferring to its ultimate authority. I will outline some of the features of this new politics as I understand them, below.

The struggles for liberation in South Africa during the 1980s were part of a new worldwide wave of resistance which in Africa has been referred to optimistically as 'the second struggle for independence'. In South Africa however this struggle emerged as the first. Particularly in the period 1984-1986, it can be described as an 'event' in Badiou's sense of the word, meaning a process after which the political reality of the situation could no longer simply be understood in the old way it had been visualised before (see Badiou 1988). In his own inimitable style: '... there exists no stronger a transcendental consequence [of an event - MN] than that of making something appear in a world which had not existed in it previously' (Badiou 2006b: 285)<sup>16</sup>.

These struggles denoted a fundamental break with liberalism for which the nation is to be identified with the state and democracy with a form of state. For the state, the mass movement in the 1980s substituted for a while a notion of 'people's power'. One of the main characteristics of this event which constituted a break from previous modes of resistance politics is that arguably, for the first time, nationalist/nationwide resistance did not take the form of a mirror image of colonial/apartheid oppression; that mirror image already existed in the politics of the exiled ANC. Rather, that resistance and the culture which emanated from it, acquired its inspiration directly from the struggles of people in their daily lives for political control over their social-economic environment, thus providing the 'enabling environment' for the unleashing of popular political initiatives and inventiveness. In this sense this experience was a truly democratic event, and a fidelity to its lessons forces us to think about politics differently. In particular I have argued elsewhere (Neocosmos 1999) that rather than thinking 'vertical' distinctions as central, (e.g. the distinctions around which leaders would mobilise followers such as the ideologies of nationalism or socialism), this mass movement put the 'horizontal' opposition between

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<sup>16</sup> In his latest work, Badiou outlines at length the ontological conditions of an event in terms of a detailed typology of change (2006a: 383-401). Here an event is understood as a 'singularity with maximal consequences'. An example of his discussion can be found in English in his discussion of the Paris Commune of 1871 in Badiou, 2006b: 257-90.

democracy and authoritarianism firmly on the agenda, in terms of political practices in particular. In broad outline, the most important features of the nationalist politics of the period can be sketched as follows.

The most important and truly original organisational expression of popular resistance in the 1980s, was the United Democratic Front (UDF) which was formed in 1983 initially ostensibly to mobilise opposition to the state's constitutional proposals and other legislation (known collectively as the Koornhof Bills) including the Black Local Authorities Act which increased the powers of reviled township councillors. The UDF brought together under its umbrella a coalition of civic associations, student organisations and youth congresses, women's groups, trade unions, church societies, sports clubs and a multitude of organisations who retained and often increased as a result of their affiliation to the UDF, their ability to organise independently. At its peak it claimed it had around seven hundred affiliates grouped in ten regional areas and amounting to a total of over two million people (Lodge et al. 1991: 34). With the upsurge of township unrest beginning in earnest in 1984, it was the young people of the townships who provided the main impetus behind the struggle, while this leadership passed over to the Trade Unions in 1988. In one important respect at least, the UDF managed to build on the experience of township based organisations such as civic associations, in that it successfully combined local and national grievances.

Nevertheless, the history of the mass upsurge, even though enabled as well as expressed by the UDF, cannot be reduced to the organisation<sup>17</sup>. Frequently contradictions existed between popular initiatives and the national organisation and the latter often 'trailed behind the masses' (Seekings 1992). The important point to understand is that while the organisational existence of the UDF spans the years 1983-1991, the political sequence of the event along with the beginnings of a new mode of politics, can be said to have lasted between August/September 1984 and mid-1986. While the early political intervention under the banner of the UDF adhered to standard protest politics and the gathering of signatures against the apartheid state's introduction of a 'tricameral parliament', a mass upsurge started in earnest in September 1984 and took the form of bus and rent boycotts, housing movements, squatter revolts, labour strikes, school protests and community 'stay-aways'. This change in the mode of politics was not the result of any strategy by the leadership of the UDF or of a change in policy. It was forced on the leadership from below (Swilling 1988: 101). Indeed, by mid-1985 it was becoming clear that the UDF leadership was unable to exert effective control over developments despite its popularity:

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<sup>17</sup> The literature on this period tends to provide a history of the popular struggle through that of the organisation, conflating the former with the latter. The UDF as an organisation made possible an emancipatory politics but it cannot be conflated with such politics. See for example, Marx 1992, Houston 1999, Seekings 2000, Lodge et al 1991; others attempt to focus more on the popular movement itself e.g. Swilling 1988, Sitas 1992, Van Kessel 2004. See also Murray 1987, 1998, Neocosmos 1998, 1999 and Bozzoli 2004 for contrasting analyses of the period and also the review of much of this literature in Suttner 2004.

*The momentum for action came from the bottom levels of the organisation and from its youngest members. It was children who built the roadblocks, children who led the crowds to the administrative buildings, children who delegated spokespersons, and children who in 1984 told the older folk that things would be different, that people would not run away as they had in 1960 (Lodge et al 1991: 76).*

In 1986 the apartheid state instituted a massively repressive state of emergency which covered the whole country with the result that from late 1986 onwards UDF campaigns were more and more initiated 'from above', by the 'national leadership' operating exclusively at the national level. At the same time, more and more coercive measures were being applied to township residents to adhere to various boycotts, a fact which showed the weakening of popular control, 'the struggle' was acquiring more of a militaristic character, and vigilante activities acquired more and more support from businessmen affected by youth directed boycotts. All in all, after that date, the politics of coercion were gradually taking over from the politics of popular democracy.

What characterised this political event during this two year period was not simply a dominance of popular power 'from below' to be replaced by an imposition of a change in politics 'from above'; after all this is a regular occurrence throughout history, including in contemporary Africa. Rather, the reason for considering this period a new political sequence or an event for politics is fundamentally rooted in the bringing to the fore of new political questions and new political solutions. Broadly speaking this new political conception can be sketched under five headings. All these enable a brief elucidation of a new form of popular democracy.

### **Politics without a party**

What was fundamental was that, in its essence, the politics of the political movement led by the UDF was a politics without a party. The whole idea of 'capturing' or 'seizing' state power whether through elections or the force of arms was absent from its politics (Suttner 2004: 695-6). In this way it differed significantly from the perspective of the NLS mode including that of the ANC. This was the case primarily because the UDF viewed the exiled ANC as the rightful leader of the national movement and deferred to it in terms of overall political dominance. Yet given the virtual absence of an organised presence within the country, the ANC could never exercise party control, and the open structure of the UDF meant that its affiliates, themselves largely controlled by their rank and file, were primarily the ones to set out the forms of struggle. Leadership was however not only reacting to pressure from below, but was forced to be accountable to activists as we shall see. Systems of accountability were instituted largely as a result of trade union influence, which had itself developed from popular resistance through the wave of strikes in the Durban area in 1973.

The main demands of the UDF concerned what one of its leaders called removing the 'barriers to democracy', by which was meant creating 'the necessary conditions for the democratic process to expand' (Morobe 1987: 86). These included: 'the lifting of the state of emergency, the withdrawal of troops and vigilantes from townships, and the release of detainees' as well as the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and other banned organisations, the safe return of exiles and the repeal of racist legislation. These were of course very limited demands and implied a deference to another leadership, yet the taking over and putting into practice the demands of the *Freedom Charter* in particular - the political flag of the Congress alliance - meant that, pushed from below, the mass movement thus constituted, engaged in a politics which focussed on transforming the living conditions of the masses of the people, especially in urban townships. What was meant by democracy and the content given to the first demand of the *Freedom Charter* 'The People Shall Govern' went far beyond anything which had been dreamt of before or established since. This will appear clearly in what follows. Yet the advantage faced by the popular movement in the 1980s - i.e. the absence of a controlling 'party line' - turned out to be one of the reasons for its eventual demise, as it gave way, after being seriously weakened by state coercion, to the returning exiled party of the ANC (Neocosmos 1998).

### **Community-based organisation and active citizenship**

The mass actions from 1984 onwards succeeded in mobilising:

*all sectors of the township population including both youth and older residents; they involved coordinated action between trade unions and political organisations; they were called in support of demands that challenged the coercive urban and education policies of the apartheid state; and they gave rise to ungovernable areas as state authority collapsed in many townships in the wake of the resignation of mayors and councillors who had been 'elected' onto the new Black Local Authorities (Swilling 1988: 102).*

The state declared a first state of emergency in 1985 as it attempted to control this mass upsurge and to reassert its control over 'ungovernable areas'. Interestingly, both popular rebellion and political organisation grew during this period which saw the setting up of 'street committees' in particular. These took over the functions of local government especially in ungovernable areas. One local activist in the Port Elizabeth area stated:

*We said [to our people]: In the streets where you live you must decide what issues affect your lives and bring up issues you want your organisation to take up. We are not in a position to remove debris, remove buckets, clean the streets and so on. But the organisation must deal with these matters through street committees (cit. Lodge et al. 1991: 82).*

The ANC view as expressed by their spokesman Tom Sebina was that street committees 'grow out of the need of the people to defend themselves against State repression...and in response to ANC calls to make the country ungovernable and apartheid unworkable [so as to forge them into] contingents that will be part of the process towards a total people's war'. Contrary to this view which saw street committees as tactical adjuncts to the development of a militaristic process and as simply oppositional to the apartheid state, local activists spelt out a different assessment:

*The people in Lusaka can say what they like...we know that the purpose is to enable people to take their lives in hand. Local government has collapsed. The state's version of local government was corrupt and inefficient in any case, but local government is necessary for people to channel their grievances. The street committees fill the vacuum. They give people an avenue to express views and come up with solutions (Frontline, Xmas 1986, Vol 6, no. 7: 13).*

One activist expressed the new situation as follows:

*Generally ... I can say that the community is the main source of power, because the state has really lost the control over the people. He (sic) has no power over the people in terms of controlling them. This is why the people have formed these area committees, so that they can try to control themselves. What has been preached in the past about the Freedom Charter, even now we are trying to do that practically (An activist from the Eastern Cape, Isizwe, Vol 1, no 2, March 1986).*

These popular state structures were proliferating in urban townships. Marx (1992: 167) notes that by 1987, 43 percent of the inhabitants of Soweto for example, were reporting the existence of street and area committees in their neighbourhoods. In many townships, rudimentary services began to be provided by civics and youth congresses, while crime also began to be regulated through 'people's courts'. These developed in some areas originally to regulate dispute between neighbours (as in Atteridgeville in Pretoria) and also as attempts to control the proliferation of brutal Kangaroo courts (e.g. in Uitenhage and Port Elizabeth). In Alexandra outside Johannesburg, five members of the Alexandra Action Committee were nominated in Feb 1986 to sit in judgement over cases of assault and theft, while street committees were empowered to settle quarrels. In Mamelodi one of Pretoria's townships, a number of informal systems of justice operated in the 1970s and 1980s and there were long term struggles over the setting up of popularly accountable courts, which were also highly influenced by traditional African custom (e.g. the importance of elders etc)<sup>18</sup>. Lodge concludes that:

*Of all the manifestations of people's power...the efforts of local groups to administer civil and criminal justice were the most challenging to the*

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<sup>18</sup> For greater detail see Lodge et al. 1991: 135-139; Seekings 1989; and also *Isizwe*, vol 1 no 2 March 1986: 35-41.

*state's moral authority. More than any other feature of the insurrectionary movement, people's justice testified to the movement's ideological complexity and to the extent to which it was shaped from below by popular culture (Lodge et al. 1991: 135).*

In addition to popular control of townships and popular justice, there was a complementary development of institutions geared towards the provision of 'people's education'. These included in particular attempts to bring local schools under community control through the establishment of Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs) and even attempts to develop a new curriculum in response to 'Bantu Education' the central plank of the apartheid state in this sphere. The struggle for people's education was seen as intimately linked to establishing people's power. In the words of Zwelakhe Sisulu:

*The struggle for People's Education is no longer a struggle of the students alone. It has become a struggle of the whole community with the involvement of all sections of the community. This is not something which has happened in the school sphere alone; it reflects a new level of development in the struggle as a whole... The struggle for people's education can only finally be won when we have won the struggle for people's power ... We are no longer demanding the same education as Whites, since this is education for domination. People's education means education at the service of the people as a whole, education that liberates, education that puts the people in command of their lives. We are not prepared to accept any 'alternative' to Bantu Education which is imposed on the people from above ... To be acceptable, every initiative must come from the people themselves, must be accountable to the people and must advance the broad mass of students, not just a select few (Sisulu, 1986: 106, 110).*

Or again:

*I want to emphasise here that these advances were only possible because of the development of democratic organs, or committees, of people's power. Our people set up bodies which were controlled by, and accountable to, the masses of the people in each area. In such areas, the distinction between the people and their organisations disappeared. All the people young and old participated in committees from street level upwards' (ibid.: 104)*

However, at the same time as street committees were taking up local grassroots issues, they also functioned as vehicles for the direct challenge to apartheid state power by the people. A detailed assessment from 1986 makes this point forcefully.

*The street/area committees - the structures of an embryonic People's Power - are not only restricted to playing this kind of [local] role, but also have a far more directly or narrowly political dimension to them. At the same time as they are taking up ... grassroots issues ... they also form the units in and through which major political issues and strategies (e.g.*



*the consumer boycott) are discussed and organised. Thus the street committee system is beginning to form not only the avenue through which people can begin to take greater and more democratic control of the immediate conditions of their existence, but they are also emerging as the form through which direct political action against the state and the ruling bloc can be decided on and implemented (White 1986: 92).*

Thus South Africa, particularly urban South Africa, did experience however briefly, a period where the oppressed people did succeed in controlling their own lives as well as in providing an alternative to state structures in the movement for 'people's power'. In practice, this social movement was giving rise to a form of mass democracy and a form of state unique in South Africa (and probably also in Africa as a whole). While these forms of popular democracy were never able to establish their dominance especially beyond 1986, they were a central feature of popular or 'subaltern' politics at the time. These forms of democracy and state have gone largely unrecognised by most intellectuals, by the party of state nationalism, the ANC, and even by many of the popular movement's own leaders. What especially stood out, was an attempt to develop genuinely popular forms of democracy in both ideology and practice.

### **Direct accountability of leadership**

The general characterisation of the mass struggle as national and democratic, brought together both nationwide as well as popular-democratic locally-focussed aspects of the process. In fact, the two were regularly combined in attempts by leading activists to theorise the process of struggle. Thus Murphy Morobe, the Acting Publicity Secretary of the UDF in 1987:

*We in the United Democratic Front are engaged in a national democratic struggle. We say we are engaged in a national struggle for two reasons. Firstly, we are involved in political struggle on a national, as opposed to a regional or local level. The national struggle involves all sectors of our people - workers (whether in the factories, unemployed, migrants or rural poor), youth, students, women and democratic-minded professionals. We also refer to our struggle as national in the sense of seeking to create a new nation out of the historical divisions of apartheid. We also explain the democratic aspect of our struggle in two ways ... Firstly, we say that a democratic South Africa is one of the aims or goals of our struggle. This can be summed up in the principal slogan of the Freedom Charter: 'The People Shall Govern'. In the second place, democracy is the means by which we conduct our struggle ... The creation of democratic means is for us as important as having democratic goals as our objective ... When we say that the people shall govern, we mean at all levels and in all spheres, and we demand that there be a real, effective control on a daily basis ... The rudimentary organs of people's power that have begun to emerge in South Africa (street committees, defence*

*committees, shop-steward structures, student representative councils, parent/teacher/ student associations) represent in many ways the beginnings of the kind of democracy that we are striving for ... Without the fullest organisational democracy, we will never be able to achieve conscious, active and unified participation of the majority of the people, and in particular the working class, in our struggle (Morobe, 1987:81-3).*

Two features of this democracy worth noting, were a detailed system of controlling leaders to be accountable to the rank and file membership, and a different way of demarcating 'the people' from 'the oppressors'. Attempts at instituting internal democracy within organisations were strongly followed, although they obviously had various degrees of success. The important point however was that such a struggle for democracy existed within organisations. The various dimensions of this democracy were according to Morobe:

- 1) Elected Leadership. *Leadership of our organisations must be elected (at all levels), and elections must be held at periodic intervals...Elected leadership must also be re-callable before the end of their term of office if there is indiscipline or misconduct.*
- 2) Collective Leadership. *We try and practice collective leadership at all levels. There must be continuous, ongoing consultation ...*
- 3) Mandates and Accountability. *Our leaders and delegates are not free-floating individuals. They always have to operate within the delegated mandates of their positions and delegated duties ...*
- 4) Reporting. *Reporting back to organisations, areas, units, etc. is an important dimension of democracy [...] We feel very strongly that information is a form of power, and that if it is not shared, it undermines the democratic process. We therefore take care to ensure that language translations occur if necessary ...*
- 5) Criticism and Self-criticism. *We do not believe that any of our members are beyond criticism; neither are organisations and strategies beyond reproach ... (Morobe, op.cit.: 84-85).*

Similar observations regarding the popular content of struggles for democratic transformation during this period have also been made with regard to the trade unions:

*The battle in the factories ... has also given birth to a type of politics which has rarely been seen among the powerless [in South Africa]: a grassroots politics which stresses the ability of ordinary men and women, rather than 'great leaders', to act to change their world (Friedman 1987: 8-9).*

Not surprisingly under this challenge, the apartheid state did not hesitate to intensify its repression. In the first six months of the 1986 emergency around 25 000 people were arrested and isolated, the ability of the press (especially the vibrant 'alternative press') to report objectively was systematically curtailed and the townships were placed under direct military rule while the state introduced

a militarised bureaucracy (The National Security Management System) to run local government and to 'win hearts and minds' (known as WHAM) following the classic counterinsurgency pattern which the Americans had perfected in Vietnam. In brief this state offensive succeeded in undermining popular organisations considerably, and probably eliminating popular leadership altogether. This was not because the UDF ceased its activities, on the contrary, rent, bus and consumer boycotts continued unabated at least until 1987 (Lodge, op.cit: 87-100). Rather it was the popular aspect of the struggle which was fatally wounded as it depended for its democratic operation on consultative processes, relative freedom of movement etc, and there was no popular army capable of defending popular gains and structures against military onslaught<sup>19</sup>.

### **New conceptions of nation and leadership**

The manner in which the popular movement demarcated its members ('the people' or 'the nation') from the oppressive state, is also worthy of note. This largely surrounded the notion of 'non-racialism' as a way of characterising the ideology of the movement as well as the nature of the state which was being fought for. Originally inherited from Black Consciousness discourse which used the term to refer to all oppressed racial groups in South Africa under the characterisation 'Black', 'non-racialism' was adapted by the UDF to include Whites who supported the struggle. This struggle was visualised as uniting into a national opposition the disparate groups which the apartheid state divided, hence the main slogan of the UDF: 'UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides!'. One important aspect of non-racialism was the fact that rather than distinguishing 'the people' or 'the oppressors' on racial grounds, it did so by demarcating on political grounds: popular-democrats from anti-democrats. The former were those who supported change 'from below', the latter those who proposed some form of 'tinkering from above' and who had by this period, lost the confidence of the majority. Democrats were all those who opposed 'minority rule' and supported 'majority rule' through popular democracy. In the words of a UDF discussion document from 1986:

*The essential dividing line that we should promote is between supporters of minority rule and majority rule. The common ground between the Botha (sic), the PFP [Popular Federal Party, the main White, big business-backed liberal opposition at the time - MN] leadership and big business is that they all seek solutions within the framework of adapting minority rule. Although they differ fundamentally on who to involve in negotiation and how much adaptation is necessary, these elements all agree that the system must be changed from the top down, with the solutions being decided over the heads of the people. All those who accept the right of the people to*

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<sup>19</sup> The ANC's MK's activities were never successfully integrated into the popular struggle, denoting a failure by the exile movement to adapt organisationally to the changed internal conditions; see Barrell 1991.

*determine the process of change are allies of the people and part of the NDS [National Democratic Struggle] (UDF Cape Town Area Committee 1986: 10, emphasis in original).*

This meant that the conducting of the popular struggle should also be 'non-racial'. Such a position was possible precisely because the social movement was not an elite movement and because White 'progressives' provided invaluable work both in the trade unions as well as the UDF, thus becoming known and appreciated by the people of the townships. It served to divide a minority of White democrats from White racists while forcing the uncommitted to commit themselves, in the same way as affiliation to popular organisations divided Blacks between collaborators with the state (so-called 'sell-outs') and the majority of the oppressed. Similar democratic practices also characterised the 'Call for National Unity against Apartheid and the Emergency' by the UDF in August 1986 for example. The discussion documents surrounding this call stress emphatically: 'it is essential that the call is not simply for unity at the top. We must ensure a way to ensure contact and planning on the ground, so that membership of different organisations may grow closer together'. At the same time they noted that the timing of the call was 'delayed to give COSATU affiliates time for thorough discussion - this is crucial, as the leadership of the call must reflect the people's unity right from the start'<sup>20</sup>.

In fact, the danger posed to popular democracy by the lack of control of the popular movement over a number of charismatic leaders who felt they had the authority to speak and act without being mandated, was one of which many were aware. Thus, *Isizwe*, the main journal of the UDF made a rather prophetic statement in 1985:

*One thing that we must be careful about [...] is that our organisations do not become too closely associated with individuals, that we do not allow the development of personality cults. We need to understand why we regard people as leaders and to articulate these reasons. Where people do not measure up to these standards they must be brought to heel - no matter how 'charismatic' they may be. No person is a leader in a democratic struggle such as ours simply because he or she makes good speeches [...] No individual may make proposals on the people's behalf - unless mandated by them [...] We need to say these things because there are some people and interests who are trying to project individuals as substitutes for political movements (United Democratic Front 1985: 17, emphasis added)*

The practices of 'mandates and report-backs' which had been adopted largely as a result of trade union influence were taken particularly seriously in the mid-eighties, had begun to decline at the end of the decade. Under such circumstances it would be relatively easy for leaders to disband the UDF in the

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<sup>20</sup> See Cape Town UDF Area Committee 'Call for National Unity -Discussion Paper' (85186) p.1.; UDF National Office (1986) 'Proposed Joint statement on 'Call for National Unity against apartheid and the Emergency'.

wake of the unbanning of the ANC, as it was felt that the latter could now take over the organisation of popular political protest. The early 1990s witnessed the gradual de-politicisation of civics and the renegotiation of their role vis-à-vis the state. I have shown elsewhere how the popular politics embodied in the organisations mentioned above was gradually replaced by state politics (Neocosmos 1998, 1999).

Another important innovation was the attempt to specify the content of the orthodox Marxist idea of 'working-class leadership' which was becoming more and more stressed as the link between 'the working class' and 'the national democratic revolution' during the period in question. The Stalinist mode of politics had hitherto basically equated such 'leadership' (hegemony) with that of a party, as the dominance of the communist party in inter-party alliances was substituted in the Stalinist mode in particular, for the 'class leadership' of the proletariat in class alliances which for the Bolshevik mode had referred to a specific politics. As the SACP was banned and did not constitute an independent organised force in South Africa at the time, it was not so much *party* alliances which were the issue (as they were in exile of course) but *class* alliances which were understood *in purely political terms*. In brief, in such circumstances, in any discussion of this issue, a greater emphasis had to be placed on ideology and practice rather than on crude organisational control. For example, *Isizwe*, the theoretical journal of the UDF stated in 1987:

*For the working-class to play their full role, their leadership must be fundamentally political leadership. It must be working class leadership of and within the national liberation front ... of the UDF itself ... The dynamic active participation, from grassroots level up, of ever increasing numbers of workers in our structures will pose fresh challenges. That is how it must be. We must be prepared for this and work to assist this process (Isizwe, vol. 2, no1: 7-8).*

At the same time both the UDF and the general secretary of COSATU added:

*The working class must ensure that its interests are paramount in the liberation struggle. That is why the mass democratic movement in our country has acknowledged the leading role of the working class. We believe that the only way to ensure this leadership is to build democratic organisations in the factories, shops, mines, in the townships, cities and villages where we live. Our structures are rooted in a constituency where leaders are not free-floating individuals but subject to recall at any time and are accountable to their constituencies and operating on the basis of mandates and report backs, can claim to be democratic (Naidoo 1987: 15).*

While the UDF therefore insisted on opening its cadreship to workers, both it and the COSATU leadership insisted more and more on the building of 'popular democratic structures' as the attributes of 'working class politics'. This idea of popular democracy being the essence of working class politics was given its most detailed explication by Karon and Ozinsky (1986). They argued that as:

*It is the process by which the national democratic tasks are completed that will determine the character of the society which follows ... the task of transforming society cannot be separated from the process of liberating it ... The method of [the] eradication [of minority rule], and the depth of the democracy which replaces it, is the essential class question of the national democratic struggle ... Transformation is only possible if the liberation struggle ensures the development of direct democracy based on organs of people's power. These are the crucial source of the power of the working class in the national democratic state, and hence the foundation of an uninterrupted transition to socialism (1986: 33, 35, 34, 36, emphasis in original).*

Here society had to be transformed *prior* to - and hence independently from - the attainment of state power and the transformation of the state: 'transformation [of the state] is only possible if the liberation struggle ensures the development of direct democracy based on *organs of people's power*' (Karon and Ozinsky 1986: 36). The idea of controlling the state in order to transform society was one which arose later, particularly with the return of ANC exiles in the 1990s. Thus for Joe Slovo, the priority was for the ANC to attain state power. Having done so would *then* 'immeasurably facilitate' the establishment of people's power (Slovo 1992: 36-37, see also Neocosmos 1999). For the popular movement then, the idea was to transform society prior to, and hence outside of a seizure of state power.

In sum it was the experience of the South African popular movement itself which was imposing itself on the understanding of 'working class politics' by those intellectuals closest to this social movement. Evidently, this understanding of popular democracy as 'working class politics' is not deducible from a social class category. The 'people' is clearly not a class category. It is not at all obvious that a popular conception of democracy should be in the interest of (or only of) a working class and not have a greater and even universal validity. So-called 'working class parties', of whatever hue, have not historically been paragons of democracy. This conception was in fact a purely politically subjective one, but it was never systematised into a theory, and a number of questions were clearly left unanswered such as: what is the difference if any between popular and working-class politics? What does the 'depth' of democracy actually mean? Is the reference to qualitatively or quantitatively different forms of democracy? How does such democracy differ from more liberal conceptions? How does this conception of democracy link up with notions of rights? And most importantly, how is a conception of 'class leadership' of the 'national democratic revolution' to be reconciled with the organisational 'leadership' of the ANC in 'the liberation movement'? The absence of clear answers to these questions was to contribute to the eventual collapse of popular forms of democracy and their replacement by an apolitical (because state-focussed) liberalism (Neocosmos 1998).

## **Prescriptive politics at a distance from the state**

The argument which I have stressed throughout has been that during the period 1984-86, the popular struggle raised questions of politics which had never been raised before in South Africa, or even perhaps in Africa - in the post-colonial period - in such a clear fashion; the issue specifically concerns the thinking of a new form of emancipatory politics in a post-NLS period. The main question raised was what is democracy? How should a popular democracy be understood and consolidated? This differed fundamentally from what most intellectuals were debating such as the relative importance of capitalism vs. socialism, the state, the nature of the economy, race and class, and so on (Neocosmos 1999).

First, there is no doubt that South Africa witnessed a period of mass popular upsurge, especially in urban townships which eventually led to the collapse of the apartheid state. The mass politics of this period were founded on the daily issues of survival confronted by ordinary people. The UDF, its affiliates and activists were able, to various extents at different periods, to express organisationally, the mass involvement of the population in politics. Everything became political, from sport to transport, from art to schooling, from rubbish collecting to public parks. In other words, true active citizenship was created across the board, unevenly to be sure, but nevertheless sufficiently for all sectors of the majority of the population to be involved. In this way then a moral community of active citizens was developed (Van Kessel 2004). The UDF, in its politics, managed to link local concerns and politics with national issues. Everything was seen as connected to the (apartheid) state. What was not understood was how to sustain (or even *whether* to sustain) this active citizenship post-apartheid, and that the role of the state in controlling the issues listed above remained central, irrespective of the form the state would take. In the absence of thinking independent popular politics post-apartheid, the only categories available to thought became those of liberal 'civil society' (Neocosmos 1999).

Second, the politics of the event of 1984-86 were emancipatory and existed at a complete distance from those of the state, simply because the thinking of political activity and practice was not modelled on an attempt to enter the subjective domain of state politics. Indeed, these constituted an alternative to state politics and were not just oppositional, as the ANC leadership has regularly maintained (e.g. Mbeki 1996). The fact that organisations were able to construct their own political culture, their own embryonic state structures, their own (often highly democratic) modes of decision-making, shows that the organisation and mass movement went beyond instilling political agency among citizens, but also delved into thinking new forms of politics of a fundamentally popular-democratic character.

The fact that 'class leadership' was theorised as democratic practice, and not simply as party dominance, shows this, despite the frequent lapses into bureaucratic-statist conceptions and practices. The weakness, if not absence, of party forms of politics, and the absence of the idea of the seizure of power, constituted major influences on the formation of these politics, as did the necessity to construct majority popular support around issues. There was

clearly militarist imagery, but little in terms of militarist politics. The UDF as an umbrella of independent organisations/affiliates was organisationally novel. Moreover not only was the UDF excluded/excluded itself from formal recognition (in fact it operated so much beyond the limits of state politics that it was eventually banned) *the politics of the UDF were not the politics of civil society*, neither as I have noted were they the politics of parties, at least not fully so. Here was an organisation which did not see its purpose as achieving state power, yet which was totally political. Unlike the ANC, the UDF was not a state-party in the making and never saw itself as such.

Moreover, these were not the politics of human rights, requesting the state to 'deliver' rights or entitlements in order to include the majority within its political ambit, for the simple yet important reason that the 'Congress Tradition' as a whole had vehemently distanced itself from the notion of being or forming a 'civil rights movement'. Rather than demanding incorporation into an existing state, activists consciously rejected state modes of politics and rather made prescriptions on the state, most notably those of the *Freedom Charter* which stressed popular democracy: *South Africa belongs to all who live in it, The People Shall Govern, The Doors of Culture Shall be Opened* and so on, all of which had a universal character. Therefore what dominated here was a politics 'for all' and not only a politics 'for some'. These politics were thus not state politics, but operated at a political distance from the state. How to put the universal ideas expressed in the *Freedom Charter* into practice was a regular question posed by activists, and at times these ideas were imposed violently on those who disagreed, an illustration of episodic relapses into statist modes. At the same time such politics could not be characterised as either 'reformist' or 'revolutionary', the usual terms with which the Left has evaluated politics, because such politics were vehemently opposed to the existence of the apartheid state (hence not reformist), while concurrently not wishing to achieve state power (revolution implies the seizure of state power).

Third, the politics of the period in question differed fundamentally from the statist aspects of the NLS mode represented most clearly by the ANC which was a proto-state operating within the diplomatic international arena and primarily focussed on gaining power through military means (Barrell 1991). The ANC was centralist, hierarchical, pyramidal in its structure. The UDF had no branch structure, only loose affiliates which encouraged popular involvement. As noted, consultation had to take place regularly in order to ensure support. The ANC on the other hand was highly centralist, cut off from direct contact with the mass movement, and hampered by the Stalinist mode of politics which dominated, in conjunction with the NLS mode, within its structures<sup>21</sup>. On the

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<sup>21</sup> What had accompanied the ANC's orientation during the 1960s and 1970s had been a militaristic perspective whereby the assumption was maintained that: 'armed struggle was not simply the means by which ultimately to contend for state power but also the principal means by which to progress in each phase of escalation to that goal' (Barrell 1991: 69). Barrell shows that armed struggle was viewed in the 1960's as 'the *sine qua non* of any form of ANC political progress' (1991: 70) and that the ANC ignored the setting up of political structures within the country. At its Morogoro conference in 1969, political forms of struggle were still considered 'as



other hand, the sites of the new mode of politics were clearly the UDF itself along with various of its affiliates, the street committees and various other community organisations, the shop-steward 'locals', a number of churches and so on.

Fourth and finally, of course there were contradictions within the popular politics of the 1980s and these appear in the extensive literature. These contradictions arose and fell along with the vagaries of the struggle and included: authoritarian tendencies, sexism, urban-rural contradictions, and deference to well known nationalist figures and to the ANC in exile, and thus to the NLS mode *inter alia*. These contradictions, along with the restructuring of the state, contribute to explaining the ultimate inability of this mode to sustain itself. These problems illustrate the fact that these politics never fully broke from what Badiou (2005: 68ff) terms the 'bond' of mass politics, the bond of interests, in order that the 'long term durability of the event' may be sustained (2005: 72). The binding of the mass movement around the idea of the coming to power of the exiled leaders of the ANC was its undoing. The sites of embryonic people's power never fully matured and were rather still born, as the democratic politics of the mass movement more or less rapidly collapsed into authoritarianism (Cronin 1992; Neocosmos 1998).

Yet what seems apparent is that the period 1984-86 was an event in Badiou's sense in that it was able to completely reconfigure and rethink the basis of emancipatory politics in the country, and to systematically raise issues concerning the centrality of popular democracy in any African emancipatory transformation. As Morobe (1987: 83) put it: 'the essence of democracy cannot be limited to debate alone. The key to a democratic system lies in being able to say that the people in our country can not only vote for a representative of their choice, but also feel that they have some direct control [...]' While it is indeed common today to hear this period referred to as that of the 'anti-apartheid struggle', this struggle was never simply defined, at the time, according to what it was against, but always also in terms of what it was for. What it was for, for the majority of its activists, was never simply a neo-liberal state and a government elected by universal suffrage which passes socially sensitive legislation. It would have never had the mass support it did get had this been

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auxiliary to military imperatives' (1991: 71), while its SACP ally during the same period resolved that: 'every political action, whether armed or not, should be regarded as part of the build-up towards a nationwide people's armed struggle leading to the conquest of power' (cit Barrell 1991: 71). The effect of the Soweto uprising of 1976 was to push the ANC and SACP into reviewing their strategy (there had been no ANC armed activity inside the country for 13 years anyway; Barrell 1991: 72). This review which took place in 1978-79, emphasised the possibilities of political struggle inside the country and the construction of a popular revolutionary political base. Yet despite what Barrell calls this 'turn to the masses', the overall perspective was one where 'power in South Africa would be won by revolutionary violence in a protracted armed struggle which must involve the whole people and in which partial and general mass uprisings would play a vital role' (cit. Barrell 1991: 89). In sum therefore, even as late as the 1980s the strategic vision remained one in which political organisation was ultimately seen as subject to military imperatives - notwithstanding traces of ambiguity in some formulations' (1991: 89).

the case. It was always a struggle for a better world, a world where indeed people 'feel that they have some direct control' over their lives, hence for a politics founded on an axiom of equality. Thus, intellectually, a fidelity to this event must put this point at the centre of thinking about politics on the continent. Such fidelity would have to name the event and the political sequence or mode corresponding to it. To my mind, this event is most aptly named the sequence of 'People's Power' which is how it was named by those involved. It institutes the inception of a People's Power mode of politics. What should be stressed insofar as the lessons for developing a more general understanding of politics is concerned, is that the politics of this mode constituted itself subjectively outside state modes of thinking politics. This was its fundamentally innovative characteristic. Whether in fact such subjectivity resulted in an opposition to the state, as it in fact rightly did, is largely of secondary importance. This non-state subjectivity constituted its novelty simply because most revolutionary politics hitherto on the continent had been firmly situated within a state subjectivity, hence their insistence on seizing power. However, fidelity to this event is certainly not guaranteed today. Yet such fidelity must be present within the politics of post-apartheid/post-colonial political organisations or social movements if a critique of neo-liberal democracy is to be sustained in practice, i.e. if a political truth stands a chance of being asserted and established. It is to this issue that we must finally turn.

## **6. Understanding fidelity to the emancipatory event: the politics of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa.**

### **A comparison of the TAC and AbM**

We now no longer live within the cold war/Keynesian/social-democratic/developmental-state period. Today, neo-liberal economics and politics have replaced state-led economic transformation by market-led growth along with massive unemployment and poverty levels while so-called de-regulation and privatisation have devastated state social provisioning infrastructure. At the same time the current form of imperialism is one which is not only globalised, but has replaced its 'civilising mission' (and later 'development mission') by a liberalising and 'democratising mission' (Wamba-dia-Wamba 2007, Neocosmos 2009b). Neo-liberal market capitalism and its attendant political liberal-democratic norms are everywhere hegemonic in thought, although people throughout the world have been showing their disgust with the liberal political system by staying away from the polls. In this context the neo-liberal state has been ruling - ensuring its legitimacy - less through the operation of parties but increasingly by institutionalising the operation of civil society organisations, in particular NGOs<sup>22</sup>. It is in such a context of the decline in legitimacy of parties,

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<sup>22</sup> Apparently USAID refers to the old South African 'struggle NGOs' as CSOs which it funds to 'function as effective policy advocacy groups' and 'to lobby' (Manji and O'Coill 2002: 14). Of course government funds its own NGOs too; see Swilling and Russell 2002.

that so-called civil society organisations have been seen as a form of popular incorporation into state politics. On the other hand, so-called 'new' social movements (which at least in Europe have now become directly embedded into the state<sup>23</sup>) are regularly visualised as holding the key to an emancipatory future. Too often though, such movements have shown highly contradictory features and the majority have simply been concerned to advocate their integration into either the state or the broader system.

Given the decline and loss of legitimacy of parties, how then are we to understand the relationship between popular movements and politics, between the social movements of what Hardt and Negri (2001) call the 'multitude', and politics? Hardt and Negri's idealisation of spontaneity imbues the 'multitude' with the same qualities of a historical subject with which Marx had endowed the proletariat. The 'multitude' is to be the saviours of humanity; a position seemingly adhered to also by Samir Amin (e.g. Amin and Sridhar 2002). While it is in popular social movements that the potential for an emancipatory politics exists, such a blanket uncritical argument is quite unconvincing, simply because the politics of many 'multitudes' are still imbued with insurrectionist assumptions for example, a form of politics inherited uncritically from our statist past, as insurrections were geared to taking over state power. The existence of social movements is not in itself sufficient evidence of an emancipatory alternative, and in any case it is in the character of such movements to rise and fall as their concerns become quite difficult to sustain over time. What is required, in addition to recognizing the importance of social movements, is the development, both in theory and in practice, of an emancipatory politics, something which is not simply given by capitalist society, but is, according to Badiou (1988) the outcome of a fidelity to specific 'events' as I have already noted.

It is probably in South Africa that the study of social movements is the most developed on the continent. However, this literature remains squarely within the perspective of the Western 'sociology of social movements' while ignoring the equivalent material from Asia, Latin America and Africa<sup>24</sup>. It is not my intention to review the South African literature here, merely to emphasise its operation within the neo-liberal framework of the human rights and civil society paradigms<sup>25</sup>. From within this perspective, as I have already noted, the

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<sup>23</sup> At least this is true of environmentalism and feminism, along with the 'old' trade union movement.

<sup>24</sup> The predominant character of Western sociology - including that of social movements - has been its systematic evacuation of political subjectivity from its accounts. This trend has not been equally predominant among the analyses emanating from the South, where social analyses have been more conditioned by popular politics. On Africa, see eg. Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba (1995), Romdhane and Moyo (2002); on India see Rao (2004) and various issues of *Subaltern Studies*.

<sup>25</sup> The main texts here are Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006) and Jones and Stokke (2005) *inter alia* and the various publications emanating from the *Centre for Civil Society* at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

tendency is to evaluate the 'success' or otherwise of an organisation 'of' civil society in terms of its ability to influence or lobby government in favour of the group whose interests it is said to represent. Operating within civil society is said to enable this, and to help redress the obvious imbalance against the poor, which the growing inequality accompanying the spread of liberal democracy has entrenched on the continent since the 1980s at least. The existence of such organisations, NGOs in particular, is seen as politically 'empowering' the poor, to exercise citizenship rights, within an otherwise disempowering economic context. The liberal conscience can thus be assuaged without its power or dominance being in anyway contested, let alone threatened.

Within this overall perspective, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) has a place of honour. Not only does it fight ostensibly for an impeccably moral issue - the provision of treatment for those dying of an incurable disease, HIV/AIDS - with which all can identify, but also it has succeeded in forcing the South African government to set out a plan for the 'rolling out' (i.e. 'delivery') of anti-retroviral drugs for AIDS sufferers, seen by most as considerably extending their life if not constituting a cure. Moreover, the TAC has combined legal action with what has been termed a 'radical' or 'confrontational' stance vis-à-vis the government's perceived lethargy on this issue, tactics derived we are told from the experience of the struggles of the 1980s (e.g. Robins 2004: 666, Mbali 2005). It is therefore seen by many as the true inheritor, not to say the bearer, of the popular traditions of struggle of the 1980s, thus vindicating the idea of a 'vibrant' civil society as a genuine indicator of democracy and the exercise of pluralism and citizenship. The conception of politics which enables this statement however is one which reduces politics to 'strategy and tactics' and largely ignores the prescriptions of the organisation and the manner in which decisions are made. This in no way constitutes a conception of politics as emancipatory and universal, but simply as a reflection of interests and the most appropriate manner to achieve them. In this context then, the TAC is seen as a model movement/NGO, with perfect 'left' credentials; it has been able to touch the world liberal conscience to such a remarkable extent that it was even nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2003.

I shall argue here that this rosy picture does not conform to reality, but rather that the politics of the TAC operate squarely within the state domain of politics and have, in spite of appearances, disabled rather than enabled a genuine active citizenship by the poor. There are several reasons for this, including its mode of organisation and massive funding, its hierarchical structure, its congruence with the international bio-medical power system and the fact that it re-enforces the ideology of the bio-medical paradigm for which people are seen as 'patients', passive recipients of medical and state *delivery*, rather than as active agents in their own cure with the help of experts. For most left-liberal politics today, the extension of the life of HIV-AIDS sufferers (not their cure, which is so far

unavailable) is to be traded for their ultimate political passivity; life is to be extended (death is to be postponed) at the expense of genuine political agency<sup>26</sup>.

In order to stress this point, I shall contrast the TAC's politics with those of a completely different organisation, which has largely remained uncelebrated, the movement of the shack dwellers of Durban or Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM). Here we have a small movement of the poor run by the poor themselves. Not an NGO, it has fought the local state tenaciously for the provision of decent housing for its members. Its politics however have remained squarely outside civil society - i.e. it has steadfastly refused to enter the realm of state and donor politics - relying rather on the commitment of a leadership drawn from its own ranks, democratic decision-making, and a rejection of state cooption and donor funding when this threatened to compromise its independence. Its politics and conceptions of itself have so far been at a distance from state politics (for which it has paid a heavy price as I have noted already), its decision-making processes have been consistently democratic, constantly involving the community. It has remained proudly independent, forcing the local state to listen to it and to take it seriously. It has contributed systematically to the production of confidence and political citizenship among the communities where it has been operating and has been expanding its membership dramatically. It is this organisation I shall argue, which has shown, at least until now, the closest fidelity to the People's Power event of 1984-86, through its democratic prescriptions on a state, which has systematically fought it at every turn using both legal and illegal means to do so.

### **6.1 The Treatment Action Campaign and the politics of civil society**

Discussion of the politics of HIV-AIDS in South Africa have been coloured by the government's (particularly the previous president Thabo Mbeki's) attempt to place, during the early 2000s a discussion of the aetiology of the disease in the public domain, contesting the mainstream medical establishment's view of the causes of the disease, while simultaneously dragging its feet on instituting plans for providing medical care to sufferers, on the grounds of the inappropriateness of Western medical solutions to African conditions. While the government rightly attempted to question the confronting of the disease exclusively on the basis of the provision of expensive medical treatment in conditions of extreme poverty, it did it so clumsily - by seemingly refusing existing treatment to sufferers - that it alienated the national and world medical establishment, its own media, as well as middle class AIDS patients and liberal opinion in the country. As a result it soon found itself on the defensive, and was eventually forced into capitulation to existing bio-medical paradigms. Today the public debate, insofar as it exists, concerns exclusively the provision of treatment. While the TAC has been able to provide the conditions for the access

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<sup>26</sup> See here Badiou's discussion around the issue of euthanasia (Badiou 2001) as well as his discussion of the centrality of bodies and languages in what he calls the 'democratic materialism' of the capitalo-parliamentary system; Badiou 2006a.

to treatment of greater numbers of people, it has succeeded in doing so *ultimately* at the expense of reinforcing a culture of political passivity. This has arguably been largely because of its insistence in operating within civil society, within the state domain of politics.

The organisational structure of the TAC is similar to a trade union or party in that it is composed of local branches with provincial structures and an overall national one; indeed Friedman and Mottiar's (2004: 17) detailed study makes much of this, stressing not only the structural similarities, but also the technical knowledge required by the leadership as in labour unions. Given the collapse of the latter from popular-driven organisations in the 1970s and 1980s to bureaucratic institutions today, the comparison is instructive. Of course as with all such structures, one is not surprised to hear the centrality of the national body in decision-making and that 'major strategic decisions are initiated by the national leadership' so that there is a danger 'that the concerns of the grassroots are not informing the agenda of the leadership' (2004: 15, 9). Branches concern themselves with mobilising around campaigns largely decided at the national level and also engage in educational programmes for their members in medical matters, a process which Robins (2004: 663) refers to, rather optimistically, as 'democratising science'. This branch structure has also led to observable contradictions between leaders and membership given that the former is overwhelmingly White and educated while the latter is Black and poor, leading one activist to remark that 'historically dominant voices - primarily white-left intellectuals - have been the main mediators of the identity and aspirations of the poor' (Mngxitama 2004, cit. Friedman and Mottiar 2004: 36).

The TAC is 'an organisation with substantial full-time staff, administration and donor funded programmes'; it employed 40 people and had a budget of R18 million in 2004, 98 percent of its income being grants from donors (2004: 6). In the words of its leaders, the TAC is 'neither anti-government nor anti-ANC' (2004: 7) and according to Friedman and Mottiar, the 'TAC has a political identity which ensures a relationship with the government and ANC unlike that of most social movements' (loc.cit.). In sum then, the TAC's purpose is to ensure the delivery of treatment to all sufferers and it uses the organisation, expertise (legal and medical) and tactics to do so within the parameters set out by the state as a legitimate organisation of civil society. In one of its leader's words: 'we want to get medicine to people - we do not want to cause a revolution' (2004: 10). As such then, it is agreed by commentators that the TAC operates clearly within civil society, and combines features of both a social movement as well as an NGO, as it provides important services to its members (2004: 40). The TAC then has been described 'as a civil society organisation which seeks to make gains by mobilising grassroots people as well as by using the constitutional system' (2004: 38).

The fact that the TAC has been successful has been put down precisely to these tactics of combining 'a rights based approach as well as grassroots mobilisation' (equated in the literature with 'politics') (Robins 2004: 671). For Robins (2004) for example it is the TAC's counterpoising of (working-) 'class politics' to those

of nationalism followed by the state, which lie at the root of its success. 'Class politics' here seems to mean mobilisation 'within working-class black communities and the trade union movement' (2004: 663), a very strange understanding as if 'ethnic' or 'communitarian' politics did not also mobilise within the same social sector. To argue that the TAC's success vis-à-vis government is to be put down to the fact that the 'TAC was participating in a class-based politics that departed significantly from the cultural nationalist/identity politics promoted by the new ruling elite of Mbeki and Mokaba' (2004: 664) is quite simply a spurious argument harking back to the crude 'workerist' versus 'populist' slogans of the 1980s<sup>27</sup>. Apart from the fact that the TAC offered hope to sufferers, which the government did not, the fundamental reason for its success was arguably that it never challenged elite conceptions of politics or elite interests, and was concurrently able to exercise pressure on the ANC by mobilising its own constituency against the government. In particular the TAC had massive support from a sustained anti-government campaign in the media (the print media and radio in particular) on the causes of AIDS.

Moreover, the TAC never contradicted the world medical establishment - 'a highly organised and connected "community" of scientists, health professionals, and civil society organisations who contested the dissident line' upheld by the government (Robins 2004: 657) - but rather relied on, and thus reinforced, the established positions and power of the bio-medical scientific model. Unlike in the United States where AIDS activists had directly challenged the production of scientific knowledge on the matter (Epstein 1996), this was never advocated by the TAC, but only by the South African government. As such it is the TAC which has been consistently on the side of 'world opinion' and power, and the government which has been at odds with it (Vandormael 2007a, 2007b). The TAC's challenge to the drug manufacturers in court did not fundamentally impact on the 'bio-medical industrial complex' (to paraphrase Marcuse), as the TNCs could not mobilise support on an issue which quite evidently put profit before people's lives in a very public way (Robins 2004: 664).

Despite its numerous successes, this has constituted the main problem with the TAC, namely a tragic failure to criticise the bio-medical model in order to enable a genuine active citizenship and self-help, beyond the advocating for the delivery of medication. There is in fact indication that certain individuals may have understood this point, one doctor pointing out that: 'whereas anti-retroviral therapy can undoubtedly prolong lives, it can also become a conduit for the "medicalisation of poverty" and the creation of dependencies on medical experts and drugs' (see Robins, op.cit.: 666, 669). Yet this issue has not influenced the workings of the organisation, nor has it been the subject of systematic public debate. The constant reference by TAC activists to 'accepted scientific expertise' (e.g. Mbali 2004: 326) has failed to see, let alone contest,

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<sup>27</sup> For a lengthy discussion of this debate and its nefarious effects on popular politics in the 1980s see Neocosmos, 1999.

the political nature of the medical scientific establishment, and has relied on the weight of medical authority to argue and to win its case.

Yet surely one is entitled to look additionally into alternatives and to be suspicious of Western medicine's exclusive reliance on technology. This is even more so when AIDS treatment has to be provided to a population living in poverty which refuses to be tested for the disease, and does not have the required levels of bio-medical knowledge or indeed middle-class standards of life. The government was not wrong to question the appropriateness of Western technology in tackling the disease. An African nationalist perspective is crucially important in this respect, as Western medicine has been found wanting on numerous occasions. Witness the multinational Nestlé's advocating of bottle feeding in the 1970s for example; was this not also 'accepted scientific expertise' at the time? The political failure of the TAC has always been its inability to develop a critical perspective towards the Western bio-medical model and its unquestioning valorisation of scientificity and liberalism.

The problem with the state nationalism on which the government founded its discourse was its authoritarianism and arrogance, evidenced by the manner it went about imposing its views. The idea of insisting on the provision of vitamin cocktails is not in itself 'quackery' but sound medical practice for boosting the immune system, as is the encouragement of the setting up of community vegetable gardens in poor areas to enable a healthy diet, although these are clearly not substitutes for drugs in the case of full blown AIDS sufferers. The taking of anti-retroviral drugs is not like taking aspirin, they can only be taken at a certain level of development of the virus<sup>28</sup> and also presuppose a regular and substantial food diet not available to all. Moreover, they must be taken on a very strictly observed regular basis which also requires systematic and regular counselling. Additionally, patients cannot be put on alternative medication if they do not respond to treatment. Moreover, general practitioners have to go through training to prescribe such medication, as the medical profession is socialised to test medication and if the response is not appropriate to move to an alternative.

The consequences for popular democratic politics of the TAC's apparent victory over the government have arguably been twofold: first the public debate has been restricted to the provision of drugs or not; in other words the public debate exclusively revolved around technology as the primary solution to the HIV-AIDS pandemic. Second the possibility of a politics of agency for the people was replaced ultimately by passivity and reliance on 'experts', as they were now to wait for the 'rolling out' of drugs by government. This could not have been in greater conformity with political liberalism which fetishizes expertise and science and which thus systematically disempowers the people (Neocosmos 2006b). The politics of sexuality, control over one's body, the organising of community initiatives from support groups to cooperative food cultivation, all

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<sup>28</sup> A debate exists among experts as to whether treatment should be provided at a CD4 count of below 200 or not. The 'CD4 count' measures the antibodies produced against the viral load.



of which enable popular political self-activity, were all marginalised (or reduced to moralising) in favour of waiting for the cure to be delivered. This is the antithesis of the politics of the event of 1984-86 and People's Power.

## **6.2 The Abahlali baseMjondolo: beyond the politics of civil society<sup>29</sup>**

The AbM is a Durban located movement of shack dwellers which began in 2005 after a road blockade was organised by the shack dwellers of Kennedy Road after a plot of land which had long been promised by the local municipality for housing was sold to a local industrialist. The 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2005 became an event during which shack dwellers realised that if they were not to take direct action, the promises of land and housing which they had been given would never be fulfilled. The context of this movement is the disastrous housing policies of most South African municipal authorities, which have continued with the apartheid policy of removing the poor from inner city areas to beyond the city and dumping them in environments where jobs, schools and amenities are scarce if non-existent. Given the high prices of central urban real estate, along with the fact that the poor make the place look dirty for middle class sensibilities and advertising images, the local bureaucracy is not particularly keen on thinking in terms of upgrading the areas in which people live, and simply wishes to remove the problem elsewhere. To force people to get out, the municipality has cut all amenities particularly electricity, and there are no sewage facilities, little running water (from a few taps) and approximately one toilet per thousand people. Yet the national constitution's mention of the right to housing and the social-democratic aspirations of many ANC politicians have meant that it is possible to contest this perspective, especially in Durban with its long tradition of popular militancy<sup>30</sup>. The following is a brief excerpt from an exchange between Deputy City Manager Derek Naidoo and residents of Kennedy Road in Durban on September 8<sup>th</sup> 2005:

*It was put to Naidoo that this was the same as apartheid - black people were being pushed out of the city. It was put to Naidoo that this sounded like a slower and more considered version of Mugabe's attack on the poor in Harare. Naidoo said that if people didn't like it 'they should go to the constitutional court'. This is, he observed, a democracy. He was told that people would rather block the roads than go to the court. Everyone knows that the courts are for the government and the rich. When the Kennedy Road 14 first appeared in court they chose to speak for themselves. Magistrate Asmal didn't allow [them] to say one word. She just sent them back down to the cells ... (Khan and Pithouse, 2005: 3).*

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<sup>29</sup> See the interview with S'bu Zikode of Abahlali elsewhere in this issue.

<sup>30</sup> There is a growing literature on the AbM and they have their own website <http://abahlali.bayareafood.org/>. An introduction to the history of AbM with very useful links concerning the movement can be found at <http://www.metamute.org/en/A-Short-History-of-Abahlali-baseMjondolo>. See also the publications of the Centre For Civil Society at UKZN and in particular their Research Reports 2006, Vol1 in particular reports 40 to 43. I rely particularly here on the detailed arguments in the very important report by Pithouse (2006) which contains a detailed discussion and evaluation of the movement.

The movement grew rapidly and by November 2005 there were 14 settlements formally affiliated to it:

*all of the 14 affiliated settlements were governed on a fully democratic basis, were holding weekly mass meetings and sending delegations, elected afresh each week, to weekly Abahlali baseMjondolo meetings. Around 20 000 people had been actively mobilised by the movement in different ways and word of the movement had spread beyond the settlements in which there was regular formal participation (Pithouse 2006: 39n).*

By the end of 2006 there were 34 settlements affiliated (Richard Pithouse, personal communication). The kinds of action the AbM has been involved in have been very innovative and have included ceremonies of 'burying councillors', mass demonstrations and marches as well as the skilful use of the media which have been on the whole quite sympathetic. These have concerned the provision of housing, the upgrading of local conditions (including the provision of toilet facilities), protests against the contempt shown them by local state officials and the violence of the police. In fact they asserted their right to think as one of their number stressed: 'we are not animals. We are human beings that feel and want nice things. We think. People must understand that we think' (cit. Pithouse 2006: 37).

The politics of AbM are resolutely independent of state subjectivity. This comes across clearly in Pithouse's account which stresses the fact that AbM are not simply demanding 'delivery' by the state, rather 'they were demanding the right to co-determine their future' (2006: 35). After intense discussions they have:

*decided to refrain from electoral politics in order to preserve the integrity, autonomy and reputation of their struggle [it was] concluded that there is a difference between 'party politics' and 'people's politics' and that the former, identified as a mechanism of elite control, will always seek to capture the latter, identified as a space for popular democracy ... The principled decision to keep a distance from what is widely seen as a mode of politics that has an inevitably corrupting influence on any attempt to keep a struggle grounded in truth, was key to the rapid building of a mass movement (Pithouse op.cit.: 32).*

In a footnote Pithouse adds: 'the commitment to keeping people's politics autonomous from the corrupting influence of state power included a commitment by everyone who accepted elected office to place themselves last on the list when housing was won. This was a dramatic break with the politics of local patronage so typical of the ANC and SANCO [the South African National Civics Organisation].' In the words of S'bu Zikode one of the leaders of the movement: 'the struggle that started at Kennedy Road was the beginning of a new era ... This movement is a kind of social tool by which the community hopes to get quicker results. This has nothing to do with politics or parties. Our members are part of every political organisation you may think of. This is a non-[party] political movement' (Zikode 2006a: 3).

*The politics of the poor is an anti-party politics. Our politics is not to put someone in an office. Our politics is to put our people above that office. And when we have finished with one office we move on to the next office. Our politics is also not a politics of a few people who have learnt some fancy words and who expect everyone to follow them because they know these words. Our politics is a traditional home politics which is understood very well by all the old mamas and gogos (grannies) because it affects their lives and gives them a home. In this home everybody is important, everybody can speak and we look after each other and think about situation (sic) and plan our fight together ... the ... poor have no choice but to play a role in shaping and re-shaping this country into an anti-capitalist system. This is the task which the betrayal of our struggle and the struggles of our ancestors has given to us (Zikode, 2006b: 2-3).*

This politics which Zikode refers to a 'living politics' or a 'living communism' as opposed to a 'party politics' is the guiding perspective of the movement (Zikode 2009); and an axiom of equality is strictly adhered to so that all people are treated the same: 'there is only one human race. Our struggle and every struggle is to put the human being at the centre of society, starting with the worst off (sic). An action can be illegal. A person cannot be illegal'<sup>31</sup>. A person is thus a person wherever they may find themselves. Their political independence extends to donors and NGO politics in general with the result that the organisation only survives on contributions from its members and people work for it for free as they have no outside funding at all. Studies on the movement all concur that meetings are conducted democratically and that the leadership which regularly reports back on its activities to its constituency have the community's full support (Bryant 2006: 62)<sup>32</sup>. In the words of one leader: 'When you lead people you don't tell them what to do. You listen. The people tell you what to do' (Zikode, cit Pithouse 2006: 26). According to Pithouse (2006: 46) the democratic nature of decision making and accountability of leadership is not only born from 'deeply valued ethical commitments' but is also a necessity as 'there is no other way to build popular consent for a risky project amongst a hugely diverse group of vulnerable people with profound experiences of marginalisation and exploitation ...'.

Clearly the shack dwellers in this movement do not want handouts or to be pushed around and patronised. They want to be listened to, to be taken seriously. They have tried to make the liberal democratic system work but they

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<sup>31</sup> All the appropriate statements (including this one by Abahlali baseMjondolo 'Statement on the Xenophobic Attacks in Johannesburg', 21/05/2008) and other documents concerning AbM can be found on their excellent website [www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org)

<sup>32</sup> There is evidence of strong continuity between many of the democratic practices of AbM and those of the 'people's power' mode of politics of the 1980s including report backs and democratic decision making. Pithouse notes that 'Abahlali take the position that everyone in the settlement is from the settlement and so meetings are absolutely open to all adults independent of age, place of origin, ethnicity, degree of poverty, time spent in the settlement and gender'; although he stresses that, in practice, mothers with small children are politically disadvantaged due to the absence of crèches. Pithouse, op.cit.: 39n.

have been systematically betrayed and let down by their local representatives. They have therefore decided to operate beyond the state domain of politics by rejecting their own councillors as well as municipal and local elections more generally along with the state celebrations of 'freedom day', asserting that there is no freedom for the poor. In their political practice they have insisted on a steadfast principled distance from state politics which they see as totally corrupt. There is, of course, no guarantee that this will continue, nor indeed that the movement will be able to sustain itself in the face of the state onslaught and the offer of help and funds from the donor-NGO sector<sup>33</sup>. We should beware the temptation to idealise AbM. Yet at present this movement offers a clear indication of what a fidelity to the event of 1984-86 can look like. It is therefore, in Badiou's words, producing a truth. This truth concerns the fact that emancipatory politics can no longer be understood as state-led as was the case with the NLS mode, and this despite the central presence of the state in the field of politics. This new truth is fundamentally that ways have to be discovered to change the world without taking power (Holloway 2002).

In comparing TAC and AbM we are confronted with two modes of politics, the former 'of civil society' and fundamentally embodied within state politics, the latter at a principled distance from the state and its politics. It is as a result of engaging in state politics that the TAC has been able to successfully pressurise the government to set out a delivery programme of medication to HIV-AIDS sufferers. This success, as I have argued, has resulted from the overwhelming power of the coalition of conservative forces arraigned behind the TAC as well as from its ability to turn out large numbers of poor people desperate for treatment onto the streets. Yet it has been achieved at the expense of the possibility of development of emancipatory politics; life has been extended at the expense of ultimate passivity in the face of power. Mass mobilization here was turned on and off tactically like a tap, much as it had been in the late 1980s after the emancipatory sequence of 1984-86 had faded, according to the dictates of a national leadership seeing itself as acting in the greater good (see Cronin 1992; Neocosmos 1999).

But an evaluation of social movements from an emancipatory perspective cannot remain within the ultimately apolitical platitudes of the sociology of social movements which concerns itself with debating 'reformist' vs. 'radical' or 'accommodationist' versus 'adversarial' dichotomies. Moreover, of course, the strategy and tactics ('politics' in the language of that sociology) of the TAC and the AbM have been very similar, combining legal action with mass mobilization. Rather, such an evaluation should concern itself with whether or not movements are able to show an alternative future in the present, a possible in

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<sup>33</sup> The recent events of October 2009 already noted in which AbM has been systematically attacked by the state and its agencies in one of its areas of mass support in Durban show how difficult it is to undertake a politics at a distance from the state in contemporary Africa. The full consequences of these occurrences which are still ongoing as the membership of AbM have been turned into refugees in their own country, city and neighborhoods have yet to be elucidated. See the various commentaries at [www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org)

the extant as Lazarus would say. The possible then can be understood as of the order of the now. In this sense, AbM may not have succeeded yet in acquiring proper housing for its members, but rather it has been successful at something arguably much more important, in asserting that the poor count and cannot be ignored and are capable of theorising on their own the basis of an emancipatory politics independent of the state and its bureaucratic managerialism. They have rediscovered a truth that any politics worthy of the name is for all and not only for some. They have been able to assert that, in the words of the *Freedom Charter*, 'South Africa Belongs to *All* who live in it'.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

I have been concerned in this work to open up debate on the conditions for emancipatory politics in Africa. In so doing I have argued against the liberal notion of civil society as the site of an alternative politics and have rather been concerned to show that civil society is in actual fact today a domain of state politics. I have used the South African case to argue this at length. Alternative politics which hold the possibility of containing emancipatory alternatives have to be sought out in sites beyond civil society, at its margins so to speak. The possibility of the impossible, to use Badiou's expression can only be found among those who have been totally excluded by the system – the 'part of no part' in Rancière's (e.g. 2001) formulation - , including by civil society as Marx had recognised long ago when he referred to the working class as 'a class in civil society that is not a class of civil society' (Marx 1844: 186).

I have tried to show that the period 1984-86 in South Africa was an event for politics - an event of 'People's Power' - on the continent, as it provided a critique in consciousness and practice of the subjective limits of the national liberation struggle mode of politics, which had hitherto been the major point of reference for all the liberation movements in Africa including the ANC. The reasons why this event can be transformed into a truth, concern the ability of ordinary people in communities to assert themselves independently on the political stage, by constituting a politics independent of that of the state whose object is not the attainment of state power, but the changing of conditions of life. In this sense that event has been truly revolutionary. In order for this event to have the status of a truth according to Badiou, fidelity to the event must be sustained in the face of all opposition. It seems to me that by asserting that they count, by screaming 'we exist!' AbM have come the closest today to an understanding of this truth.

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### **URL for this article**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/neocosmos.pdf>

## **Book review: Incite! Women of color against violence, *The revolution will not be funded***

**Teresa O'Keefe**

**Incite! Women of color against violence, *The revolution will not be funded: beyond the nonprofit industrial complex*.  
Cambridge: South End Press**

In today's economic climate many non-profit organisations are increasingly fearful of losing funding as states and philanthropic organisations tighten the purse strings. After reading *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* one has to ask, is this necessarily a bad thing?

Incite! is an organisation of radical feminists of colour in the US dedicated to addressing multiple forms of violence experienced by women of colour. In 2004, Incite!, in conjunction with the Women's Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara, brought together a collection of activists and academics from a variety of backgrounds, and each having experiences working in and with the non-profit sector, with the objective of exploring the difficulties of building revolutionary movements. Out of this conference emerged the book under review, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. Dedicated to exploring the pitfalls of operating within the non-profit system in the United States, the book contains seventeen essays organised into three different sections - the rise of the non-profit industrial complex, non-profits and global organising, and rethinking non-profits and reimagining resistance.

The overall purpose of the book is to assess the impact foundation funding has on building revolutionary movements and to stimulate debate on the subject. While the book does not claim to put forward a singular, unified stance on the subject, it is painstakingly obvious that there are serious implications for organisations choosing to participate in the non-profit system, such as de-radicalisation, collusion, and subtending exploitation. Despite such consequences, there is a diversity of opinion in the collection with some pieces calling for a revision of the problematic system while others argue that groups should opt out all together and return to more grassroots organising and funding.

The target of this book is what the authors term the Non-profit Industrial Complex or NPIC - the symbiotic entanglement of the state, capitalism and the non-profit system. The term builds on existing definitions of similar complex relationships between state, capitalism and society, namely the military and prison industrial complexes. The NPIC, in a nutshell, refers to the

corporatisation, de-radicalisation and co-optation of American social justice organisations by the state and capitalist interests.

Central to the functioning of NPIC is 501(c)3 charity status. This status declares as tax-free any donations made by a corporation, foundation or individual to a non-profit organisation. Groups can avail of said monies by registering for the status (i.e. officially declaring non-profit status). This has proven to be an attractive offer for social justice organisations and wealthy Americans. According to the authors, there are 837, 027 non-profits in the US, a number which does not take into account religious organisations. These groups are availing themselves of foundation funding, the amount of which has grown exponentially in the last four decades. Foundations have assets totalling 500 billion dollars (US) yet only donate a small portion of that annually, as legislation only forces foundations to spend 5% of their wealth (Incite!: 7). On the surface this model might appear more benevolent than sinister. However, as many authors in this volume demonstrate, this system has been most advantageous for those interested in maintaining their wealth and furthering a conservative agenda, both socially and economically. On the other hand, the NPIC has been detrimental for those on the left interested in mass mobilisation for social transformation.

The most immediate issue addressed by this important work is the extent to which funding has transformed the objectives, strategies, and organisation of groups working for radical social change. Foundation funding has no doubt skewed the goals, abilities and politics of many non-profits. As several essays point out, acquiring and maintaining funding forces voluntary organisations to plan reactively as opposed to proactively, and discourages them from taking the long view. As funding is primarily applied for and awarded on a yearly basis, organisations are unable to plan beyond the typical one year funding cycle. Organisations become trapped in this cycle of managerialism as their funding now pays salaries and keeps the organisations alive on a yearly basis. As a result, there is a dependency on funding that was not there prior to partaking in the NPIC. Organisations have become mini-corporations with much of the focus and energy being put into administrative work (application forms, keeping accounts, office management) as opposed to mobilising. Piven and Cloward in their seminal piece on poor people's movements made similar claims suggesting there is an important difference between mobilisation and organisation with the latter resulting in less effective movements (Piven and Cloward 1977).

This book also produces clear evidence that accepting funding can often come with strings attached. Groups who accept funding are also subject to censorship and limited in what campaigns they can work on, what language they can use and who they can work with. Bierria's piece on manipulation of the anti-violence movement and Durazo's essay on the experiences of Project South provide strong testaments to this. In order to be seen as deserving of funding, tough decisions need to be made, strategies and goals revised. Consequently, as some essays clearly show, funding has the detrimental effect of transforming organisations which were initially radical and revolutionary into

liberal/progressive ones. This raises the further point of 'legitimisation' – which groups are legitimate and therefore visible and which ones are seen as illegitimate, and on the margins. It creates a dividing line between 'respectable groups' who engage in dialogue as opposed to those who are engaged in tactics like 'direct action.' Such groups are marginalised, seen as on fringe, less respectable, and volatile. This dividing line is quite evident in the book as well. It would appear those who support revolutionary change are now reticent, even opposed to accepting all external funding, unless it is raised at the grassroots level. By contrast, those organisations which tend to be more reformist than revolutionary are less likely to harbour ideological objections to this form of funding and more likely to see the value of this funding for their work.

The most troubling aspect of the NPIC, however, is the way in which social justice groups are now implicated in supporting a system which furthers oppression. Many of the various authors in this book clearly reveal the troubling ways in which the NPIC subverts capitalism by allowing significant amounts of money (that is largely unaccounted for) to accumulate in foundation bank accounts as means of escaping taxes on wealth. In effect, foundation funding is 'private money' that should in fact be public money were it not for the tax loophole that the NPIC provides, money that would be in state coffers paying for public services.

Furthermore, several authors remind us of how this money was made in the first instance. As much of the money channelled into foundations is derived from the profits of large corporations, it is actually money made through capitalist practices which in turn often means exploitation and oppression on the basis of class, race, gender, among other things. Foundations, it can be argued, are taking from those who rightfully own it, i.e. workers on whose back profits were made and citizens whose tax money is being withdrawn. As Smith's piece rightly points out, funding agencies can only exist within a capitalist structure. Social justice groups by declaring themselves as registered charities or non-profits in order to avail of this funding are therefore becoming part of this complex. The very nature of the NPIC and the means through which foundations acquire their funding for donations is antithetical to the ethos of many social justice organisations, who ironically now partake in this system and accept such funding with open arms. By illuminating this situation, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* has, no doubt, shone an uncomfortable spotlight on many activists and groups.

Although American in its focus, the issues explored and subsequent questions that emerge in this collection can be applied anywhere, whether it be to the role of non-governmental organisations in the Majority World, EU funding of projects throughout the European community, or funding from philanthropic organisations like Atlantic Philanthropies, Carnegie and Ford which have international scope. This book is not only relevant beyond the context of America but a must-read for any activist. This publication also makes an important contribution to critiques of capitalism. Philanthropic capital is very rarely the subject of inquiry by critics of capitalism, yet the implications of such



capital are significant as the essays in this volume so clearly and insightfully show.

Perhaps the two most outstanding pieces in this collection are that of Madonna Thunder Hawk and Paul Kivel. Thunder Hawk has written a short yet notable piece on her experiences of organising within the native community. It provides a strong reminder of not only how to organise without funding but why it can be more desirable. It recounts the dangers of managerialism which plagues groups in receipt of funding. This, in turn, prevents fluidity amongst groups working on a variety of campaigns. Thunder Hawk argues that being a non-profit requires a focus on an organisation's own goals and hence limits the imagination of what we can seek to achieve and do. Paul Kivel powerfully argues that the non-profit tax category grants substantial economic benefits to the ruling class and directly benefits those at the top. This piece drives home the point that the ruling class, through the non-profit sector, controls billions of dollars of private and government money. Furthermore, he rightfully argues that the jobs created in non-profits are, in fact, a co-optation by the ruling class. In taking money and creating jobs through such funding non-profits are maintaining the capitalist system. While these two pieces stand out, on the whole, each essay in the collection offers an important contribution in its own right.

To my mind, the greatest offering contained in this volume is the questions it forces activists and organisations to ask themselves based on the evidence put forward. As Duranzo points out, funding- whether government or foundation money - emerges from the 'deepest ranges of capitalist inequality.' Similarly, the pieces by Allen and that of King and Osayande highlight the racialised nature of the NPIC - that the leadership of the philanthropic movement is predominantly white, and this white leadership protects white wealth and undermines the work of oppressed communities of colour. In essence, white capital is circulated among white people and thus maintains white supremacy. And, as Kivel and de Almeida argue, by taking foundation funding non-profit organisations are taking money made at the expense of millions of people struggling in the face of the systems of oppression such groups originally organised to fight against.

If I were to offer one criticism of this collection it would be that its discussion of what exactly the Non-Profit Industrial Complex comprises is too brief. The introduction offers a cursory (less than a page) examination of the dimensions of the NPIC and does not actually explain what it entails in any significant way. A full understanding is only gleaned from reading the rest of the book. A more extensive explanation in the introductory chapter would have been most beneficial.

The truncated introduction aside, this collection is full of rich and detailed case studies and analyses. At the end, one is left wondering how any social justice organisation can reconcile the many contradictions associated with the philanthropic funding regime. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* claims to offer no way forward, however, some of the essays offer real, tangible alternatives to foundation funding, and to being part of 'non-profit sector'. Most importantly, it makes it very clear that organisations need to assess their

priorities and think seriously about the implications of accepting funding – not just in terms of how it impacts the organisation itself but from a broader perspective, i.e. their participation in furthering inequality and oppression. This is a difficult challenge no doubt, but one that can no longer be ignored thanks to this publication.

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## About the author

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## **Book review: Heidi Swarts, *Organizing urban America***

**Maite Tapia**

**Heidi L Swarts 2008, *Organizing urban America: secular and faith-based progressive movements*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press**

What can local grassroots organizing achieve in a climate of political hostility, decreased public expenditure, a crumbling labor movement, and a bleak Left? To what extent do the organizational infrastructure, the political strategy, or the "mobilizing culture" differ between secular and church-based movements? What lessons can be learnt from the successes and failures of community organizing in America? These fundamental questions are the thread running throughout Heidi Swarts' book *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-based Progressive Movements*. To compare congregation-based community organizations (CBCOs) with the secular community organization ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), the author focuses on four local groups in two cities: ACORN St.-Louis, ACORN San Jose, the Metropolitan Congregations United (MCU) of St. Louis, and People Acting in Community Together (PACT) of San Jose. MCU and PACT are affiliations of two different national networks of church-based groups, the Gamaliel Foundation and PICO (People improving Communities through Organizing) National Network respectively.

Swarts argues that "different styles of organizing make different contributions to American urban politics and political participation" (xvi). Church-based community organizations, according to the author, develop a unique, innovative, and exemplary cultural strategy both for overcoming the challenges other social movements face, and for reconciling the tensions of American political culture. Through a combination of cross-class and multiracial membership, articulation of shared religious values and beliefs, ideological tactics, participatory democracy, and efficiency, these organizations are able to surmount differences in class and ethnicity, to link pragmatic self-interest to a vision of moral altruism, to reconcile liberal with conservative mindsets, and to integrate private life with public action. ACORN, on the other hand, excels for its innovative organizational and political strategy. This poor people's movement takes on a more instrumental and utilitarian approach by focusing intensively on fundraising, house-to-house recruitment, and issue campaigns rather than on constructing a collective identity. ACORN is perceived as task-oriented, building coalitions, and using innovative insider and outsider tactics simultaneously in order to win campaigns. Since ACORN is a national, centralized organization with local and state chapters, it is easier for it than for CBCOs to mobilize coordinated national campaigns. As a result, this "low-class

organization" has been able to empower, organize, and give a voice to thousands of poor and working-class citizens, winning significant victories in living wage agreements and low-cost loans programs, among others.

The author compares the "mobilizing culture" and the style of organizing of secular and faith-based groups in St.-Louis and San Jose over a period of ten years, from 1997 to 2006. The data has been collected through field work (1997-1998), using participant observation, interviews and documents. The author participated in numerous meetings, negotiations, training events and campaigns in St.-Louis and San Jose, conducting over 200 interviews with activists, staff, members, city officials, and others, and collecting data from organizational files, local newspapers and city government departments. This qualitative approach has resulted in four rich, descriptive case studies presenting, analyzing and comparing the mobilization capacities of secular and church-based movements in the two cities. The author's decision to compare the rapidly growing, high-tech, sunbelt city, San Jose, with a declining, industrial, rustbelt city, St.-Louis, yields important variation revealing the influence of external factors.

The importance of this study lies in its emphasis on local grassroots organizing. Swarts, rightly, not only describes the significant victories, but also, in great detail the campaign failures of the local activist groups, unlike the bulk of social movement scholars, who too often pinpoint only national social movements, describing their cyclical spikes of success, or most public policy literature, which is biased towards national and elitist policy changes. As a result, continuous local community organizing remains under the radar, or 'invisible'. Paradoxically, local activism is rapidly growing, involving far more American citizens than any other organizational form, channeling mass-capacity building into public policy innovation. Stressing the importance of local community organizing and its policy impact pushes local grassroots activism to the forefront.

Swarts is moreover going counter to two mainstream social movements theories. In their classic book, *Poor People's Movements*, Piven and Cloward argue that poor people's organizations and mass disruption are irreconcilable: the logical consequence of a formally structured organization with a mass membership, will be the abandonment of oppositional politics. Swarts shows that poor and working-class Americans can be organized and that organizational infrastructure and coordination is indeed indispensable. Crucial policy changes, such as the nationwide implementation of an anticrime and antigang program thanks to the efforts of PACT, would not have been possible without the full development of this networked organization. Another big paradigm in social movement literature emphasizes political processes to explain the emergence of social movements. Swarts, however, by focusing on the micro-level, demonstrates how community organizing has achieved significant gains even in hostile political climate by emphasizing the strategic choices of social movement entrepreneurs in selecting campaign issues and deciding strategies and tactics.

According to Swarts, in order to achieve gains or policy changes, a grassroots organization's most important strength is its ability to mobilize members; the combination of organizational resources, strategic capacity (Ganz's term, 2000) and "mobilizing culture" will produce this fundamental power to act. Indeed, as demonstrated through her case studies, the bundling of these three factors explains the differences in mobilizing outcomes. Instead of echoing the political process theorists' term "mobilizing structures", Swarts introduces a new concept to the field, "mobilizing culture", which she defines as "shared meanings, norms and practices...tacit norms and values that are nonstrategic and underlie more conscious strategic framing of group identity and issues" (xviii).

This ethnographic study indulges the reader with meticulous and fine-grained illustrations providing rich insights into grassroots organizing. As in every other book, however, certain gaps still remain. First, I believe that Swarts' theoretical contribution to the field could be pushed a bit further. She starts off by defining "mobilizing culture" and integrates this new concept in her case studies, but fails to give a more abstract, general model. How generalizable can this concept be in explaining outcomes? Where does this "mobilizing culture" come from? Is it inherent in the type of organization (church-based versus secular), or can it change over time? To what extent can the "mobilizing culture" predict the success or failure of a campaign? An organization can have a little or a lot of resources or strategic capacity (Ganz 2004), but what about mobilizing culture? In the case studies, both the ACORN chapters and the church-based organizations have mobilizing cultures, albeit in a different forms. Is there any organization without a mobilizing culture, and if so, how does this affect its mobilization capacity? Does a lack of mobilizing culture mean that the organizational infrastructure and strategic capacity must be buttressed? I argue that giving this concept more analytical strength, and comparing the case studies through an abstract, theoretical lens as well, would stimulate fruitful debate among 'cultural paradigm' proponents.

In her introduction, Swarts states that "the larger issue that motivates the book is the quality of American democracy" (xv). What she presents, however, is a micro-level study with a clear-cut agent-centered view, which does not leave any space for the broader socio-economic or historical contexts. Indeed, although her last chapter is entitled "American inequality and the potential of community organizing", it gives the reader a bouquet of recommendations, without going deeper into America's societal problems. To what extent do the grassroots organizations affect American society? What is the role of community organizing for a democratic America? I believe that bridging the agency-centered approach with a bird's eye view would give more insight into the role of community organizing and its impact on American society.

Finally, in presenting her four case studies, two each in St. Louis and San Jose, the author does not expand on the potential collaboration between the secular and church-based organizations. To what extent do PACT of San Jose and ACORN San Jose compete for the same resources? Did each organization create its own niche in order to survive? Why, how and when do they build coalitions

and cooperate? To what extent would this collaboration affect their different "mobilizing cultures"? These questions remain unanswered.

In conclusion, despite these criticisms, *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-based Progressive Movements* by Heidi Swarts is of great value for social movement scholars and practitioners interested in how the internal life of a local grassroots organization is critical to its success. This clearly written, accessible book not only demonstrates different styles of organizing between secular and church-based groups, but shows how seemingly underrepresented groups of society can become empowered, get a voice and effect positive change.

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Before coming to the US, she graduated in Law (cum laude) at the University of Ghent (Belgium), pursued a Master in European and International Law, and a Master in International and European Relations at the University of Parma (Italy). After her studies she worked at the Institute of Labor in Bologna (Italy), focusing on European labor relations. Email: mt348 AT cornell.edu

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<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/tapia.pdf>

## **Demontage der Subversion: zur politischen Wirkung ästhetischer Techniken im 20. Jahrhundert**

**Rezension zu Anna Schober,  
*Ironie, Montage und Verfremdung***

**David Eugster**

**Anna Schober 2009, *Ironie, Montage und Verfremdung:  
Ästhetische Taktiken und die politische Gestalt der  
Demokratie*. München: Wilhelm Fink**

### **Abstract**

*Twentieth-century artistic radicals have often claimed that techniques such as irony, montage and alienation have the power to radically transform power relations. Anna Schober's book studies the theories underlying these claims as well as the political impact of such techniques, from the French Revolution via the Weimar Republic and the Brazilian 1960s to the Yugoslav conflict of the 1990s. Noting the dogmatic nature with which these claims are often presented, she argues that the actual impact of such techniques is less easily controlled, and less automatically subversive, than is often held. She shows that the visual decapitation of power and the creation of new linguistic modes linked to these methods are certainly effective, but that their effectiveness cannot be controlled by their producers, and their political impact has often been deeply problematic<sup>1</sup>.*

Ästhetischen Techniken wie die der Ironie, der Montage und der Verfremdung wird seit Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts eine auf dem blossen Formalen beruhende Gewalt zugeschrieben, welcher eine immense Transformationskraft innezuwohnen scheint. André Breton sah 1930 das Ziel der Surrealisten darin, mit ihrer Kunst nichts weniger „als in intellektueller und moralischer Hinsicht eine Bewusstseinskrise allgemeinsten und schwerwiegendsten Art auszulösen.“ Walter Benjamin beschreibt die formalen Techniken der Dadaisten als „Tricks“, die blitzartig Wirklichkeit verändern können. Europas Neue Linke der Nachkriegszeit sah in den künstlerischen Techniken politische Taktiken zur Entlarvung des ideologischen Schleiers, der Zerstörung des „falschen

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<sup>1</sup> An English-language summary of Anna Schober's argument is due to appear as "Irony, montage, alienation. Aesthetic tactics and the invention of an avant-garde tradition", in *Afterimage. The journal of media, arts and cultural criticism* for November 2009.

Bewusstseins" zugunsten einer wahren Sicht auf die Verhältnisse. Das Vertrauen in die aufklärerische Wirkung dieser Techniken hat sich gehalten, noch in den 1990er Jahren behauptete Judith Butler die geschlechterdiskursstörende Kraft der Travestie, Richard Rorty das politische Potential der Ironie.

Die binäre Vorstellung von der "Subversion" und "Dekonstruktion" von hegemonialen öffentlichen Positionen durch die ästhetischen Techniken der "Gegenöffentlichkeit" hat eine lange Kontinuität. Anna Schober ist jener so erfolgreichen Verbindung avantgardistischer ästhetischer Techniken und dem politischen Emanzipationsdiskurs in ihrem Buch „Ironie, Montage und Verfremdung. Ästhetische Taktiken und die politische Gestalt der Demokratie“ nachgegangen. Mit ihrem Buch liefert sie nicht nur einen beachtlichen Beitrag zur historischen Aufarbeitung eines ästhetisch-politischen Diskursstrangs durch das 20. Jahrhundert. Vielmehr stellt sie sich darin den Behauptungen der Akteure auch in theoretischer Hinsicht.

Anna Schobers Buch verbindet in ihrem Text eine historische wie philosophische Hinterfragung der Wirksamkeit jener Techniken. Gerade kulturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten neigen dazu, das Vertrauen der politischen Akteure in die verwendeten Techniken etwas unbedarft zu übernehmen. Dennoch steht im Zentrum von Schobers Arbeit nicht eine Widerlegung der Wirksamkeit der Techniken, sondern vielmehr die Frage, inwiefern die Effekte, welche die Techniken ausüben sollen, wirklich derart kontrollierbar und zielgerichtet wirken, wie von den Akteuren behauptet wird? Dienen die Ironie, die Collage und die Verfremdung a priori der zielgerichteten Subversion? In der Bearbeitung dieser Frage stützt sich Schobers Studie auf eine Vielzahl von in Archiven und Feldforschung gewonnenen Beispielen, und hebt sich so wohlthuend ab von Reflexionen, welche in blossen Texträumen agieren und z.B. Butlers kulturphilosophische Thesen mit geschickt zitierten Foucault-Zitaten legitimieren. Zugleich aber argumentiert sie nicht mit theoriefreien Empirismus, sondern verwebt historische Erkenntnisse mit philosophischer Reflexion.

### **Historische Verortung**

Zunächst verortet Schober die Techniken in einer Veränderung des Diskurs des Politischen, die in der Französischen Revolution seinen Ausgang nahm. Mit dem Kopf von Louis XVI war hier auch eine traditionell legitimierte Machtposition gefallen, Politik transformierte sich zu einem Wettkampf um diese freigewordene Position. Der eliminierte Körper des Königs auf dem Thron, der seine Macht durch die Tradition erhalten hatte, wurde ersetzt durch wechselnde Körper, welche ihre Macht durch Überzeugungskraft und Verführung auf der Bühne des Politischen erlangen mussten.

Schober illustriert dies mit einem Bild von 1789, in dem die Revolutionäre auf den Tisch steigen, sich wieder aus der Masse hervorheben und an der Spitze der politischen Pyramide zum Volk sprechen. Um den leeren Platz der Macht,



welche der geköpfte König hinterliess, wird gekämpft, die Auseinandersetzung, wer der neue Kopf sein soll, dauert das ganze 19. und 20. Jahrhundert hindurch an, bis heute. Dieses Bild der Enthauptung des Königs und des Kampfes um diese leere, und nie wieder ganz auszufüllende Position wird für den Verlauf der Studie ein Leitfaden bleiben. In der oft äusserst anschaulichen ikonografischen Illustration des Kampfs um die Wiederbesetzung des Throns und der Versuche, den Kopf des Königs zu ersetzen, verleiht Schober den Analysen der politischen Theologie von Michel Lefort und dem Hegemonie-Konzept von Ernesto Laclau und Chantal Mouffe eine ausserordentliche historischer Plastizität.

Spielten ästhetische und symbolische Praktiken bis zur grossen Enthauptung die Rolle der Repräsentation von tradierter Macht, so dienten sie seit diesem Bruch nun zur Faszination, Attraktion und Überzeugung der zu Repräsentierenden, des „Volks“. Der zuvor von einem Ort her beherrschte „Gesellschaftskörper“ zersplittert, formiert sich neu um symbolische Markierungen, Flaggen, Uniformen, Selbstdarstellungen zu teils temporären, teils andauernden „Kollektivkörpern“. Die symbolischen wie ästhetischen Praktiken dienten in diesem Umfeld einerseits der Hinterfragung bisheriger Sinn-Setzungen und Zuordnungen, zugleich aber immer auch der „politischen Subjekt-Werdung“.

In der Entstehung dieser Form der Verwendung politischer Zeichen sucht Schober auch die Wurzeln einer Tradition „subversiver“ Zeichenverwendung, die Eingangs erwähnt wurde. Anna Schober beginnt, nach einigen Vorbemerkungen zur jahrhunderte alten Tradition der Verfremdung und der Ironie bei einer „Bündelung“ in der deutschen Romantik. Hier entwickelt sich, so Schober, über das Verhältnis zur Ironie, ein Bezug zur Sprache, in dem das Subjekt dadurch nicht mehr nur Wirklichkeit repräsentiert, sondern Sprache als Mittel einsetzt, um Regeln neu zu schreiben, neue Aspekte der Wirklichkeit hervorzuheben, die Welt neu zu sehen und dadurch zu verändern. Hier nehme eine Tradition ihren Ursprung, an welche nach der Jahrhundertwende der Dadaismus mit seiner radikalen Sprachhinterfragung anknüpfe. Die Destruktion der Sprache wie auch der Bilder wurde hier in den Jahren des Ersten Weltkrieges direkt in Beziehung gesetzt mit der herrschenden Indienstnahme der Zeichen zum Zweck der Kriegspropaganda und Produktewerbung.

Anna Schober präsentiert hier einen Querschnitt durch philosophische, künstlerische und politische Deutungstraditionen, in denen das Vertrauen in die politische Wirksamkeit der ästhetischen Techniken immer wieder neu aufgenommen und gefestigt wurde. So wird z.B. die Tradition der Techniken der Collage und der Verfremdung, die bei den Dadaisten seinen Ursprung nimmt, bei Walter Benjamin mit einem theoretischen Fundament versehen, das in den 60er Jahren in der Kunst, aber insbesondere auch in der Studentenbewegung rezipiert und neuformuliert wird. Schober verlässt im Zeichnen dieser Traditionslinien auch die üblichen europäischen Pfade und beschäftigt sich mit der Aufnahme von Benjamin in den 1960er Jahren durch Theoretiker der „Neuen Objektivität“ in Brasilien.

## Kritik der Traditionsübernahme

Schobers Ziel ist hier nicht eine lückenlose Traditionsgeschichte. Ihr Ziel ist vielmehr aufzuzeigen, dass sich hier eine Tradition der Selbstvergewisserung herausgebildet hat, welche bar jeder Skepsis die politische Wirksamkeit die subversive Effektivität der ästhetischen Techniken behauptet. Ob und wie die Techniken wirken, wird in diesem Diskurs als selbstverständlich vorausgesetzt, die Position wird nicht mehr diskutiert, sondern ist, so Schober, längst „eingefroren“.

Schober interessiert sich jedoch genau für die Unkontrollierbarkeit der angewandten Verfahren und Handlungen, welche die Akteure zu überspielen versuchen, die unerwünschten Effekte, welche diese Techniken auch zeitigen können. Diese Unkontrollierbarkeit zielgerichteter Zeichenoperationen theoretisch „nachzuweisen“ fiel äusserst leicht, deutet Schober doch gerade die Denkweise der Dekonstruktion bei Jacques Derrida und Paul de Man als eine Reaktion auf dieses moderne Vertrauen in die Macht von symbolischen Akten. Schober liefert die Hinterfragung der Techniken auf (kunst)-historischer Ebene.

Ein besonders ketzerisches Beispiel findet Schober in der ironischen Agitation der Dadaisten gegen die Weimarer Republik. Auch in der Weimarer Republik geht Schober wieder vom Bild des Kopfes aus, der gefallen ist. Sie geht aus von einer Postkarte aus der Postkartensammlung von George Grosz, in der Kaiser Wilhelms II Porträt gross über dem Reichstag schwebt. Dieses Porträt wiederum konfrontiert sie mit einem Bild, worauf Arbeiter 1922 in Berlin „Platz! dem Arbeiter“ fordern: Man sieht eine demonstrierende Menschenmenge, die diverse Plakate tragen, d.h. Zeichen, welche über politischen Körpern schweben, der Kopf Wilhelms II ist verdrängt, von partikularen Positionen im Versuch, Hegemonie zu erlangen. Dieses Thema findet seine Fortführung in eine Collage von John Heartfield für die *Rot Front Berlin* 1927, worauf eine gereckte Faust über den Arbeitermassen thront und findet wenig später seine zyklische Schliessung in einer Collage von Heartfield, worauf das „erneute Verschweissen zu einem Kopf und einem Kollektivkörper“ zu sehen ist: Lenins Kopf prangt nun über eine sozialistische Volksmenge geklebt. Damit ist jener Kopf, welcher einen „leeren Platz“ hinterlassen hat, ersetzt, der Kollektivkörper wieder gebündelt.

Diese suggestive Bildreihe gewinnt dadurch an Überzeugungskraft, dass Schober John Heartfields Arbeiten einerseits die Konflikte George Grosz' mit der KPD gegenüberstellt, die von ihm fordert, Parodie und Ironie immer nur gegen die Bourgeoisie zu wenden, und der sich, nach einigen Arbeiten, welche auch den eigenen Parteiapparat ironisieren, grösseren Problemen gegenüber sah. Andererseits zeigt sie auf, dass die politische Verwendung der Collage und der Parodie der Dadaisten Teil eines anti-demokratischen Diskurses war, an dem partikulare Positionen der Linken wie der Rechten sich verbanden. Die Darstellung von Wahlurnen als Kloschüsseln, aber insbesondere die Verhöhnung der Staatsoberhäupter wie Friedrich Ebert als lächerliche Figuren, deren sich die dadaistische Parodie bedienten, gingen so ungewollt Allianzen ein, welche kaum der Zielrichtung der Subversion hin zu einer emanzipierten Öffentlichkeit entsprachen. Der Effekt der dadaistischen Parodie

trug auf dem Feld bestehender Mythen zwar durchaus mit zur Subversion des demokratischen Staatsoberhaupt bei, zeitgleich aber auch zur Stützung von anti-demokratischen Ressentiments, die dem demokratischen Modell und seinen Vertretern Weiblichkeit und Schwäche vorwarfen.

Schober verwendet gerade die historisch verheerende Subversion der Legitimität der Weimarer Republik um aufzuzeigen, dass ironische Taktiken durchaus wirksam sein können, in ihrer Wirkung jedoch nicht gänzlich kontrollierbar sind. Schlussargument dieser Behauptung bildet die Tatsache, dass sich letztlich auch die Nationalsozialisten der Techniken bedienten, welche jenen der von ihnen derart verhetzten Avantgarde glichen. Hier setzt Schober die vorher angesprochene Bildreihe fort und zeigt eine Plakatwerbung für den Volksempfänger, worauf eine gerichtete Masse, ganz wie bei Heartfields Faust, auf einen hineincolligierten Volksempfänger starrt.

Während sich Schober bei der Arbeit an den Dadaisten auf Archivmaterial und bereits erarbeiteten Studien stützt, untersucht sie die Vorgänge im Jugoslawien der 1990er Jahre in grossen Teilen mit selbst erarbeiteten Informationen. Hier werden insbesondere Quellen erfasst, welche nicht-serbokroatisch sprechenden Forschern kaum je zugänglich würden. Auch hier geht Schober wieder von der Situation des verschwundenen Kopfes aus, der nach Titos Tod fehlt. Sie beschreibt, wie die serbische Sozialistische Partei unter Slobodan Milosevic sich eine hegemoniale Position durch symbolische Taktiken errang, so zum Beispiel durch Allianzen mit der orthodoxen Kirche. Eine weitere besonders überzeugende Bildquelle stellt hier ein Foto dar, das einen Verkaufsstand um 1990 in Serbien darstellt, das neben religiösen Ikonen auch Fotos des neuen „serbischen Führers“ verkauft, die Aufnahme Milosevics in einen ikonografischen Heiligenschar verdeutlicht. Es ist immer wieder genau derartiges Bildmaterial, das Anna Schobers Arbeit besonders gut lesbar macht, ohne plakativ zu werden, da den anschaulichen Beispielen nicht alleinige Beweiskraft zukommt. Sie werden stets durch andere Befunde gestützt.

Schober untersucht hier, wie die Opposition sich formierte und durch künstlerische Techniken versuchte, diese Position Milosevic' zu attackieren. Diese Attacke gelang nur bedingt, ja scheiterten vielmehr. So führten die parodistischen Techniken weniger zu jenem persuasiven Resultat, das man erhofft hatte, sondern vielmehr zu einer Verschärfung der von der Milosevic „Demokratie“ geschürten Teilung zwischen einer „urbanen Elite“ und einer „bodenständigen“ Kultur „des einfachen ländlichen Volkes“. Resultat der Aktionen war weniger politische Veränderung in der gesamten politischen Landschaft, als die Herausbildung einer künstlerisch orientierten sub-kulturellen Gemeinschaft, welche zwar intern grossen Zusammenhalt fand, das Grundziel der Überzeugung jedoch verfehlte. Zugleich zeigt Schober auch hier wieder auf, wie so genannte subversive Taktiken auch vom Regime selbst verwendet wurden, das Stilelemente des oppositionellen Protestes für die eigenen Zwecke übernahm, z.B. um gegen die Bombardierung Belgrads 1999 zu protestieren. Während der oppositionelle Protest seine Basis in der Stadt hatte, wurde der regierungsgelenkte Protest von den Landstädten her aufgerollt.

Durch diese Zielrichtung wurde jene „urbane Elite“ mit ihren eigenen Techniken subvertiert.

Weitere Beispiele erarbeitet Anna Schober für die Künstlergruppe *Expanded Cinema* in Österreich und Deutschland der 1970er Jahre, wo es der künstlerischen Avantgarde zukam, in illegalen Pornofilmvorführungen das restriktive juristische Feld zu bereinigen, das danach von kommerziellen Pornovertreibern wie *Beate Uhse* übernommen wurde. In eine ähnliche Richtung gehen auch die Beschreibung der Enttäuschung der Künstler der „Neuen Objektivität“ im Brasilien der 1960er Jahre, welche sich nach 1968 der Aneignung ihrer Techniken durch die Kommerzialisierung erleben mussten.

## Fazit

Die Grundtendenz, welche Schober in allen Gruppen aufzeigt, ist die, dass die verwendeten ästhetischen Techniken durchaus eine Wirksamkeit entfalten und als attraktiv gelten, dass aber weder die Wirkung noch die Techniken selbst an die ursprüngliche Intention gebunden sind. Die politischen Gruppierungen gehen damit „unvorhersehbare Verkettungen“ (Ernesto Laclau) ein, die sie mit anderen Kollektivkörpern alliieren. Schober demonstriert das, was man in einem philosophischen Diskurs schon so oft ausnehmend unklar als so genannte „Eigengesetzlichkeit der Zeichen“ oder „Dissemination“ bezeichnet hat, an historischen Beispielen. Dienen die semiotischen Taktiken dazu „Kollektivkörper“ zu bilden, so kann es durchaus dazu kommen, dass sich hegemoniale Formationen ausbilden, welche nicht intendiert waren.

Wer eine Antologie subversiver Techniken des 20. Jahrhunderts sucht, wird bei Anna Schober unter Umständen fündig, das Register erleichtert hier auch eine punktuelle Suche. Doch ist diese nicht lückenlos, soll es auch nicht sein. Vielmehr liefert Schober einerseits eine breit angelegte, historisch reich fundierte philosophische Reflexion zur Stellung der Intentionalität und politischer Praktiken in demokratischen Gesellschaften, und andererseits der Beziehung von Kunst und Politik. Sie verwendet politische Theorie, ohne in jenem terminologischen Bannkreis zu verharren, der philosophische Debatten für Kulturwissenschaftler teilweise so unergiebig gestaltet. Zugleich aber halten sich historische Empirie und philosophische Reflexion produktiv am Leben, Theorie wird hier nicht zu Tode operationalisiert, sondern dient einer produktiven, letztlich selbst politischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema politischer Ästhetik.

## Über den Autor

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*insbesondere die alltägliche Perspektive auf Zeichen und ihre Wirksamkeit im 20. Jahrhundert.*

**URL für diesen Artikel**

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/eugster.pdf>

## **Book review: Gary Francione, *Animals as persons***

**Roger Yates**

**Gary L Francione 2008, *Animals as persons: essays on the abolition of animal exploitation*. New York: Columbia University Press**

Law professor Gary L. Francione is the most prominent animal rights theorist writing at the present time. However, *Animals as Persons*, like his earlier books (Francione 1996; 2000), contains not only Francione's vision of animal rights theory but also a historical and contemporary analysis of social movement advocacy for animal protection. Francione's position on campaigning is borne out of experience. As legal advisor to the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals [PETA] in the 1990s, he was a close associate of prime movers in the US animal advocacy community. However, his views are controversial within the 'animal rights movement', no least because he claims that it does not exist.

Francione asserts that the social movement that often goes under the 'animal rights' banner is still largely influenced by Peter Singer's utilitarianism. *Animal Liberation* (Singer 1975) is the recognised text that inspired post-1970s advocacy. Francione caused bitter debate by describing Singer's position a form of animal welfarism (a type of 'new welfarism'), while claiming that all forms of animal welfare have theoretical and practical problems. *Animals as Persons* begins with a reiteration of this suggestion, differentiating animal rights, which seeks the abolition of animal use, from animal welfarism, which is about regulating how nonhumans are treated while they are being used. Francione states that animal welfarism is based on the proposition that 'we can use animals but must treat them "humanely"'. While traditional forms of animal welfarism finds institutional expression in 'humane societies', 'new welfarism' is represented by organisations such as PETA. Francione says that, 'most large animal advocacy organisations promote some form of the new welfarist position.' They believe that a series of welfare reforms may work to end animal use and raise public consciousness about animal exploitation. A recent example of this strategy is PETA's 5-year long campaign to encourage KFC Canada to adopt a system called Controlled Atmosphere Killing (CAK). KFC agreed to this and the new killing method, claimed to be 'more humane' than throat slitting, will be implemented in 2016.

Francione argues that there are several problems with attempting to employ animal welfare to abolish animal use and, therefore, animal advocates are wasting time, energy and money. He suggests that, as a matter of moral theory, it is problematic for a social movement to promote 'humane' forms of exploitation. What movement would promote a 'humane' form of paedophilia, he asks. Moreover, he states that there is no evidence that improved regulation

of use will lead to its abolition, claiming that the opposite appears to be the case. Animals are only helped by welfare regulation if it so happens that there is an economic benefit for the users. Francione points toward evidence of the failure of animal welfarism saying that, once animal use is regarded as 'humane', consumers are even happier buying animal produce. In recent years, for example, there have been a number of former vegetarians returning to meat eating.

Francione begins his first substantive chapter – 'Animals – property or persons?' – with an account of his concept of 'moral schizophrenia'. This notion builds on repeated polls which suggest that large percentages of the general public believe that nonhuman animals have morally significant interests and should be protected from 'acts of cruelty', and even agree with the suggestion that animals have a 'right to be free of suffering.' The public apparently believe that animals cannot be used merely for trivial reasons. However, the way nonhuman animals are treated in actuality contradicts these declarations, Francione argues. Most human use of nonhumans is demonstrably trivial. He suggests that all this can ultimately be explained by the legal status of nonhuman animals and, moreover, the legal status of animals certainly sheds light on why animal welfarism fails to significantly protect their interests. In law, there are two categories, 'things' and 'persons'. Nonhuman animals are regarded as 'things': the legal property of property owners. Francione claims that

The property status of animals renders meaningless any balancing that is supposedly required under the humane treatment principle or animal welfare laws, because what we really balance are the interests of property owners against the interests of their animal property.

Francione argues that real progress for nonhuman animals requires them to become moral persons. He says they become moral persons 'if we extend the right not to be property to animals'. This idea is likely to create further controversy for Francione, yet he explains that his conceptualisation of animal personhood is limited and practical: 'To say a being is a person is merely to say that the being has morally significant interests, that the principle of equal consideration applies to that being, that the being is not a thing.'

Francione suggests that humans already partially accepted that nonhumans are persons but, as in the case of human slaves before them, their property status 'has prevented their personhood being realised.' While animal welfarism amounts to the creation of 'quasi-persons' or 'things plus,' he maintains that there really isn't this third choice: a being is either a person or a thing, and since nonhuman animals have morally significant interests, they should be regarded as persons in terms of the persons-things divide. The property status of nonhumans is a structural impediment to taking their interests seriously and, therefore, animal advocacy must be directed full-time on attacking this barrier.

Not surprisingly, then, Francione quickly returns to his analysis of the animal advocacy movement on the grounds that, if nonhuman have moral significant

interests then they must be accorded the basic right not to be property. However, this demands that a credible social movement that takes animal rights serious must seek in a clear and consistent manner the abolition of animal use and not the regulation of animal treatment. For Francione, an equally clear and consistent declaration that veganism is the moral baseline position of animal rights is a necessary requirement for social movement claims-making. *Animals as Persons* also contains useful critiques of 'animal law' courses that have emerged in the US in particular, the 'similar minds' thesis, ecofeminist condemnations of rights-based theory and advocacy, and some of Tom Regan's (1983) construction of animal rights theory. While sociologists Jasper and Nelkin (1992) have suggested that philosophers have acted as 'midwives' to social movements, Francione shows why the modern 'animal rights movement' is really an animal welfare mobilisation.

This book will interest social movement scholars interested in the interplay of philosophers as the producers of ideas and movement activists as the producers of action in civil society. For those with a particular interest in human-nonhuman relations, this is vital reading, especially helpful in understanding the philosophical muddle that exists in the present animal advocacy movement.

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## URL for this article

<http://groups.google.com/group/interface-articles/web/yates.pdf>



### Call for papers issue 3:

## Crises, social movements and revolutionary transformations

*Interface* is a new journal produced twice yearly by activists and academics around the world in response to the development and increased visibility of social movements in the last few years – and the immense amount of knowledge generated in this process. This knowledge is created across the globe, and in many contexts and a variety of ways, and it constitutes an incredibly valuable resource for the further development of social movements. *Interface* responds to this need, as a tool to help our movements learn from each other's struggles, by developing analyses and knowledge that allow lessons to be learned from specific movement processes and experiences and translated into a form useful for other movements.

We welcome contributions by movement participants and academics who are developing movement-relevant theory and research. Our goal is to include material that can be used in a range of ways by movements – in terms of its content, its language, its purpose and its form. We are seeking work in a range of different formats, such as conventional articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews – and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally will be geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

Our third issue, to be published in May 2010, will have space for general articles on all aspects of understanding social movements, as well as a special themed section on crises, social movements and revolutionary transformations.

### Crises, social movements and revolutionary transformations

*"In every country the process is different, although the content is the same. And the content is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking, for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of broad masses ... or because huge masses ... have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A "crisis of authority" is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the state"*

So wrote the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci from behind the walls of Mussolini's prison, in his famous notes on "State and Civil Society". His words

aptly describe the trajectory of crises in modern history — these are periods when the wheels of economic growth and expansion grind to a halt, when traditional political loyalties melt away, and, crucially, when ruling classes find themselves confronted with popular movements that no longer accept the terms of their rule, and that seek to create alternative social orders. The clashes between elite projects and popular movements that are at the heart of any “crisis of hegemony” generate thoroughgoing processes of economic, social and political change — these may be reforms that bear the imprint of popular demands, and they may also be changes that reflect the implementation of elite designs. Most importantly, however, crises are typically also those moments when social movements and subaltern groups are able to push the limits of what they previously thought it was possible to achieve in terms of effecting progressive change — it is this dynamic which lies at the heart of revolutionary transformations.

Gramsci himself witnessed, organised within and wrote during the breakdown of liberal capitalism and bourgeois democracy in the 1910s through to the 1930s. This was a conjuncture when tendencies towards stagnation in capitalist accumulation generated the horrors of the First World War and the Great Depression. Movements of workers and colonized peoples threatened the rule of capital and empires, old and new, and elites turned to repressive strategies like fascism in an attempt to secure the continuation of their dominance.

Today social movements are once again having to do their organizing and mobilizing work in the context of economic crisis, one that is arguably of similar proportions to that witnessed by Gramsci, and a political crisis that runs just as deep. The current crisis emerged from the collapse of the US housing market, revealing an intricate web of unsustainable debt and “toxic assets” whose tentacles reached every corner of the global economy. More than just a destruction of “fictitious capital”, the crisis has propelled a breakdown of world industrial production and trade, driving millions of working families to the brink and beyond. And, far from being a one-off, this crisis is the latest and worst in a series of collapses starting with the stock market crash of 1987, the chronic stagnation of the once all-powerful Japanese economy, the Asian financial meltdown of 1997 and the bursting of the dot.com bubble.

The current conjuncture throws into question the fundamentals of the neoliberal project that has been pursued by global elites and transnational institutions over the past three decades. Taking aim at reversing the victories won by popular movements in the aftermath of the Second World War, neoliberalism transferred wealth from popular classes to global elites on a grand scale. The neoliberal project of privatizing the public sector and commodifying public goods, rolling back the welfare states, promoting tax cuts for the rich, manipulating economic crises in the global South and deregulating the world's financial markets continued unabated through the 1980s and 1990s.

As presaged by Gramsci, neoliberal policies have whittled away the material concessions that underpinned social consensus. Ours is a conjuncture in which global political elites have failed in an undertaking for which they sought

popular consent, and as a consequence, popular masses have passed from political passivity to a certain activity.

Since the middle of the 1990s, we have seen the development of large-scale popular movements in several parts of the globe, along with a series of revolutionary situations or transformations in various countries, as well as unprecedented levels of international coordination and alliance-building between movements and direct challenges not only to national but to global power structures. The first stirrings of this activity were in the rise of the Zapatistas in Mexico, the water wars in Bolivia, and the protests on the streets of Seattle. On a global scale we saw dissent explode in the form of opposition to the wars waged by the US on Afghanistan and Iraq. In terms of sheer numbers, the mobilisation of against the latter invasion was the largest political protest ever undertaken, leading the New York Times to call the anti-war movement the world's "second superpower".

Each country has had its own movements, and a particular character to how they have moved against the neoliberal project. And for some time many have observed that these campaigns, initiatives and movements are not isolated occurrences, but part of a wider global movement for justice in the face of the neoliberal project. An explosion of analysis looking at these events and movements has occurred in the academic world, matched only by extensive argument and debate within the movements themselves.

In this issue of *Interface*, we encourage submissions that explore the relationship between crises, social movements and revolutionary transformations in general and the character of the current crisis and how social movements across different regions have related and responded to it in particular. Some of the questions we want to explore are as follows:

- What are the characteristics of the current economic and political crisis, what roles do social movements – from above and below – play in its dynamics, and how does it compare to the political economy of previous cycles of crises and struggle?
- What has been the role played by social movements in moments of crisis in modern history, and what lessons can contemporary popular movements learn from these experiences?
- What kinds of qualitative/quantitative shift in popular mobilisation we might expect to see in a "revolutionary wave"?
- Are crises – and in particular our current crisis – characterized by substantial competitions between different kinds of movements from below? How does such a dynamic affect the capacity to effect radical change?
- What goals do social movements set themselves in context of crisis and what kinds of movement are theoretically or historically capable of bringing about a transformed society?

- What are the criteria of success that activists operate with in terms of the forms of change social movements can achieve in the current conjuncture?
- Is revolutionary transformation a feasible option at present? Is revolution a goal among contemporary social movements?
- What are the characteristic features of elite deployment of coercive strategies when their hegemony is unravelling?
- How have global elites responded to the current crisis in terms of resort to coercion and consent? Have neoliberal elites been successful in trying to re-establish their legitimacy and delegitimizing opponents?
- Are we witnessing any bids for hegemony from elite groups outside the domain of Atlantic neoliberalism?
- How is coercion in its various forms impacting on contemporary social movements and the politics of global justice?

The deadline for contributions for the third issue is January 1, 2010.

Please contact the appropriate editor if you are thinking of submitting an article. You can access the journal and get further details at <http://www.interfacejournal.net/>.

*Interface* is programmatically multilingual: at present we can accept and review submissions in Afrikaans, Catalan, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Maltese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Zulus. We are also willing to try and find suitable referees for submissions in other languages, but cannot guarantee that at this point.

We are also very much looking for activists or academics interested in becoming part of *Interface*, particularly with the African, Arab world, South Asian, Spanish-speaking Latin American, East and Central European, and Oceania / SE Asian groups.

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